



Sanibel's Special Events: Time For Some Limits?

by Mike Miller, COTI President



During the winter season, traffic congestion on Periwinkle Way can be a nightmare. Much of the problem is caused by the sheer number of vehicles coming to and leaving Sanibel each day. But some of the problem is caused by events on Periwinkle creating congestion as a result of vehicles arriving, parking and departing.

That's why the consent agenda for the July 18th City Council meeting included an item, Resolution 17-032, that would have restricted new high-attendance special events on Periwinkle during the winter season. The consent agenda is for items not needing discussion, so it was not surprising that the item was removed from the agenda by Council members, with the promise that the matter would be discussed at a later Council meeting.

By its wording, the resolution would have prohibited any new or additional special events occurring between January 1st and April 30th having an expected daily attendance of 400 persons or more - and either occurring on Periwinkle or being directly accessed from Periwinkle.

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The resolution would have applied only to new events; to buttress that

point, the resolution included a list of existing events that would be "grandfathered," including the Shell Club Shell Show, the SCA Art Festival, the Rotary Club Arts and Crafts Fair, the Lions Club Arts and Crafts Fair and the Kiwanis Club Spaghetti Dinner. Based upon prior permit applications, the combined attendance for these listed events is between 16,000 and 19,000 attendees.

It is important to note that the resolution would have affected only events that, by their nature, fall within the City's definition of special events, thereby requiring a permit. When an organization such as a Sanibel restaurant, a business, a church or the SCA, holds an event within its facility and uses its own parking area, it is not subject to the Sanibel special event ordinance and no permit is required (assuming no large tent, temporary signage or outdoor sound system).

So if a local church holds an indoor concert during the season, and if the church parking lots are sufficient, no permit would be required, and the proposed resolution would have no effect on them. Similarly, the Community Association, with its beautifully renovated facility having three separate rooms, could hold multiple indoor events without needing a permit - provided that the SCA parking (including its parking area north of Periwinkle) were sufficient given the expected attendance. In such case this resolution, if enacted, would not apply since no permit would be needed.

We presume that this resolution was driven by the concern that, with more and more applications for health walks, 5K's, triathlons and street fairs, the proliferation of such events will only make life more difficult for those of us that live here.

Congestion at its tolerable maximum

COTI shares this concern and hopes that any resolution, whatever the eventual wording, embraces the principle that island congestion on Periwinkle, during "season" is at its tolerable maximum. And while we will continue to support existing events, we will draw the line at additional large public events. No more.

But we'd go further. Sanibel's special events, at least during the season, should be conducted predominantly for the benefit of residents and guests otherwise on the island - and we are frequently told by organizers that such is their purpose. So we would propose that all applicants for large public special events during the season be required to promise in the permit application that they will not arrange for either off-island temporary signage or for any paid radio or television advertising of the event. If these sponsors need significant numbers of off-island attendees to be successful, maybe they should consider a venue change.

No discussion of Sanibel special events would be complete without providing full recognition of the wonderful work done by many island organizations in raising funds for worthwhile causes. The events and the people organizing them are a credit to our community.

But there needs to be a balance between these socially beneficial fund-raising efforts and the needs of residents and their guests.

Neither the Sanibel Plan nor Vision Statement say anything about using the island for fund raising; but the Vision Statement does provide that Sanibel "will resist pressures to accommodate visitor attractions and activities" that compromise the qualities of sanctuary and community.

Limiting new large-attendance special events and restricting advertising focused on attracting off-island attendees will help us achieve this necessary balance.

COTI invites your input on this and other issues affecting our island. Send an email to coti@coti.org. To read our past commentaries on Island issues, visit our website at www.coti.org. Or visit Committee of the Islands on [Facebook](#).

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