

Our Readers Speak: Thank bureaucracy for cancellation of Littleton's Main Street Block Party

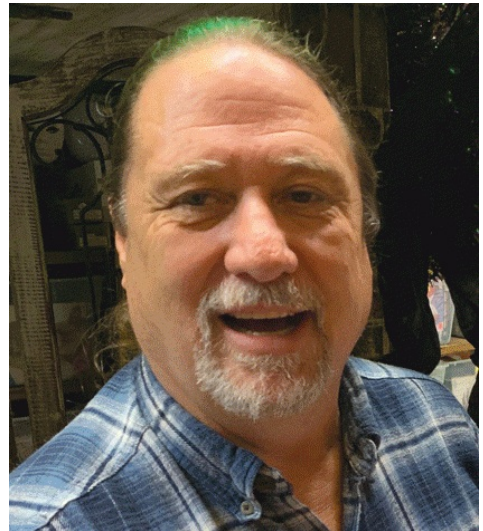
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BY **GREG REINKE**

Over the last 15 years, the annual Main Street Block Party, presented by Historic Downtown Littleton Merchants, has gotten bigger and bigger— and better and better. Every year, we have worked extremely well with the City of Littleton and its fire department to make this community event happen. As many as 30,000 people from across the metro area have come every year.

Amazingly, we have five stages, two fireworks shows, circus acts, the Creepy Freaky Alley, where anything can happen, beer booths, restaurants— and it all runs like a well-oiled machine. We set it up in two hours and we tear it down in an hour and a half, minimizing disruption to Main Street traffic.



Greg Reinke

But now a couple of bureaucratic nightmares have done what rain could never do to our parade.

The Block Party, I am sorry to announce, has been canceled for 2019. There is simply no way for the proverbial show to go on with all the new rules being enforced on us. I cannot in good faith throw merchants' money at a craps table. I have to be a good steward.

The City of Littleton has adopted a whole new event policy, and of course, the city's voters decided to replace the Littleton Fire Department with Centennial-based South Metro Fire Rescue. Unfortunately, these two governmental agencies failed to talk to each other or to us about their best-laid plans to affect a full slate of upcoming summer events—and not just the Block Party, but the Irish Festival and Littleton's beloved 91-year-old Western Welcome Week, among others. Our own Turkey Leg-Wine Hoedown is already off the calendar.

Even the city government's own in-house events—Little Jam and the Littleton Twilight Criterium—are scratching their heads over South Metro's requirements. Did the right hand of the city know what the left hand of its fire protection was doing?

To Littleton's credit, city officials have worked with us in recent weeks, even though the community's nonprofit event planners were not initially consulted about any changes. For this year's Block Party, Littleton had initially said it wanted 200 portable toilets when the most we had offered before was 30—that was plenty with all the bars and restaurants happily opening their doors.

Littleton had also wanted 64 handwashing stations—the most we had in previous years was six. That's \$20,000 for toilets and handwashing! We're a nonprofit. \$20,000 is what we pay our top-notch circus acts. Would you rather look at toilets?

And there's more. We always book five bands for the multifaceted Block Party. The city's event policies only had room for one band. And so on. Thankfully, city officials listened.

Still, these are things city officials didn't discuss with anybody until recently—much less with the nonprofit community stakeholders who make these events happen.

That leaves us with Littleton newcomer South Metro, which refused to meet with HDLM and answer our questions until we went through a very lengthy and cumbersome permit process. They declined our application anyway but didn't give us a reason.

What's worse, we soon found out the new fees required to put on this event would now be 10 times greater than what the former Littleton Fire Department had charged us for years—going from \$150 to \$1,500 in one year. Talk about inflation. Are these real costs or profit?

On top of that bill was a slew of incidentals. It seems we can't use water barrels for tents anymore. We've got to use concrete blocks and rent a forklift. For years, Littleton Fire was OK with one open lane down Main Street in the event of emergency traffic. Now, we need 20 feet, according to South Metro, which means two open lanes. That means no room for stages.

The Block Party has always been a partnership of nonprofit groups—the Rotary, the Masons, the Elks, Arapahoe Rescue Patrol. Everybody does this for free. It's a giveback to the community. We simply don't have the money to do the impossible, as much as we love a good magic show.

All South Metro will tell us is that they are "accredited and correct," though they can't seem to tell us why it is "correct" to pay them well over \$1,000 to oversee a fireworks show.

Last year, I was told by Littleton that a committee of stakeholders would be formed to develop new rules for community events. If they had actually followed through with that kind of due diligence, we likely wouldn't have this problem. Instead, we are paying cancellation fees.

Hopefully, all of this can be worked out in time for next year's events, so Littleton can again have a memorable summer. It's good to be the king—but it's even better for the community if everyone has a seat at the roundtable. Let's come up with a plan we can all live with.

Greg Reinke is the president of Historic Downtown Littleton Merchants.

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