

7 April 2009

Mr. Ron Gathers
Director, Department of Parks and Recreation
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission- Prince Georges County
6600 Kenilworth Avenue
Suite 300
Riverdale, Maryland 20737

Dear Director Gathers:

Residents attending the October 2008 University Hills Area Civic Association (UHACA) general membership meeting voted to authorize the sending of a letter to your office which would serve to inform you of residents' preferences/comments regarding the ongoing presence of the Hispanic Festival held annually at Lane Manor Park..

In order to afford all adult residents an opportunity to submit their preferences, a survey (see attachment 1) was designed and distributed to every household within the boundaries of the UHACA. The surveys were collected and the data was collated and presented to residents in attendance at the March 26, 2009, general association meeting.

Briefly, on a 0-4 scale measuring preference responses to the statement that the festival "should not be held at Lane Manor Park", the average of responses collected is 2.42 thus indicating that more people responding think the location is no longer an appropriate site for the festival, with 2.0 being a neutral position.

Included in this letter(see attachment 2) you will find an analysis of the survey results which also includes selected resident comments both pro and con which we believe you will find very informative. Copies of the actual surveys returned that contain residents' written comments are also included for your review(see attachment 3).

The October 2008 vote empowering this letter did not authorize a request that the festival be moved to another more suitable site. The vote did, however, authorize that you be made aware of concerns and comments from residents of this neighborhood that may help your office with respect to future decision making about the location of this festival.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Slezak
President
University Hills Area Civic Association
3433 Stanford Street
Hyattsville, Maryland 20783

Cc: Roberto Hylton, Chief, Prince Georges County Police Department
Daniel Lipsey, Captain, District 1, Prince Georges County Police Department
Doug Holland, Chief of Police, City of Hyattsville
Will Campos, County Councilman, District 2, Prince Georges County Council
William Gardiner, Mayor, City of Hyattsville
Anthony Patterson, Councilman, Ward 3, City of Hyattsville
Krista Atteberry, Councilwoman, Ward 3, City of Hyattsville
Ms. LaVerne Williams, President, Lewisdale Civic Association

UHACA Hispanic Festival Survey January to March 2009

The M-NCPPC Hispanic Festival should not be held at Lane Manor Park (adjoining University Hills Neighborhood Park).

- 4 - Strongly Agree
- 3 - Agree
- 2 - No Opinion/Neutral
- 1 - Disagree
- 0 - Strongly Disagree

Statistics from survey responses received between January 28 and March 26, 2009:

Number of households responding = 22
Number of individuals responding = 36
Numerical total of weighted responses (0-4) = 87
Average response = 2.42

At 2.42, one can interpret the average as approximately halfway between No-Opinion/Neutral and Agree, thus indicating more support for the festival not being held at its current location, although not very strongly so.

The total number of individual responses (unweighted) in each of the five categories, however, show stronger convictions than the average might suggest:

Strongly Agree - 16 responses
Agree - 4 responses
Neutral/No Opinion - 3 responses
Disagree - 5 responses
Strongly Disagree - 8 responses

More revealing are the attitudes expressed in the comments section of the survey form. Of the 23 forms submitted (two individuals from one household each sent a separate form), 12 contained comments regarding the festival.

On responses indicating disagreement with the survey statement, **comments supporting retention of the present festival site** emphasized the festival itself and its positive effects. They also typically either reported experiencing no problems or thought whatever problems there are can be tolerated for one day, especially with proper police support.

On responses indicating agreement, **comments supporting moving the festival** included strong statements in support of the festival, but not at the present location. Various reasons for the inappropriateness of the present site included current size of the festival, traffic and parking problems, noise stemming from the festival, and litter, especially as it affects the surrounding parkland. Some suggested other specific locations as possibilities, along with other helpful suggestions.

The following statements are excerpts from some of the comments supporting retaining the present site for the festival:

"I really appreciate the diversity of Hyattsville, and I want to celebrate that diversity in as many ways as possible"

"My daughter enjoyed the festival, and I liked the ease of it being right down the street."

"...this is the heart of where the Hispanics live."

"The festival has been held for many years and I even went down one year just to see how much fun the families were having."

"I have lived next to the park for the past three years and have not noticed any disturbances."

"...although police were stationed at points of access to our neighborhood to divert traffic, I had no access problems to my street."

"We should reach out to our neighbors and not run them away. Forgive them for blocking our driveways and just ask them to move their car to a different place and wish them a nice time at the festival."

"It's just one day!!"

The following statements are excerpts from some of the comments supporting moving the festival from its present site:

"We believe the M-NCPPC Hispanic Festival is a wonderful event. And we fully support it and look forward to its continued success. However, because of its enormous size..."

"The ethnicity of this festival is not the problem. It is the size..."

"...this is not about any particular type of festival, but about any large gathering which disrupts the local traffic flow, residential parking in surrounding neighborhoods and use of five parks (three south of University Boulevard and two north of University Boulevard)."

"The noise, parking, accessibility, and traffic is getting to be overwhelming for the residents..."

"Before last year's festival, participants of this event would park in front of my house and it was nearly impossible to find a spot. Many people parked illegally, and I saw one car park in front of a driveway cutting off access for the house's owner."

"Should the festival continue, the presence of the PG Police controlling access to our neighborhood must continue to prevent our neighborhood from being overrun by vehicles belonging to festival attendees."

"The noise from this festival is so loud that I am unable to enjoy sitting outside or even opening a window. Both participants and music account for this issue."

"I am concerned [among other things] about litter which is really bad in the park and surrounding woods and streams."

"A larger park will address these problems. Greenbelt Park is much larger"

"We strongly urge the M-NCPPC to consider moving the festival to a more appropriate and accommodating area – perhaps available space on the University of Maryland campus."

"...September is Hispanic Heritage Month; however, other Hispanic Festivals are held at fairgrounds (Montgomery and Hagerstown) and Colleges (PG and Frederick) where there is ample parking, and more importantly, facilities that can handle the large crowds."

"Prior notice to all neighborhoods needs to be done, if the festival continues at Lane Manor – not just on Univ. Blvd."

"It would be helpful if the police staging area were not in the University Hills Community Park."

"The festival has grown too big in the last few years...; it has become more than parking and accessibility and the repercussions that follow. It is about the health and safety of everyone – the community and all those who are attending."