

MEMORANDUM

TO: Roger L. Stancil, Town Manager

FROM: Brian Curran, Chief of Police
Ray L. "Butch" Kisiah, Parks and Recreation Director

SUBJECT: Report on Halloween Activities

DATE: September 22, 2008

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform the Mayor and Council on current plans for managing expected Halloween activities in Chapel Hill.

BACKGROUND

The observance of Halloween on Franklin Street, which is not sponsored by the Town, has transformed over many years from a traditional children's activity of dressing in costume and walking from store to store on Franklin Street, to an activity that grew to include the UNC-CH students dressed in costumes, to the current situation of tens of thousands of people of all ages parading around Franklin Street. As the years have gone by we have observed fewer people in costume and more people who come for the sheer spectacle of the crowd. Many people come from out of town.

Binge drinking prior to arriving on Franklin Street is common. Included in this crowd, unfortunately, are those who would look to take advantage of this situation in a mean, violent or criminal manner. We have observed over the past several years the addition of criminal street gang members mingling throughout the crowd.

DISCUSSION

There are a number of reasons for the growth of the event, including news coverage that encourages more and more people to attend, especially from other communities and college/university campuses; a growing number of organizations providing charter bus transportation to bring out-of-town people to the event; internet publicity; and word of mouth advertising on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus that has transformed this event into what could reasonably be described as a "tradition" for the UNC student body.

The Town has been faced with the necessity of "managing" this event by involving hundreds of law enforcement personnel from a variety of jurisdictions, providing for clean-up of the downtown involving staff from the public works, parks and recreation and engineering departments, organizing and planning for various public safety contingencies through an inter-departmental task force, providing for crowd control and vehicular control access points to downtown along with emergency medical response and care. In recent years the Chapel Hill Fire

Department has needed to pull in multiple personnel and response resources from throughout the region. The Department in the past couple of years has used more than 125 firefighters and apparatus from at least five other cities.

With an estimated 80,000 people on the street in 2007 and a similar number of people expected for 2008, the Town is spending a significant amount of money, time and resources to attempt to make this event as safe as possible. The 2007 event cost the Town approximately \$221,000 for personnel, equipment rentals, food, and other associated costs.

A key factor to consider is that for a few hours on Halloween night, the number of people on and around East and West Franklin Street is approximately 20,000 to 30,000 greater than the entire resident population of the Town.

This event has grown to the point where senior staff believes that it has become so large as to pose a significant risk to public safety. Our opinion is that the event needs to be down-sized to a more manageable environment and returned to being an event that is fun and enjoyable while reducing the amount of alcohol consumption before we find ourselves facing a situation in which our resource limitations substantially limit our ability to provide the level of services we believe are needed to try to prevent a serious incident.

The Town Manager requested that the Chief of Police and the Parks and Recreation Director work together to determine the best course of action to confront this issue. We think that the following factors should be considered in any action plan formulation.

1. That it has taken decades to have the event grow to the size it is now and may take several years for it to return to a more manageable size.
2. That the event is larger in scope than the Town of Chapel Hill and that developing an action plan will require involvement and cooperation of many different groups in our community and beyond, including but not limited to:
 - a. Town of Chapel Hill
 - b. University of North Carolina System
 - i. Student government
 - ii. Public safety
 - iii. Campus organizations including sororities and fraternities
 - c. Triangle news media outlets
 - d. Other North Carolina colleges and universities whose students normally come to Franklin St. on Halloween night
 - e. Town of Carrboro

Based on these factors, representatives from UNC-Chapel Hill student government, administration, and Department of Public Safety have met with Town staff to discuss issues surrounding the event and bring ideas of how to achieve the goal of downsizing and reclaiming the event as a local Chapel Hill tradition. Additional meetings with downtown business interests through the Downtown Partnership are currently being planned.

Assuming that we do not wish to continue on as before and watch the Halloween event grow ever larger, we offer the following alternatives for consideration.

- Establish a multi-year plan to reduce the event size and to create a community focused event that could include Town sponsored activities. This is the preferred course of action.
- Restrict access to the downtown area similar to what was done in 2001. In 2000, the Halloween crowd on Franklin Street was estimated to be 50,000. The next year a traffic plan was implemented restricting access to the event area through the use of traffic checkpoints approximately a mile and a half out from downtown along major transportation corridors. The result, in addition to massive traffic jams all around town, was a smaller crowd size of approximately 25,000. That course of action was abandoned in 2002 and the crowds have been growing steadily since then. We believe that a modified version of this strategy should be considered as part of an overall strategy to reduce the number of individuals arriving from outside of Chapel Hill.
- End the event abruptly. This would require intensive law enforcement activity which could result in injuries and property damage. We do not believe that this method is consistent with community standards and we do not recommend this option.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council receive the following recommendations in regard to Halloween.

- Conduct an aggressive public information campaign ahead of the event highlighting our concerns and describing what we would like the event to become instead of the current media reporting that encourages travel to Chapel Hill for Halloween.
- Work with the Mayor's Office, downtown restaurants and bars, the Downtown Partnership and the Alcohol Law Enforcement Agency to consider limiting alcoholic beverage sales at all establishments that have permits to sell alcohol, either on or off premise, in Town Center Zones - TC-1, TC-2 and TC-3 for a part of Halloween night.
- Discontinue the use of Chapel Hill Transit shuttle service from the Park and Ride lots to the Central Business District.
- Place parking monitors in surrounding residential neighborhoods to discourage illegal parking and disruption of neighborhoods.
- Alter the traffic management plan to reduce ingress and encourage egress from the Central Business District.
- Utilize the UNC emergency contact system, and as is feasible public address systems in the downtown area to help guide or direct the crowds during an emergency or when the event is ending.
- Continue discussions with UNC-Chapel Hill administration staff and especially with UNC-Chapel Hill student leaders to determine additional steps that can be taken to meet our goals of a smaller, local, safe event.