

Falls City 'Third of July' traditions in jeopardy

Without someone to take charge of organizing Independence Day events, they may be scaled back

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — A well-loved tradition in Falls City is in danger of having to scale back in size.

Cost and staff time concerns may shrink the size of Falls City's day-early Independence Day celebration if the city can't find an organization to coordinate the event.

Last July's event had to be restructured when the organization that took over coordination had to back out at the last minute over insurance concerns.

July 3 proceeded with no noticeable changes this year, even with that challenge.

Next year, city officials want to avoid a repeat of that situation.

"We had the 'after meeting' and it was decided to have an early plan in place for the 2016 event," said Mayor Terry Ungricht.

He said the firefighters association appointed three people to work with three members of the city's parks committee to come up with a plan.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer file

A scaled-back "Third of July" celebration in Falls City may mean the end of the spontaneous, small-town parade down Main Street. City officials are seeking more donations and someone to take charge of organizing the event for 2016.

To date, no members have been selected from the parks committee.

Thus, no plan is taking shape yet, Ungricht said.

One of the most popular traditions, the July 3 fireworks show put on by the Falls City Fire Department, will continue.

"We are still planning on doing it," said Fire Chief Bob Young.

What the other pieces of the celebration — the parade, vendors, and activities in the park — will look like remains unclear.

Ungricht said the city will not be able to take on its

normal role this year.

"Staff's going to be extremely busy this year. I mean, we are trying to get a lot accomplished," Ungricht said, noting time will be devoted to helping with the city's water master plan starting in January and modifying the waste water

facility plan.

He said he had hoped another organization would step in to coordinate the event.

"I'm real concerned that no one seems interested," he said. "I'm basically recommending that we scale down the celebration, maybe have a cookout and games down in the park, and let it go at that."

Another concern is increasing costs.

In years past, the fire department has purchased and put on the fireworks displays, while the city covered the cost of insurance, portable toilets and security.

In 2015, the city budgeted \$1,000, but spent \$1,945. Ungricht said the city budgeted \$1,200 for 2016, but he doesn't believe that will be enough.

The price of putting on the fireworks show has steadily increased, now costing more than \$7,000, but in recent years donations have decreased.

"We used to get pretty much half of whatever we shot up," Young said. "The last couple of years, it's been really down."

He said only about \$2,000 was donated for the show last year.

The fire department uses its savings to purchase the fireworks and needs about half of the cost donated to make putting on the show sustainable.

"We used to get a lot that night," Young said, referring to collections from the audience on July 3. "I really don't know why people aren't giving."

Minet to seek more ways to earn

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH — Monmouth Independence Networks (Minet) has kept a 60 percent market share in its coverage area, maintaining a mostly flat revenue versus expenses, said Buzz Brazeau, chair of the finance committee.

"No loss, no gain," Brazeau said. "From the finance committee's point of view, we believe we will have at least two recommendations to give to the board in a short period of time. We have to look at ways we can increase revenue."

Brazeau, who reported to the Minet board at its Thursday meeting, said it is easy to say, as has been said in years past, "find more subscribers."

"It's easy to say, 'We're at 60 percent, so let's go to 80 percent' penetration," Brazeau said. "As of this morning, I weighed about 280. It's easy to say, 'I'd like to weigh 250.' But for me to weigh 250 is going to require an act of God and Congress."

Instead, Minet needs to focus on growing other sources of revenue, Brazeau said.

To that end, General Manager Don Patten asked the board for guidance on what members wanted him to do with the company, noting he had several talks going on with various potential clients, but not providing specific details to protect proprietary secrets.

Board chair Scott McClure said Patten could bring vague ideas about deals, and without naming names, could inform the board about what's going on.

Also, an executive session could be used, McClure said, likely under the allowable exemption, "to discuss matters of trade when a body is in competition with other states or nations."

McClure noted that the bigger the risk involved, the more information should come before the board before moving forward.

"If you have someone say, 'We'd like to use your service,' and we (the cities) have to dump \$300,000 to get that done, that's where we need to have a discussion about what these things look like," he said.

McClure said that it would be a tough sell to the public to invest any more money in Minet.

"We set up Minet, and said it's going to work and it's going to make money," he said. "Then we took more debt, then we doubled down. It's going to work, it has to, and it didn't. It doesn't work. It doesn't make enough money, and hey, we're going to offer more

Monmouth-Independence Networks board of directors and their connections:
David Clyne—Independence city manager, MINET board ex-officio member
Greg Ellis—Minet board member, Dallas economic development director
Scott McClure—Monmouth city manager, MINET board vice-chairman
David Ritchey—Monmouth Police officer
Jon Carey—Monmouth city councilor
Jerry Hoffman—Independence city councilor
Mike Lodge—spouse of Independence city council president Nancy Lodge
Other connections:
Marilyn Morton—MINET administrator, Independence city councilor
 Board members are appointed by the Independence and Monmouth city councils, according to the intergovernmental agreement that formed MINET.

services. The constituents are going to say, 'What?'"

Board member Jon Carey agreed.

"It's been a drain on city resources," Carey said. "We're all interested in push-

ing this thing forward. It's the future. But to get running, you need oxygen. To get oxygen, you need to get above water."

McClure said the board will continue with basic

oversight, but board members are eager to move on to the bigger discussions on how Minet will move forward to become a financial asset rather than burden.

"We've obviously been very distracted on non-big-picture things," he said. "We're not going to have it all down perfect the first time, because it's new territory."

Board members suggested Patten look at grants — even hiring a grant writer if needed.

"We want ... what other businesses would do before making a decision," McClure said.