

Fireworks ban likely at Lake Helen

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 27 November 2009 14:59 -



Preliminary approval given; won't affect city display.

People who enjoy igniting fireworks at Lake Helen on the Fourth of July may be disappointed.

Because of safety concerns, the Gothenburg City Council took the first step toward banning the shooting of firecrackers in the Lake Helen recreational area on July 4 of each year.

At their meeting Nov. 17, members also initially made it unlawful to discharge fireworks within 100 feet of a fireworks stand and set days and hours for when fireworks can be ignited.

Fireworks will be permitted within the city from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on June 24 through July 3 and between 8 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. on July 4.

Council members will formally vote on those changes and others after American Legal Publishing rewords revisions they made at their meeting.

Police chief Randy Olson suggested the banning of fireworks at the lake because of the large amount of people who gather for the city's annual fireworks display on July 4 while many are discharging their own fireworks.

"We've been lucky so far," Olson said about no accidents so far in a huge crowd with personal firework shows.

Council member Jim Aden said he didn't want to push personal fireworks into Lafayette Park by a ban on Lake Helen but also voiced a concern about safety and infringement on the rights of people who are not lighting them.

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With a ban, council president Jeff Kennedy said people still have a choice whether or not they want to go to the lake or shoot off fireworks at home.

Both Kennedy and council member Jeff Whiting said they'd been approached by residents against a ban. Whether to prohibit the lighting of fireworks on the Fourth of July at Lake Helen was also discussed at length at the Nov. 3 council meeting.

Rather than a ban, Whiting said he'd like to see a time limit of when personal fireworks could be detonated at both Lake Helen and Lafayette Park.

However Olson said he didn't know how law enforcement could enforce time limits.

"It's all or nothing for me," he said. "If you do nothing, it's a safety issue but if you do something, it may help."

Instead of a ban, Whiting suggested posting signs asking people not to light fireworks but Olson said the issue is whether or not people would pay attention to signs.

Because of the size of the crowd and the volume of fireworks, Olson said it's one of the busiest nights of the year for the police department.

City services director Shane Gruber, who camps at Lafayette Park with his family each year, said he's observed many people who stake out a spot at Lake Helen on July 4, have picnics and shoot off fireworks.

Council members also reviewed other city laws and made changes to the number of members on city commissions, committees and boards, peddlers and solicitors in the city, enforcement of curfew, sign regulations, speed limits, school children loading zones, animal shelter

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impoundment fees, burn permits, abandoned vehicles, restrictions on grass height, smoking penalties, electrical codes, sales tax and expiration of building permits and more.

Revisions will be formally voted on at a future council meeting.

In other business, the council:

- selected the lowest bid of \$134,712 from Altec for a digger truck for the electrical department. Two other bids were from Altec at \$151,503 and \$160,489 and another from Terex Utilities for \$162,294. On a related issue, the council passed a resolution to sell the city's 1985 digger derrick truck at Brott's Annual Consignment Sale on Saturday, Nov. 28. Members put a \$7,500 minimum bid on the equipment
- set Tuesday, Jan. 5, at 7 p.m. as when the city council will act as the board of equalization to set assessments for street improvement projects on 22nd and 23 Sts. and Fifth Street.
- passed a mutual aid agreement concerning water and wastewater and stormwater. Clymer said the Nebraska League of Municipalities recommends cities pass such agreements so that when natural or man-made disasters occur, it's spelled out how mutual aid between other entities will be handled.
- approved mayor Joyce Hudson's recommendation that she, Clymer and two council members make up a committee to select an engineering firm for a transportation study. Jim Aden and Jeff Kennedy volunteered to serve on the committee to select one of four firms who bid for the job.
- gave the go ahead for Terry Kruse Construction of Cozad to do two owner-occupied housing projects—one for \$19,875 and another for \$17,828. The projects use grant money administered through West Central Nebraska Development District.

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