



July 6, 2021

Statement from Webster Groves City Manager, Dr. Marie Peoples, regarding Anti-COVID Vaccine Information in the 4th of July Parade:

The City of Webster Groves does not condone or support messaging contrary to the public health standards and the science regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines like was exhibited in the 4th of July parade this weekend. We also embrace our duty as a local government to support and defend First Amendment rights to free speech and freedom of assembly. As a government-sponsored parade, the City cannot regulate the content or message of the parade participants. This has been the repeated advice of counsel, consistent with the volume of case law that prohibits government from regulating the content of a person or group.

To be included in the parade, a group must fill out the application which asks for the name of the organization, a contact name and a brief description of the layout of their entry. We do not ask for information about the content of their entry. All applicants must complete a safety training and fill out a hold harmless agreement. Once that is done, they are able to participate in the parade. While we will continue to review our parade permit process to better provide for additional public safety protocols, the City cannot act to disqualify a unit for their intended content – stated or not. The rules that we have for the parade are content-neutral.

In this particular matter, the unit entry “Keys to a Healthy Gut”, did lead their unit with messaging consistent with that title but also included anti-vaccine information. Actions to disqualify their entry would run afoul of their constitutional rights.

We understand that residents will not support the messaging of every unit in the parade. As a government entity, we must protect everyone’s right to free speech and the right to assemble, even if that speech is contrary to science, unpopular, and contrary to the beliefs of the City as an institution. Action by the City to regulate the content of the parade units would face the strictest scrutiny in court and would probably result in untold costs of taxpayer resources in litigation that would likely be lost.