

Calaveras leaders begin studying reforms of special events

By Dana M. Nichols

August 14, 2012

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SAN ANDREAS - Calaveras County may soon crack down on whomping and bumping, even as community leaders seek to ease regulations on stomping and jumping.

That was the informal direction given by county supervisors and planning commissioners during a special meeting Thursday to study regulatory reform of the permits required for everything from garage sales to rock festivals.

Translation for folks unfamiliar with foothill culture:

» Whomping is what happens at Wood Whomp, a music festival in Mountain Ranch that for the past two years has outraged neighbors by keeping them up for three nights in a row.

» Bumping is what people do at the ski-boat-oriented Bump festival on Lake Tulloch, the noise of which irritates those who live nearby.

» Jumping is what happens at the Calaveras County Fair & Jumping Frog Jubilee.

» Stomping is the focus of the annual Grape Stomp wine-harvest celebration each fall in Murphys.

Calaveras County Planning Director Rebecca Willis asked elected leaders for the go-ahead to craft changes that would eliminate or ease permit rules for yard sales, church bazaars and other small events while simultaneously putting more teeth into rules aimed at large events that disrupt neighborhoods and lead to emergency overtime for law enforcement, health and code enforcement officials.

"Those events, when they are happening unlawfully, our code doesn't have a good way to shut them down," Willis said. "We'd like to put in language that would give the sheriff the authority to shut it down."

If such a law had been on the books in June, it might have allowed Dennis Bullock and others in his neighborhood to get a little more sleep.

"We've had to hear 72 hours of constantly thumping music in the background," Bullock said of the Wood Whomp event held in June in the Oak Ridge neighborhood off of Sheep Ranch Road in Mountain Ranch.

Bullock urged the board and commission to give enforcers the teeth to shut down events such as Wood Whomp, which this year operated without a permit.

The three supervisors and five planning commissioners at Thursday's study session indicated they are willing to do so. They also, however, seemed eager to ease permitting requirements on smaller events that rarely spark complaints and on larger events that are part of the county's traditional culture.

Supervisor Steve Wilensky, for example, said it is ludicrous that county code requires permits to have a yard sale or garage sale.

"We've never enforced it. Why is it in our (code)?" Wilensky said.

Michelle Plotnick, who represents Murphys on the Planning Commission, said she'd like to make it possible for the organizers of street festivals - including the Grape Stomp - to obtain a single permit for all the events they do during the year.

Willis said she envisions a system where unneeded regulations such as the permit requirement for yard sales would simply be eliminated, and where small events like temporary stands operated by charities could get a quick, over-the-counter permit that costs less than \$25.

Permits for larger events that require law enforcement presence would cost more and take more time.

Willis said she plans to reach out to business and agricultural leaders as she crafts a proposal for reforming the code.

At least one small-business owner said he welcomes Willis' effort to reform the permit process.

"She's a breath of fresh air, because she wants to make changes," said Don Parker, owner of Dodasa Ranch Pumpkin Patch in Burson.

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