

April 8, 2024

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Sheryl M. M. Long, City Manager

202401302

Subject: Feasibility of Ault Park 4th of July Fireworks Continuity

Reference Document #202400916

The City Council at its session on March 27, 2024, referred the following item for review and report:

MOTION, submitted by Councilmembers Walsh, Kearney, and Owens, that the administration produces a report within thirty (30) days on the feasibility of assuming operations of the 4th of July fireworks celebration in Ault Park from the Ault Park Advisory Council (APAC), Hyde Park Neighborhood Council (HPNC), and Mt. Lookout Community Council (MLCC). This report should include background information on the history of the 4th of July fireworks celebration, the logistics of running the event including any support needed from other City departments, how much funding is necessary, and what is needed to make the event sustainable going forward. (BALANCE ON FILE IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE)

BACKGROUND

Cincinnati Parks appreciates the opportunity to have our parks and greenspaces throughout the city used for community events and was proud to host over 750 community events last year alone. These events fall into three main buckets:

- **Rentals.** Organizers rent space and pay for support services (staffing, electric, clean-up etc.). These could be large scale signature events such as Riverfest, Black Family Reunion, Oktoberfest, the Flying Pig Marathon, Pride, or smaller events like a 5K race or neighborhood picnic.
- **Partnered.** Parks works with community organizers to help produce free, family friendly events in our parks such as Springfest in Burnet Woods, Trailfest in Mt. Airy Forest, the Pumpkin Chuck in Stanbery Park, free yoga programs, and many, many others. As an event partner, Parks often provides one or more supportive services such as staffing, clean up, entertainment, event promotion, equipment, or electric at no charge.

- **Self-produced.** We also have very limited staffing and budget resources to produce a handful of events entirely in-house. Examples include the All-American Birthday Bash, Piatt Park acoustic lunches, or the Amped Up Concert series.

AULT PARK FIREWORKS

Since its inception over 50 years ago, the Ault Park 4th of July Fireworks has been organized and produced by the community, and Parks has served in a support role as an event partner. The event attracts approximately 5,000 visitors and takes place every 4th of July. It begins with a ceremonial flag raising at 6 PM, a festival atmosphere with live music and food trucks from 7-9 PM, and concludes with a fireworks display at 9 PM. The crowds typically clear out immediately following the fireworks show by 10 PM.

Community organizers provide overall event planning, administration, and execution, and a fundraising campaign to pay for the fireworks display, portable restrooms, stage set-up, volunteer recruitment, promotion/sponsor recognition, all city fees, and hiring police details.

City Participation

As a Partnered Event, Cincinnati Parks has been providing use of Ault Park at no charge. In recent years as the event has become more challenging for the community to organize and execute, Cincinnati Parks has provided increasing support to help keep the event going, including booking and paying for live music, temporary fencing, and staffing for event set up, execution, and clean up. The total recent amount contributed by Parks annually equals roughly \$3,700. Off-duty Cincinnati Police Officers are hired by the community, CFD inspects and receives a fee for firework safety, and the City receives permit fees paid equaling \$1,395.

City Costs	\$
Fire Inspection	500
Event Fees	895
Police Detail	3,738
Parks*	3,700
Total	8,833

*Paid by Parks

2024 CANCELLATION

In January, Cincinnati Parks was informed by event organizers they would no longer be able to produce the event (see attached). Aside from the administrative burden inherently placed on the volunteer organizers in planning, managing, and executing a large community event, there are two factors identified as particularly troublesome. The first factor is funding. The event relies on conducting a community fundraising campaign each year to pay for most of the event costs. Over the last few years, organizers became increasingly anxious about having to cover shortfalls in fundraising from existing organizational budgets.

The second factor relates to safety and security. Ault Park has wooded areas near the fireworks display and is a fairly confined space, making traffic flow and parking particularly challenging to manage. Right before the fireworks show, large numbers of guests flock to the park, and as soon as the fireworks end, everyone leaves en masse. The event has a few volunteers, but mostly relies on hiring off-duty Cincinnati Police Officers to provide security, safety, parking control, and traffic flow. In recent years, event organizers have struggled to get a full complement of needed officers to take the off-duty shifts even though adequate funding is available.

SUSTAINABILITY

Staff have identified 3 scenarios for the event to continue.

- 1) A consortium of community members come together to resume producing the event, effectively forming an Ault Parks Fireworks Organizing Committee, and Parks continues to work with them as a partner. Since the announcement of the cancellation, Parks has heard from some community members who have at least expressed interest in becoming involved. This is the most sustainable path forward because it is a continuation of past practice, which was so successful. This option ties long term sustainability to community and volunteer commitment.
- 2) Parks self-produces the event. As described above, Parks has limited ability to fully produce events; however, staff have analyzed what would be necessary and could take this on if additional resources were provided. Parks is not set up to organize community fundraising campaigns and would require City funding. The budget estimate below details the event needs should Parks assume control. Additionally, Parks would need assistance in securing enough off-duty Cincinnati Police Officers to manage traffic and ensure guest safety. For the event to be sustainable into the future, a budget line item and support in assuring an adequate number of off-duty officers are scheduled would be required every year. This option ties sustainability to an annual funding allocation from City Council and administrative support from the Cincinnati Police Department.
- 3) The community steps forward to take on the fundraising component and provides the funds to Cincinnati Parks who takes over producing the fireworks. Under this scenario, CPD support in assuring an adequate number of off-duty police officers are scheduled would still be required. This option ties sustainability to community fundraising, Parks staffing bandwidth, and administrative support from the Cincinnati Police Department.

2024 Estimate	\$
Fireworks Display	13,500
Portable Restrooms	2,000
Stage	2,500
City Stage Permit	345

Cincinnati Police Detail	5,000
Police Permit Fee	50
Fire Marshall Inspection	500
Live Music	2,500
Parks Staffing	4,100
Promotion/Sponsor Recognition	1,500
City Event Permit Fee	500
Total	32,495

EQUITY

For years, Cincinnati Parks has produced the All-American Birthday Bash at Sawyer Point. This event typically takes place on one of the closest Saturdays to the 4th of July and is intentionally centrally located, serving the entire community. This year's event takes place on Saturday, June 29th and includes a car show, entertainment, food and drinks, and a fireworks display. Parks has also partnered with communities wishing to produce smaller neighborhood-based fireworks events at Inwood Park and others, but has not produced a show on the 4th targeting the broader community.

If Parks were to assume the Ault Park 4th of July Fireworks, this would de facto become the location for a City hosted and sponsored 4th of July event, though it does not necessarily cater to neighborhoods from throughout the city. In thinking through City sponsored event selection, consideration should be given to ensuring residents from across the city have the opportunity to participate.

CONCLUSION

The Ault Park 4th of July Fireworks is a rich and cherished Cincinnati tradition enjoyed by thousands each year. Cincinnati Parks welcomes the opportunity to participate in efforts to see the event continue for future generations to enjoy and stands ready to answer any additional questions about the event.

Attachment – Community Cancellation Letter

cc: Jason Barron, Parks Director