

Item 25-0572: WI United Football Club - Summer Shootout Special Event Application

Safety and Licensing Committee

Wed, May 28, 2025 5:30PM

Alderperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 01:21

Going right into our action items is—we'll take it in order, because they're here for this first item. 25-0572 is the Wisconsin United Football Club Summer Shootout special event application. So, they would like to speak to us today, talk about their application, the event, and then we'll bring it back to committee for formal action. So welcome. Please use the microphone. I'll turn it on, and if you could give your name and address for the record.

Ann Bona (Wisconsin United Football Club) 01:50

Ann Bona [XXXXXX] Green Bay, Wisconsin, 54313.

Alderperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 01:56

Okay. Okay, go ahead.

Ann Bona (Wisconsin United Football Club) 02:01

So, I am—and like I said, I'm the tournament director for Wisconsin United, and I just wanted today to give you a little bit of an inside look into the Summer Shootout. This event has been held in Appleton on the same weekend for over 30 years now. It's a tradition that spans generations of families and players, and one that continues to grow and evolve. Our tournament brings together players from ages 9 through 18, offering them high quality competitive environment to play the game they love. We host teams from Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, and even some from Canada. Some of those teams don't actually have a league to compete in, and they rely on this tournament to provide meaningful competition and developmental opportunities. For some of these teams, this tournament is the highlight of their soccer season. We have families booking their rooms as early as January, which is before the registration even opens, but they want to make sure that they can be part of it and they can get a room. Many local hotels have even sold out of their rooms.

Ann Bona (Wisconsin United Football Club) 03:03

One great example of this is the Keliix Soccer Club from Minnesota. Year after year, they bring their entire club, which is more than 25 teams. They all come in together, they travel on coach buses with all their parents, and they stay at the Paper Valley Hotel. They have a tent set up at the park, and they coordinate a buffet dinner at the hotel, and it really becomes more than just a tournament to them. It's a full experience for their players and their families. I actually have a letter here from Linda Garvey with the Hilton Appleton Paper Valley that I'd love to read. She says, "I'm writing to express my strong support for the summer shootout soccer tournament hosted by Wisconsin United Football Club scheduled to occur June 20 through 22nd, 2025. This event is a valuable part of our tourism community, and I'm hopeful that a special event permit will be granted to them in order to continue this tournament. The Hilton Appleton Paper Valley has had the honor of hosting a soccer club from out of state since 2016 that has contributed significantly to the financial success of the hotel as well as nearby restaurants. This particular soccer club could travel anywhere and participate in a lot of other tournaments, yet they choose to come back to Appleton each year because of how well the tournament is run and their general fondness for our city. To give you an idea of the impact this one club has, they occupy roughly 275 of our 388 rooms for two nights. You can imagine the same volume occurring at all of our Appleton hotels, and the lodging tax dollars generated by these overnight stays. If this tournament is not able to secure a permit, there would be severe financial consequences to the tourism industry in Appleton. Thank you for your consideration in issuing a

permit for this event, and I am hopeful that this event will be able to continue enhancing our community this year and many years to come."

Ann Bona (Wisconsin United Football Club) 04:48

And really kind of going back to that Keliix part too, that's what the summer shooter is. It's an experience. It's about community, connection, and creating memories that last well beyond the final whistle. On Saturday night, we host a coaches game where the roles reverse and the players get to cheer on their coaches. It's a really fun, light hearted event that brings everyone together in a really special way. We also believe that everything we do should have a cause behind it. It's more than just the game of soccer out there. So, since 2006 we've donated \$25 per team to cancer related charities. This is totaled over \$8—\$80,000 in contributions. Last year and this year, we're donating to the ribbon of hope, which is a local breast cancer organization. And we plan to continue that commitment and relationship with them. This tournament really is more than a weekend of soccer. It's a tradition, an economic driver, a platform for good, and, most importantly, a meaning—a meaningful experience for hundreds of families. And we hope that the city will continue to support it, as it has for so many years.

Eric Gebhard (USA Sports Park - President) 06:03

I gotta follow that. She's gonna blow me off the stage. My name is Eric Gebhard [XXXXX] Appleton, Wisconsin. I have to say—well, I serve as the president of the USA Sports Park, which is a nonprofit, and also Wisconsin United Football Club, which is a nonprofit. When we were contacted about the special permit on April 11, I honestly felt frustrated; maybe we're doing something wrong. And then to have a May 6 deadline, it was—it seemed maybe reasonable, but we started going through the permit and asking for things like, where is your mass casualty collection area? And I don't feel like that's a question you want to get wrong. So, what I found out is in conversations with Deputy Director Thomas Flick, Sergeant Ostermeyer of the police department, and Chief Battalion Commander Henson is there's a lot of things we were maybe skipping over.

Eric Gebhard (USA Sports Park - President) 07:10

We felt like we ran really good tournaments, and it's been on the national US Soccer regional 2 tournament in the Midwest for 15 years. So, we feel like we really nail it. But I think when I look back at this process over the last month, I learned that this application is really a blessing to improve public safety, you know, reducing the potential of having an automobile assault. All these things are just things that we just had—hadn't thought of. So, I think it opened up dialog with the city that, you know, I wish we maybe would have started a long time ago, but we just, we just never really had that contact before. So, in the end, I think it's a blessing.

Eric Gebhard (USA Sports Park - President) 07:52

But then maybe we talk about where the money goes. USA Sports Park is a completely self-funded organization. Without these events, it just can't go. All the hotel dollars that we generate, they go to pay the mortgage at the Champion Center. So, without this type of event, we can't sustain that community and the businesses around it. We—last year we spent \$70,000 upgrading the parking lot and the sprinkler system. We have light poles that need to be replaced at \$100,000. We have to redo the bathrooms at \$100,000, and we have a half a million dollar parking lot repair. That all comes from these events. That's not county money or city money or hotel room tax. This is all kind of self-funded. So that kind of just talks about the money.

Eric Gebhard (USA Sports Park - President) 08:43

But besides soccer there's—the park hosts the annual Apple Blossoms Walk. It's a parking lot for that. We host the Appleton North homecoming parade preparation, the City of Appleton CDL truck driving training, Appleton Little League legends baseball, [...] any baseball, and many more visitors. But really, without soccer being the main engine of that park, that whole community kind of crumbles. So, this is really important for us. We have a great tournament staff. We are ready to go. Just let's do it. So, thank you.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 09:19

Okay, thank you both. Thanks for coming. I understand, you know, the reason why you're here is to appeal the denial. And I'll let clerk—Clerk Lynch just make a few comments about the memo that was attached. So, people that are watching this video understand why, you know, this process is unfolding the way it is. So, it has to do with the 45 days and the fact that the application was, I think, about six days late. I'll let clerk Lynch clarify those details. Which one? Five? Okay, go ahead.

Clerk Kami Lynch 09:52

Thank you. Yeah, so with our new special event policy that went into effect this year, there is a 45-day application requirements, so 45 days in advance of the event. And this is a bit of a unique situation, because this event has been occurring for several years within the city, and the city has been supporting it and doing some traffic control. So, we thought it would be best that it would be treated as a special event to make sure that there's the planning, staffing, and support for the event. So, we tried to work with the event organizers to communicate that to them; however, you know, it wasn't done perhaps as soon as both of us would have liked, and these applicants took the, I would say, expanded application with our new permitting requirements quite seriously. So, it took a little more time to complete, but with knowing that this isn't a brand-new event, they have already reduced the size of their event to take into consideration the surrounding construction, and city staff are prepared to support the event even though there is a late application.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 11:09

Okay. Thank you for clarifying that, because I was—wanted to make sure that when we when we take this up and we approve it, that the departments are all on board with supporting it. I think what you've learned is a lot of time and energy was put into the new special event policy for the city. I think you're—one of your comments was a thorough and lengthy attachments or something. But I think it just goes to show that, you know, there's reasons why certain things are in there, like the 45 days is to properly vet and properly plan. And so, I think, you know—I think, from the city's perspective, is they'll learn some things as long the way with the new policy, and obviously, for applicants, same thing. So, let's bring it to the committee. So, we'll need a motion to get it on the table here.

Aldersonperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 11:57

Move to approve.

Aldersonperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 11:58

Second.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 11:58

Okay, we have a motion and a second to approve. I'll just start. I know you both probably want to chime in, but thank you for everything you do for this event. It's obviously a very important event for those that are participating but also for our community as a whole. As you mentioned, it supports a lot of things through room tax and just economic impact, but also much more than just an event, it's an outing; it's a it's a getaway for a lot of groups. So, thank you for all your work on that. I will—I think Alder Van Zeeland was first and then Alder Fenton.

Aldersonperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 12:28

Thank you, Chair. Just to clarify, typically, the 45 days is so that staff can review the application and ensure that we have proper support. So, when you're saying the city is able to support this, they would not need the time, typically, to review the application because of their familiarity and their discussions with the organizers.

Clerk Kami Lynch 12:55

I'd say that's correct, and given that the deputy director of Parks and Rec is part of the board for this, we were aware that it was happening and aware of the scope of the event.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 13:06

Excellent. Then, in that case, I would ask my colleagues to support this as well.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 13:12

Thank you. Go ahead, Alder Fenton. I was going to make a comment. Go ahead.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 13:17

You can go.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 13:18

I lost it. So, I'll get it back.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 13:20

Thank you, Chair. Just—I was going to—obviously, I support this as well. This is—when we passed this change to our special events policy, we talked about there being an adjustment period, and city staff told us that they would work with people who had had previous events with us, and appreciate that you took this application seriously, and for, you know, understood the need for some of these kind of scary questions when we're talking about a really, really large event like this. So, appreciate everything you do for the city. I know it brings a huge crowd, and we're all excited about that, and thank you for your diligence in completing all the steps.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 14:13

Okay, thank you. I agree with both your comments on that. I just—I was just going to clarify that the reason why you have to come before us and do the appeal is because it's an automatic denial. It isn't that staff chose to deny it. It's part of the policy—correct, Clerk Lynch?—that a late application just gets automatically denied, and then you need to come and appeal to the committee. So, I think what you're hearing is very strong support for it. It's three members of the body. There are 15 on Council night, which would be a week from tonight, at seven o'clock. If you want to address the Council, there will be a sign-up sheet in the back of the room. We're going to vote here in a minute, but you're welcome to come. You're welcome to speak. There's a defined period of time at a council meeting during public participation, so it's a little more formal than this here.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 15:05

It's okay. What you what you're going to find is, if you come, that's great. Otherwise, you're going to probably find one or all of us commenting in support or asking our colleagues to support it based on what we heard today. So, we'll definitely take, try to take care of that for you. Alder Van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 15:20

Thank you, Chair. I'll just let these folks know too, that if you wanted to submit your comments online or have people submit their support online, they can do that on the city website as well.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 15:33

Okay. Alder Fenton, anything? Okay, all right, let's—if there's no other comments or questions, we'll take a vote on the special event application for Wisconsin United Football Club. We have a motion and a second to approve.

All those in favor signify by saying aye. All opposed? Three zero. Okay, so it will go to the full city council on a three zero recommendation to support. Okay, thank you for coming.