

Petition
8-26-02

PETITION FOR RE-EVALUATION OF APPLE CHILL

Presented by Eunice Brock

August 26, 2002

Good evening Town Council, Mr. Horton, and other staff members.

You know, better than any of us, that Chapel Hill faces a budget crisis, and our taxes are escalating. We cannot afford to do all we would like to do, and that includes our street fairs of Apple Chill and Festifall.

As many of you remember, Apple Chill began as a community celebration that our citizens enjoyed and participated in, but it no longer serves this purpose. The overwhelming crowds are predominantly out-of-towners, and Chapel Hillians pay the cost. It is now time to end it or change it.

Before the Council's summer recess, I asked the Town Manager for an accounting of Apple Chill's expenditures and revenues. Thank you, Cal, for your prompt response. I learned that the revenues from Apple Chill are \$23,000 and the expenditures \$41,000 (which includes \$6,400 additional police costs after the 5-hour affair is over). Quoting from the Town Manager's report, "This figure does not include the administrative costs of two 30-hour-per-week Special Events Recreation Specialists in Parks and Recreation who spend significant time throughout the year planning and coordinating the annual Street fair." I have since learned that these two specialists together earn \$48,579 for their part-time work. According to Kathryn Spatz, our Parks and Recreation Director, they devote about 30% of their time each year to planning Apple Chill, and thus cost the Town about \$15,000 for their efforts. This raises the total expenditures to \$56,000, leaving \$33,000 to be picked up by us taxpayers.

There are no figures available for the intangible costs of gridlock, the noise and fumes from countless cars and hundreds of motorcycles, the resulting damage to our environment, and the general frustration of most of the local people. And where are the costs to local merchants who close their stores and suffer loss of income?

Let's return the street fairs to the community for which they were intended. Why not have a "Last Friday" event similar to the ones in Hillsborough and Raleigh? The stores would remain open late that night for shoppers, local bands would play to promote themselves and their club dates, local glee clubs and orchestras could perform, and local vendors could offer their wares from the sidewalks. Moreover, it could incorporate the Chamber of Commerce's "Last Friday Art Crowd," which just began but which was an immediate success, with some galleries reporting hundreds of visitors.

A monthly event like this would attract local residents who want to come downtown for local community events, but would have little appeal to the out-of-towners who want to party all night. The Chapel Hill Chamber of Commerce has been encouraging people to shop at local businesses, and this would be an excellent opportunity for us to enjoy each other's company.

It is time to ask specific questions. What are the costs of preparation and clean-up. the costs in police manpower for traffic control and arrests? Are entertainers local or out-of-towners? I am sure the Town Manager and staff could compile these and other pertinent costs dealing with Apple Chill and Festifall.

What is wrong with discontinuing these fairs in our hard economic times and coming back later with something that is truly community based?

Money that has now been budgeted for next year's Apple Chill could be applied to one of the capital improvements that was cut from this year's budget.

In good economic times, we all have wishes for ourselves and our community – but in times like these, our Town's basic needs should take precedent.

I petition you to look at Apple Chill. Is this event a wish or a need?