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Condo, business owners tell Frank Productions they oppose event facility

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A potential Frank Productions music and events facility near the Summerfest grounds would cause excessive disruptions for owners of what an audience member called “million-dollar condos” nearby — a theme that carried the evening at a company-organized public information and input meeting.

Executives with Frank Productions of Madison and related company FPC Live scheduled two information and discussion sessions for the public on the proposed indoor venues next door to the offices of Summerfest operator Milwaukee World Festival Inc. A Frank Productions-connected company is negotiating a long-term lease with Milwaukee World Festival for the site that’s now a surface parking lot in anticipation of starting construction later this year.

About 45 people attended an in-person session Monday night at the Milwaukee Public Market and another 60 watched via Zoom. Another session is scheduled for Jan. 18 at the same location.



RICH KIRCHEN

Attendees listen to Frank Productions CEO Joel Plant (left) during the public information and discussion session at the Milwaukee Public Market.

Only one person in the audience spoke in support of the proposed facility. In-person audience members were critical of the potential impacts on street parking, noise and traffic.

Although neighbors attending the session primarily opposed the project, downtown Ald. Bob Bauman, who also was there, said city officials cannot block the proposal for two venues under one roof. One room would have a capacity of 800 and the other would hold up to 4,000 attendees.

"It's important to emphasize this is a private transaction between two private parties," Bauman said. "Summerfest owns the real estate."

Bauman also shared information from a Milwaukee Common Council committee meeting earlier Monday that both current and possible future zoning of the site would allow a live-events venue like the one proposed by Frank Productions/FPC Live.

"There will not be council voting on the zoning issue," Bauman said.

Despite Bauman's statements, neighborhood opposition could still erect some hurdles for the project.

Developer and architect Peter Renner and the owners of The Rave/Eagles Ballroom have hired an attorney who is exploring avenues to stop the proposed facility. A group called Friends & Neighbors of The Historic Third Ward represented by public relations executive Craig Peterson also emerged in opposition to the project.

Of course, the neighborhood is adjacent to the Summerfest grounds that draw 50,000 or more people per day during the annual music festival, which in the past has run over 11 days. And thousands more attendees visit ethnic festivals and non-fest shows at the BMO Harris Pavilion and American Family Insurance Amphitheater.

However, audience members said the existing situation with Summerfest-related activities is not akin to buying a home near an airport and complaining about the noise.

Residents of the Third Ward were well aware of Summerfest's impact when they moved there but they have to deal with that only for short periods every summer, said audience member Jeff Natrop. The proposed indoor venue is opposite of what

neighborhood residents expect for future development based on the ward's master plan, he said.

"Why don't you locate this downtown — why is this in our neighborhood?" Natrop said to Frank Productions CEO [Joel Plant](#). "Put it in the theater district or by the arena where there is all sorts of activity. We're not looking for this kind of activity here."

The comments by Natrop, who is a partner with [Peter Renner](#) in Renner Architects of the Third Ward, drew the largest applause of the evening from the in-person audience.

Executives with Frank Productions and FPC Live say the site near Summerfest is ideal in part because of adjacent existing surface parking lots and access to the freeway. The companies are negotiating with Milwaukee World Festival to use the parking lot immediately east of the proposed facility, Plant said.

Plant pointed out that his company's building would attract much smaller crowds than Summerfest, ethnic festivals and non-fest concerts at the BMO Harris Pavilion and American Family Insurance Amphitheater. FPC Live anticipates hosting 135 concerts or events per year between the two venues and attendees would only be there immediately before, during and after an event, he said.

"Just to be clear, this is not a redux of Summerfest," Plant said. "This is not even 10,000 people. This is a maximum of 5,000 and that's a handful of days a year. More likely than not, you're talking about several hundred cars on any given night."

Plant said the proposed facility would not cause traffic tie-ups like Summerfest. As for the impact on nearby public parking in front of condos along Erie Street, Plant said:

"As a private company we cannot be expected to restrict parking on public streets. I don't think that's a fair expectation and I'm not sure it's a legal expectation."

In response to concerns about possible noise from the proposed facility, Plant said his company has received no complaints from office and residential neighbors of its facility in Madison, The Sylvee. He said the venue is built to contain sound and he can't hear it from his office in an attached space.

As for security, FPC Live has its own security staff and hires security contractors, Plant said. If necessary, the company pays for

extra security from local police departments but he said the goal is to maintain security without such a measure, he said.

Another audience concern was about long lines before shows, as FPC Live plans venues that are largely general admission and standing-room only. FPC Live co-president Charlie Goldstone said the company plans to route lines of fans to the north along a road in front of the facility and away from nearby condo residents.

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