

Urban Transportation Commission
July 13, 2010 meeting

Michelle Graham –Promoter of Bounce and Turkey Trot Event

I would like to begin by thanking Austin Police, Parks, EMS, and Fire Department for their support of this event and helping create a safe and enjoyable environment for what has become a Thanksgiving Day tradition for almost 15,000 Austinites.

Since I began working with the Turkey Trot in 2007, the Police, Parks, EMS, and Fire Department have all been great partners. Our communications process and the event as a whole have improved every year.

However, as we entered the fourth year working on this event, we have not seen the same improvements or sense of partnership with Right of Way Management.

I have a brief summary of our experience that explains this year's events and I would be happy to share if time allows.

Our course venue, start time received initial approval by Right of Way Management more than three months ago on April 8th and written approval from the University of Texas on March 31st. Based on this approval, we moved forward with our permitting process, requesting bids from traffic control engineers and compiling documents necessary to receive our permits.

On June 17th however, more than two months after the April 8th approval, we received a letter from Right of Way stating that the Turkey Trot course approval was being rescinded. We were instructed to select a new route with a completely new venue and reapply.

The Department's stipulations were that we develop a new course outside the UT area defined by them as the region between 45th and Cesar Chavez, and I 35 to MoPAC, essentially downtown Austin in its entirety. Finally we were told we likely had to decrease the distance of our race by half and possibly change the start time of our event as well. Two aspects that have remained virtually unchanged since the race's inception 20 years ago.

To add insult to injury, Right of Way informed us we had to prepare all our clients, including the Turkey Trot, to expect multiple permits for many events moving forward, which also means multiple sets of paperwork and fees.

The Turkey Trot has never required more than one permit in the past and as of today we do not have a clear definition on what makes an event become two or three events for Right of Way.

Needless to say, we have been blindsided by this response. We have done everything outlined by the Department in regards to the application process and in turn received initial approval for our event. To rescind our approval without even giving us an opportunity to discuss potential concerns, changes, or make edits to our race route is just plain wrong.

We are deeply troubled to think that the future of this wonderful Austin tradition rests in the hands of this department, one that has already shown disregard for the approval process, not to mention the parties involved.

At this point we are seeking reasonable recourse to meet with UT to review how we may co-exist in the same area on this holiday. We certainly feel this could be a win-win situation for all involved. The fact is The Turkey Trot is more than just an annual event. It has become an Austin tradition that not only brighten the lives of tens of thousands on Thanksgiving day but improves the lives of hundreds of thousands through "Caritas". To change an already approved route at this juncture is not only unacceptable, but it will severely impact the event's ability to raise the funds needed to feed the more than 20,000 homeless and a hundred thousand meals each year. Thank you.

C Demling asked if this was something that would come up in the future. He remembers seeing some emails about it.

Gordon explained the process.

Chair MacKinnon reiterated what Gordon said: if after she works outside the process with UT, and still continue having a disagreement, then the UTC will review the appeal, however, if the issue at hand is that she feels she has been treated unfairly through the process, then the UTC won't hear about it. (A. Correct)

What is the proper procedure to check this out? Put it on the agenda for next month and get a more in-depth discussion to allow ROW to respond.

Gordon: After the initial meeting UT and the Texas Facilities Commission came back and said the route and the start location were not acceptable because of the tailgaters, and the garages and the streets to be used by the runners, will not be available. The University has concerns with the runners through the property. After they both expressed their concerns, we met with Michelle and Caritas and told them the event, as outline, will not work. That the change was due to the TX – A&M going back to Thanksgiving. When it was on Friday, the event worked well, but now other arrangements will need to be made.

This is the second year the event has been on a Texas game. CM Blocker explained the reasons the game was played on Fridays, but now it is back on Thursdays, one year at A & M College Station and the other year at UT Austin.

Michelle explained that two years ago, the events co-existed. She said there was an issue with parking and it was a concern of the UT alumni association, but when we got together, unlike the first part of the process, when we were all allowed to get together, look at the plans and review it, instead of allowing that conversation to at least happen, the response from ROW was: “you just need to move”, rather than coming back and saying, “ok, the Texas facilities is not comfortable right now with letting the garages be used, the UT alumni association isn’t comfortable, let’s find a different route, let’s look at their plans for entering the garages and see if we can work together,” it was just: move.

“Originally we went back and looked at the things that didn’t worked in 2008 and we revised the route to be better for UT, and had multiple members there, not all parties were at the first meeting, and then it was cut-off on June 17th, and they just basically said no, with no opportunity to even sit down and attempt to find consensus or win-win.”

C Demling: It seems that every time a special event issue comes to us, we’ve always said try to go and work it out because usually two reasonable parties can work something together, but it sounds, by just

listening to one side of the story that there was no attempt to work it out.

Gordon: There has been quite a bit of discussion. I don't know if citizen's communication is the time to do this, but we can come back next month if you would like us on the agenda and brief you on what's happened up to this point. We have two neighborhoods, the Capitol Complex and University of Texas who objected, so we have that process if they insist on having the event at that time. Staff is looking at other alternatives, maybe a five mile run. Our next step will be to get back with the event folks and lay out some options. That is the process we are going through.

C Demling: UT is considered an affected party in a neighborhood or is their objection usually covered by the ordinance?

Gordon: They are not officially a neighborhood, but if there is no place for 15,000 people to park, it is going to be an issue.

C Demling: My concern is that if UT isn't in an official capacity to object, they can come and say to the City: we don't want this and the City just denies the whole process and it never comes to any arbitration situation?

C Lanier: I do have a more general process question. When a statement is made that "we have received approval and then it was taken away", how does that happen? The process seems to me allows for commentary while allowing businesses some sense they are actually going to be able to pull off their event without putting a great deal of capital at risk. From a system level the part that is most interesting to try and understand was, if the City tells someone you can go forward and do, can the City just come in and say, never mind. So, were they given approval to move forward?

Gordon: I can't speak of the exact level. We accept applications, we have meetings, but there are things, and I am not sure what those are, maybe the submittal of the traffic control plans, are they completed, etc. but I will bring you an update at next month's meeting or even a memo about that.