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SaraQuoia Bryant speaks to council requesting closure of 13 W. Union St. for the October 19th event outside of Cool Digs. Photo credit to Athens City Council.

## **Athens business owner requests street closure for event, city council considers**

Athens City Council responded to an application for a street closure by an Athens business owner during the Committee of the Whole, a segment of the council meeting dedicated to allowing a more open exchange of views without the urgency of a decision.

Council member Alan Swank, 4th Ward, introduced the application detailing his correspondence with the owner of Cool Digs, a business with two locations at both 13 W. Union St. and 596 E. State St. Swank detailed that the business has an annual gem show at the E. State St. location and that this year the business has decided to move the show uptown in front of the West Union Street location, Swank included that the West Union Street location is blocked by construction machinery, directing the council to view an image of the blocked business.

Swank explained that the event by Cool Digs, on October 19th, located at 13 W. Union St. would diversify the entertainment in the city. “This brings people into the city. We talk about being business friendly and bringing people into the city for various opportunities. And, interestingly enough, this is a thing that is an event thats going to take place and attract people,” said Swank.

SaraQuoia Bryant, Athens resident and owner of both Cool Digs locations, spoke to the council about the details of the events. She added that Cool Digs wants to showcase its business uptown yet there is machinery on West Union Street, currently blocking the storefront. Bryant includes that she has been in communication with Andrew Chiki, the Athens Deputy Service Safety Director, regarding the requested road closure since July.

“We’ve seen four different occasions where the road in front of our shop was shut down. Only one of them was on that city list of approved road closures, but it seemed like Andy (Chiki) was just able to shut the road down...” Bryant said. Bryant further explained that Chiki has not responded to emails regarding the request for the closure of West Union Street.

Bryant reminded Chiki of the request, in an email, for the street closure in September. Chiki responded by saying DORA was over. DORA is a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area, present within Athens's uptown designated limits that allows for alcoholic beverages to be carried outside of bars. Bryant responded including that there would be no alcohol at the event or on the street.

Swank spoke again to clarify the action required by city council to approve the street closure request. Swank clarified that by looking at the agenda, the request will be listed as an item for first reading. “...And to get this passed, we would need to suspend the rules. We do have the requisite number of people here to do that, and if we suspend the rules, then we could go ahead and vote on it so they could proceed with their project,” said Swank.

Mayor Steve Patterson spoke to include the exception with this request as the council considers moving forward. “We are typically putting together the slate of events where promoters are coming to city council in January, where we put before council a slate of all the events moving forward in time. And so policy in 2025 is going to be that, you show up and come to the meetings that we have to put that calendar of events together, and if you don't show for whatever reason, next year, no exceptions will be made for bringing anything to council,” said Patterson.

Patterson included further that informing the city council of requests such as the one by Cool Digs owner Bryant, saves the administration time regarding the “people power” that goes into putting out roadblocks and barricades. Patterson further includes that all requests for street closures delivered in January will be in a piece of legislation.

The Committee of the Whole meeting concluded, and City Council President Crowell said that the council would consider Bryant’s request for the street closure on October 19th.

Outside the city council's regular body meeting, Bryant responded to a question about her communication with Chiki, saying that she had first contacted him on June 8th when the Pride Art Market was in front of Cool Digs, blocking the storefront on 13 W. Union St.

In other business:

- Alan Swank included in the Communications section of the council meeting that the first week of October is Fire Prevention Week, and one of the local businesses, Lowe's, has agreed to donate 350 smoke detectors to be used in private residences and apartments. The Athens City Fire Department Chief Rymer has been in communication with Swank, distribution of the smoke detectors will begin as early as this Saturday.
- An ordinance for First Reading is introduced by Council Member Micah McCarey authorizing a buyout agreement for the car-port mounted solar array at the Community Center. Mayor Patterson explains that the outcome of purchasing the solar array shows Athens is actively contributing to carbonization, putting energy into the Community Center. No further questions were asked.
- Chris Miles, a resident of Athens representing Indivisible Appalachian Ohio, spoke to call on the council to pass a resolution for city council to address Issue 1's provisions. President Crowell asked the group to provide the read text to the council for the resolution to be voted on at next week's committee meeting.