

PRAC Meeting: The PRAC tried hard to avoid a decision on fireworks and succeeded.
Prepared by George Utermohle, Sept. 7, 2016

The CBJ Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) held its regularly scheduled September meeting Tuesday night (September 6, 2016) to discuss the issue of fireworks in CBJ parks.

The PRAC received considerable written public comment (over 250 pages) on the issue of fireworks in parks. At the meeting, the committee heard from approximately 15 people during the public comment period. Four people spoke against fireworks in parks. The remaining speakers spoke pretty much in favor of fireworks use in parks. Four of the people who spoke acknowledged being dog owners – two spoke of dogs being adversely affected by fireworks and two said that their dogs had no problems with fireworks. Those who spoke in favor of fireworks took positions ranging from no regulation of fireworks to permitting fireworks only during certain specific times and specific dates. Those who favored specific times and dates when fireworks were permitted expressed opinions favoring fireworks only around the 4th of July and New Years, allowing fireworks on a wide range of public holidays, allowing fireworks on birthdays and other private celebrations, allowing fireworks on Friday and Saturday nights, and allowing fireworks any time provided that the person had previously received a permit from CBJ.

Following the public comment period, the PRAC discussed fireworks in parks. The chair of the PRAC was reluctant to take any definitive action on fireworks and wanted the two sides of the issue to formulate a compromise for the PRAC to consider at its next meeting in October. Nonetheless, the committee decided to adopt a motion that asked the assembly to adopt an ordinance relating to fireworks in parks that included limitations on use of fireworks in parks based on dates, times, type, and size. [This motion is consistent with the PRAC inclination to pass the buck to someone else and to not to take a stand on fireworks in parks.] This motion was adopted by the PRAC with 7 members in favor and 2 members opposed. However, a member of the PRAC who had voted against motion moved to reconsider the vote on the motion. The reconsideration of the vote on the motion prevented any further action on the issue until the October meeting. Thus the PRAC avoided taking any action on fireworks.

WHAT'S NEXT? In order to maintain some momentum on the issue, the PRAC will hold a special meeting (provide that a public notice can be published in time) this Friday at 6 pm at a location to be determined to discuss among themselves as to what position the committee should take on fireworks in parks. The meeting will be a public meeting but no public testimony will be allowed.

WHAT TO DO NOW? If the use of fireworks in Juneau is important to you, then you must let decision makers know what you think. Let the PRAC know what you think about fireworks in parks.

More importantly you must inform CBJ Assembly members about how you feel regarding fireworks in Juneau. If you have a family member or pet adversely affected by fireworks, you need to communicate with Assembly members. If you know an Assembly member, communicate directly with them. Let Assembly members know that real people, not just wackos and weirdos, are concerned about the expanding daily use of fireworks in the community. The Assembly is in the process of formulating a proposed ordinance regarding fireworks in Juneau. Early and repeated communication with Assembly members is essential. Be assured that those in favor of unrestricted fireworks in Juneau are actively lobbying the Assembly.

Keep up-to-date with the fireworks issue by visiting the Grateful Dogs of Juneau web page: <http://www.gratefuldogsofjuneau.org/>

Grateful Dogs of Juneau has taken a strong position opposing use of consumer fireworks in Juneau due to the large proportion of the dog population that is significantly traumatized by fireworks. If you have hunkered down on the bathroom floor trying to comfort and reassure your dog during a neighborhood fireworks display, you know how stressful fireworks can be to some dogs. It would be great if dogs were not affected by fireworks, if dogs could be taught to accommodate fireworks, or if there were effective medications without significant side effects to calm dogs with fireworks phobia. Because there is no effective remedy to alleviate fireworks phobia in some dogs, Grateful Dogs is committed to keeping the use of consumer fireworks to a manageable level in the community so that dog owners can anticipate and cope with private fireworks displays.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Sept. 9, 6 pm, Friday-- PRAC meeting to discuss what to do about fireworks in CBJ parks
Location to be determined. Meeting is tentative pending publication of a public notice of meeting. No public comment will be taken at this meeting.

Oct. ??, 6 pm, PRAC regular monthly meeting, date, location to be announced. Meeting will continue discussion of fireworks in CBJ parks. Public testimony will be accepted.

Oct. 10, 6 pm, Monday – CBJ Assembly Committee of the Whole to discuss draft ordinance regarding fireworks in City and Borough of Juneau. No public testimony will be accepted at this meeting.