

Sept. 15, 2020

Holiday Events Notice --- Berlin Mayor Gee Williams

I feel it necessary to address some misinformed posts on the internet regarding the Town of Berlin's decision to cancel the Berlin Christmas Parade and our traditional New Year's Eve Celebration. I also wish to comment on the decision to proceed with a modified version of Berlin's Oktoberfest.

The decisions and policies of the Town since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic have fully followed the guidelines and orders of Gov. Larry Hogan and his administration. I stated early on during this crisis, and I know we have proceeded throughout this unprecedented medical challenge, to seek a middle road but when the path forward is not clear, to err on the side of caution.

The Town of Berlin has hosted only one event so far this year. That was a highly modified version of the Berlin Peach Festival which was promoted as Peach Day. By spreading the offerings out along Main Street and side streets we were able to accommodate the necessity of social distancing and required everyone to wear face masks.

Peach Day was a resounding success and serves as an example of what is possible for the re-organizing of some popular Berlin events during this ongoing pandemic. This year's Oktoberfest is being restructured along the similar lines and not with the massive grouping of crowds in recent years.

It is not possible for Berlin Christmas Parade to be reorganized in a way to make it a safe public event. Literally a few thousand people, many children, come to town from neighboring communities. Kids, parents and friends pack the sidewalks all along Main Street. This is in no way conducive to social distancing in any manner. Some people say the town should just restrict the number of people who can attend. Really!

Many of the youth groups and marching bands are not meeting or practicing. And even if we should all be so lucky that somehow the pandemic magically disappears later this fall, then an event as large and involved as Berlin's Christmas Parade cannot just be thrown together in a matter of a couple weeks or even a month.

The New Year's Ball Drop on Main Street presents similar crowding problems, just on a smaller scale in a much more confined area. Once again, it is not conducive to setting up a safe setting or for social distancing in this time of the coronavirus.

The Town of Berlin is exploring an alternative for this New Year's Eve which would enable a fireworks display to be based at the Worcester County ballfield at the southern border of our community. If this is feasible, as we hope, it would be held early in the evening on New Year's Eve so children can see the fireworks from their homes, or from their parents' automobiles. This approach is being considered by the Town of Berlin and a decision will come in a few weeks.

I know all of us are weary of this seemingly never-ending pandemic. Opinions about its danger to citizens is a varied as anything I have ever witnessed. As the Mayor of Berlin it is my responsibility to not be swayed by either extreme, but to find a responsible middle course that gets our community safely through this disappointing and often frustrating year of 2020.

In the meantime, please do all you can within your control to keep your family, friends and your extended family of Berlin safe until this is all behind us.

Mayor Gee Williams
Town of Berlin