

Northfield Selectboard dissecting SoulFest proposal



- Members of the Northfield Selectboard continue their discussions regarding the Christian music festival SoulFest on Tuesday. STAFF PHOTO/MARY BYRNE» Buy this Image

- [Previous](#)
- [Next](#)

By MARY BYRNE

Staff Writer

Published: 12/21/2022 5:38:22 PM

Related stories

- [Northfield Selectboard hears initial details of Christian music festival](#)

NORTHFIELD — Selectboard members continued their discussion Tuesday regarding the Christian music festival eyeing the D.L. Moody Center for the site of its 25th annual event in 2023, an event that is predicted to attract up to 8,500 attendees.

SoulFest, which was most recently held at the Gunstock Mountain Resort in Gilford, New Hampshire, is scheduled from Thursday, Aug. 3, through Saturday, Aug. 5, the festival's website states.

Although a special permit application has not yet been filed, Moody Center Vice President and Chief Operating Officer James Spencer spoke with the board last month about plans for the festival, as special permit approval from the Selectboard is required. On Tuesday, members reviewed a draft letter of response to SoulFest organizers.

In part, the letter, which Selectboard Chair Barbara "Bee" Jacque was tasked with drafting, outlined areas where the proposal — based on Spencer's presentation — appeared to fall short.

Selectboard Clerk Bernard "Bernie" Boudreau said he felt Jacque's draft letter was "very good" — a sentiment echoed by his peers. He noted that the letter did a sufficient job incorporating feedback from the 14 letters the board had received from the public, at least eight of which felt the anticipated attendance at the event was too large.

As part of his presentation last month, Spencer said there would be a main stage to the east of the Moody homestead, with smaller stages and about 30 other tents placed around the property that is shared with Thomas Aquinas College off Main Street (Route 63). According to Spencer, the event is estimated to have a maximum of 8,500 attendees, but the space on the campus can hold up to 10,000. If the event happens to be as large as Spencer predicts, it would be about 3,000 attendees larger than the Green River Festival.

"I think this event is too large for a residential town like Northfield," Boudreau said Tuesday.

Boudreau also shared his concerns about the impact an event of that scale would have on water use, emergency services, traffic and sanitation. He noted that the ratio of positive to negative comments he's received in talking with residents was nine to one.

[Support the Recorder. Subscribe Today](#)

Selectboard member Mary Bowen said that overall, she wanted it to be emphasized in the letter that the proposal demonstrated a “lack of research” and a failure to do due diligence. She also asked what happens if the town chooses not to accept the eventual application, given the marketing and advertising already being done to promote Northfield as the event’s new location.

“They take the hit if this doesn’t pan out,” Jacque said.

Many residents took to social media to express concerns about SoulFest after its plans to move to Northfield were published by New Hampshire news outlets ahead of the final festival at the Gunstock Mountain Resort in August. SoulFest is already selling tickets for the Northfield festival at thesoulfest.com and has announced several confirmed musical acts.

Although there were no other public comments during Tuesday’s meeting, resident Sarah Kern presented two topographical maps — one of the Moody Center and the other of the Gunstock Mountain Resort. Selectboard members said rather than discuss the maps with her that evening, she would be given an appointment at a future Selectboard meeting.

Selectboard Vice Chair Heath Cummings cautioned against providing the applicants with too much direction.

“We are not giving them any sort of hints,” Cummings said. “They’re going to show ... their best effort. ... If we don’t get that ... then I won’t approve it.”

Reporter Mary Byrne can be reached at mbyrne@recorder.com or 413-930-4429. Twitter: @MaryEByrne.

Related stories

- [Northfield Selectboard hears initial details of Christian music festival](#)