

Letter: Discussion on 4th of July safety sparks controversy among local officials

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A little over four weeks after the 4th of July incident that left several people injured, 16 officials, including CEOs, and two attorneys, convened at the wastewater treatment plant to discuss public safety measures for next year's holiday. The meeting which was held today became contentious almost immediately due to a dispute over media presence.

Supervisor Valerie Starkey opposed the presence of this journalist, arguing that coverage could cause public chaos if discussions were not followed by concrete votes. Despite her objections, the journalist was permitted to stay, given that the meeting had been publicly listed as a 2x2 meeting rather than an ad hoc session by the city, and had been announced at a former meeting by the Harbor District. The journalist's attendance was also supported by a prior statement from Darin Short regarding journalist access to ad hoc meetings, during a county meeting where homeless issues had been discussed.

The discussion, which lasted for an hour and a half, revealed a troubling outlook for public safety improvements by July 4th 2025. Sheriff Scott indicated that preparations would not be ready in time, casting a shadow over the prospects for enhanced safety measures. The struggle of elected leaders to devise a robust safety plan for such a significant event was evident. One promising proposal came from the Harbor

District, which is considering a complete ban on fireworks for its jurisdiction, this idea was brought forth by Harbormaster Tim Petrick.

Additionally, Blake Inscore highlighted the severe impact fireworks on veterans with PTSD, noting that some individuals found the recent 4th of July experience More distressing than their tour in Afghanistan.

Kelly Schellong played a crucial role in maintaining focus during the meeting, Emphasizing the need for effective communication. The group agreed to Increase public awareness through radio advertisements, signage, pamphlets, And newspaper articles to inform residents and visitors about prohibition of Illegal fireworks.

The meeting ended on a sour note when city attorney Martha Rice announced. No public members or journalists were allowed to attend future meetings.

Linda Sutter