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Questions over Fulton's tourism draw arise after rescinded board decision

By Jim Dayton jdayton@gazettextra.com 15 hrs ago

TOWN OF FULTON

The Fulton Town Board recently reversed a decision it made to allow The Anchor to extend its live outdoor music hours, leaving bar co-owner Kevin Brown confused over the town's approach to tourism around Lake Koshkonong.

Town ordinances require live outdoor music to stop at 7 p.m. on weekdays. Brown requested the window be extended to 9 p.m. June 7, 14 and 21 for the Rock Girl Calendar competition, an annual event held in conjunction with 105.9 The Hog.

The board balked at the full request at its meeting earlier this month. But the sides compromised, extending the time period to 8 p.m. for the three Thursdays, Town Clerk Connie Zimmerman said.

Some board members expressed concern the next day, fearing a temporary change would violate the town's live outdoor music ordinance, which only applies to places with liquor licenses.

Zimmerman contacted town attorney Mark Schroeder, who said the board had exceeded its authority by partially agreeing to The Anchor's request.

"They can always change their ordinances, but in the meantime their ordinance is the law," Schroeder said. "Unless their ordinance provides they can make exceptions under certain scenarios, then they can't do that. In general, municipalities try not to do that because they don't want to be arbitrary. They want to have clear standards."

The Anchor is located on the Rock River near the mouth of Lake Koshkonong. The bar has waterfront parking for customers arriving by boat, and the area boasts the state's second-largest concentration of campgrounds behind only the Wisconsin Dells, Brown said

He thinks the town of Fulton should recognize its value as a prime tourist destination, especially during the summer when sunlight stretches into the night. A time restriction on live outdoor music would seemingly have the opposite effect.

Brown declined to say what frustrated him most about the situation, citing his desire to maintain a working relationship with the town, but he did question why the ordinance only applied to places with liquor licenses.

In February, the Fulton Town Board rejected a "wedding barn" event venue. Zimmerman told The Gazette the board preferred development to occur near Newville rather than in more rural areas of the town.

Rescinding The Anchor's request applied similar logic: Extending one bar's live outdoor music hours, even if that bar is in a high-traffic area, could set an unwanted precedent for places near Indianford or other quieter spots, Zimmerman said.

She said the town modified the ordinance last year at the request of former Anchor owner John Kinnett. That change extended live outdoor music hours from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays and from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m. on weekends, she said.

Brown said he planned to move the Rock Girls Calendar contest to June 3, 10 and 17. Those dates are Sundays, which have the same time restrictions as the originally scheduled Thursdays.

Brown wanted to better understand the board's direction when it came to development and tourism, but he was having difficulty, he said.

"What is their plan for the area?" he said. "Because if they're trying to stop people from playing music and going to bars and not have amenities for tourists, there's going to be a clash."

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