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FEATURED

## Chamber, city working on summer canoe, concert series

Tim Hennagir Apr 10, 2019

City officials and the Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce are working together to use tourism funding to pay for a canoe and kayak outfitter that will manage a summer music and river recreation series.

The New Event Grant Program is administered by Explore Minnesota. Its purpose is generating economic impact and awareness through new events statewide. The program uses a coordinated approach for funding events through competitive bidding and operating and hosting new events that have the potential to generate significant economic impact for the host community.

In partnership with the Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce, the city submitted an application for supplemental funding for a concert and canoe run series that's scheduled for June, July, and August. Community Development Specialist Stephanie Hillesheim said one event will take place June 8, during the Rum River Festival, another July 6, and a third Aug. 3 this year. Each event will begin with a canoe and kayak run starting at Riverside-Riebe Park in downtown Princeton. The park is located on the wild and scenic Rum River State Water Trail.

Each "Rockin' the Rum River" series event will culminate with a free outdoor concert in the park. Regional bands would perform, Hillesheim said.

The canoe and kayak runs will have an entrance fee of \$20 per participant. Those who participate will get an event T-shirt and finisher's medal, she said.

The city and the Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce will partner to find a contract canoe outfitter that can provide rentals on weekends from June through August. The outfitter will organize and manage the event series.

Volunteers will collect tickets and help with clean-up efforts. Hillesheim said the volunteers would be recruited locally, from chamber businesses and local youth organizations.

City staff asked the council to approve a \$4,000 grant request made by the Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce during its April 4 study session.

That money would come from the city's liquor store fund and be used to leverage the entire series.

Chamber Executive Director Karen Michels estimated on her grant funding request form that the new concert and canoe event series could bring as many as 5,000 people to Princeton during the summer.

The Rockin' the Rum River Series is recognized at the first step toward establishing Princeton and its historic downtown as a destination for regional tourism, capitalizing on the Designated Rum River State Water Trail, Hillesheim stated in a memo that was presented during the council's study session.

"This funding will help supplement some of the things that we are already doing," Hillesheim explained. City Administrator Bob Barbian added that the key to making the event series concept would be harnessing more than \$10,000 that would be obtained from Explore Minnesota.

"That would be the amount that we would receive through their grant program," Barbian said. "That would be utilized in combination with the \$4,000 to produce enough funds to get an outfitter to operate out of the park."

According to Barbian, the outfitter would rent canoes and kayaks out of the park, mostly on weekends, but not until the river is safe. That might be mid or late June, depending on water levels, he said. The outfitter would also provide some assistance to the Chamber with their operation of the three planned events.

Hillesheim said the chamber currently has seven canoes and kayaks for rent. "We can currently use some of the funding for the Rum River Festival to leverage this new effort," she added. "The funds for this grant are 30 percent of the complete budget. They are allowing that to be counted toward the budget. It's actually \$20,000 from the city and the chamber to get the state \$10,000."

Councilor Jeff Reynolds liked the canoe and concert series concept, but said he wanted to see a breakdown of expenditures once the events were completed.

"I think it would be great to do this," Reynolds added. "I canoe the Rum a lot. Regarding logistics, it's hard to find a place to put in and take out, and there's going to have to be some clearing of shoreline. I've canoed with a chainsaw a couple of times."

Barbian said during discussion there were a couple of caveats for city leaders to consider in order for the Rockin' the Rum River Series concept to work.

"What we want to do is to try and leverage money so we can hire someone in a way that's similar to what the city does with its splash pad," Barbian said. "We need a manager who can basically take an interest and do it."

Hillesheim and Barbian said the city would not shuttle event participants.

Because of insurance requirements, that task would have to be completed by Tri-Cap or another transportation provider.

"We can haul canoes, but not people," Hillesheim told the council.

Each canoe and kayak event would start in Riverside-Riebe Park and end by the city's wastewater treatment plant.

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