



SELECT BOARD TOWN OF NORTHFIELD

www.northfieldma.gov
69 MAIN STREET
NORTHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS 01360-1017

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206 Main St.
Northfield, MA 01360

Overview

The goal of this document is to distill Select Board discussion (November 1, 2022 and December 20, 2022 meetings) and citizen comments (submitted through November 22, 2022). In it, we are outlining and describing areas of deep concern in response to the Preliminary Review. It is not an exhaustive list or a prescriptive list. Per the Special Events Policy, the Select Board can and will ask for more information and may impose additional requirements — (e.g., meetings with departments & other boards, event size & time limits, topographical maps to name a few) — before approving or denying an application. Any application for an event larger than 500 should expect to receive significantly more scrutiny than a Preliminary Review, especially one with major impact on public safety and infrastructure.

Public Safety

First and foremost, we are concerned about the impact on public safety, first responders, and the Town's capacity to deliver those services. This includes getting emergency vehicles through traffic to the event and onto campus, and to other areas of Northfield, as well as to nearby communities in need of mutual aid. Also, we are very concerned as to whether ~8500 attendees, especially on Saturday night, can safely fit into event spaces given the lack of detailed maps and measurements for event spaces, fences, tents (VIP, Meet & Greet, vendors), portable toilets, seating/standing areas, stage(s), backstage areas, parking, camping, etc.

Traffic & Parking

The concern for public safety is exacerbated by what we think will be a significant increase in traffic. Summer weekends are already a busy time for traffic on Route 63/Main Street. We expect "clogging" to increase/lengthen at Rt. 10 intersections which have had serious accidents in the past. We also expect overflow on secondary roads (e.g., Gulf Rd., Birnam Rd., Rt. 142, Pierson Rd., Winchester Rd.), adding to summer traffic and disrupting local traffic, especially for those who reside near the event.

In comparison to Gunstock — which is a recreational resort "outside of town" with extensive parking, camping, and activities designed to keep thousands of concertgoers in place — the Moody Center is located in a residential neighborhood with yet-to-be-developed parking and camping. Given the lack of high-capacity lodging nearby, we presume the majority of attendees will stay elsewhere and commute twice daily. The expected pressure on getting to parking and actually parking a vehicle makes us seriously question the parking estimates. In addition, parking is in/near wetland, marshy, or uneven land — meaning less parking than proposed.

Event Scale vs. Venue Expertise

The large scale of the proposed event (~8500 attendees) is typically handled by venues like Greenfield Community College and Franklin County Fairgrounds in Greenfield, the Tri-County Fairgrounds in Northampton, and Mountain Park in Holyoke. These well-established venues already have experience, facilities, and parking, as well as immediate access to Rt. 91 & lodging. We note our strong concern with the Moody Center location having **no experience as a venue at this scale**. While it may have been useful to have proposed a smaller trial event, the Moody Center and its partner opted to announce SoulFest and sell tickets as if the event was a "done deal," surprising Town officials and alarming the community.



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Noise

In comparison to Gunstock — which is a natural “sound bowl” located outside of town — the Moody Center is located in a residential neighborhood in a “sound alley” along the Connecticut River. Based on experience with other events in the area, we expect the concert noise will not be contained, but rather unevenly amplified, distributed, and echoed. In other words, most residents in the neighborhood and others elsewhere, including nearby communities, will bear the oversized brunt of the noise level. In addition, we are concerned about the potential noise level of vendors (e.g., food, trash, water, & sanitation) and equipment (e.g., generators, tour buses), including prior-to and after the event overall and each day.

Infrastructure & Impact

Echoing feedback from the Board of Health and citizens, we expected a demonstrated sense of potential impact on the infrastructure shared with your neighbors, especially water, sewer, and health. If the Moody Center was already an experienced, large-scale venue, detailed plans (versus general estimates) for set-up, break-down, contingencies, provider relationships, numbers/locations of containers (trash, water, and toilet), etc., would already exist.

Citizen Concerns

We thank citizens for outlining their concerns in writing and enclose them for your review so you can see the level of detail and their specific concerns in their own words. We think the level of consternation with the surprise announcement and subsequent ticket sales is abundantly evident. The Select Board takes their concerns seriously. At the same time, we must respond to groups & organizations who want to propose special events and follow policy & procedure methodically to determine benefit versus impact on the Town.

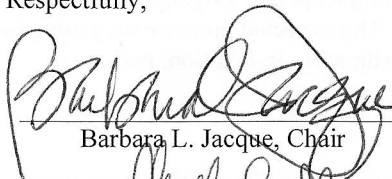
Select Board Priorities

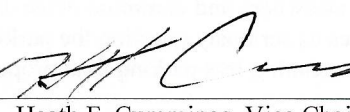
Economic development is a huge, ongoing priority for the Select Board. Our preference is for community-oriented events which create and support steady, organic, sustainable, growth for our small businesses rather than large, one-time, silver-bullet efforts which overwhelm them and the Town’s resources. Given the scale of this proposed event and its importance to the Moody Center, we are surprised and disappointed the due diligence normally done for a major decision and event announcement wasn’t in the presentation.

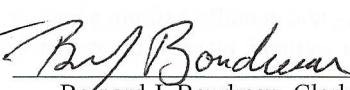
Conclusion

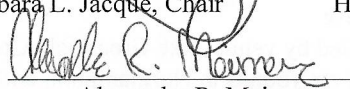
As mentioned at the start, the goal of this document is to distill Select Board discussion and citizen comments as well as to **express deep concerns** in response to the Preliminary Review. While it is not an exhaustive or prescriptive list by any means, this response should provide a very clear sense of the sentiments and priorities of the Select Board and the community.

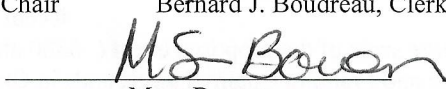
Respectfully,


Barbara L. Jacque, Chair


Heath F. Cummings, Vice Chair


Bernard J. Boudreau, Clerk


Alexander R. Meisner


Mary Bowen

Northfield Select Board