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A 52-year Northport tradition appears to be coming to an end as the city's premier event has begun the necessary process of searching for a new home.

After failing to reach an agreement with the city on the future location of the annual Kentuck Festival of the Arts, Kentuck's 19-member board of directors on Nov. 16 instructed the organization's staff to begin the process of finding a new home for upcoming festivals.

The Kentuck Festival of the Arts draws up to 20,000 visitors to the city each year for the two-day event. It generates an estimated \$5 million economic impact. But city officials have not responded to the organization's attempts to finalize plans for future festivals at Kentuck Park on 5th Street.

"It is regrettable that a few city leaders have put us in this position," said Bobby Bragg, president of the Kentuck Board of Directors. "Kentuck and Northport have enjoyed a mutually beneficial partnership, but now we're forced to look at relocating an event that has grown significantly over the years."

Talks between Kentuck and city leaders began breaking down when the city moved to change the terms of the agreement. Those changes included decreasing the funding provided by the city and an attempt to change the agreement from one year to five years.

"While the city wanted a five-year agreement, it was unwilling to guarantee that we could continue to hold the festival at Kentuck Park for the duration of the agreement, and they were uncommunicative on how the construction would impact the festival during that time," Bragg said. "The city wanted us to sign a contract with less funding and no certainty on where future festivals were to be held."

Kentuck Executive Director Amy Echols said the organization normally would already have announced plans for the 2024 festival in the days following the close of the 2023 festival, which was held Oct. 14-15.

The funding agreement in question for Kentuck reaches well beyond the festival. It also includes all of the programs that the organization conducts year-round in the city. Faced with uncertainty about the future of the festival and the agreement with the city, the board of directors were forced to instruct the organization to begin exploring other options for the festival. So far, Kentuck has identified about half a dozen potential locations in Tuscaloosa County.

"We are not happy about the idea of having to move the festival. Kentuck Park has been its home for so long it is part of the fabric of Northport. We are extremely grateful for the city employees, from Public Works to Public Safety, that we've formed relationships with over the years. They are like family to us. It is unfortunate we have been forced into this position, but if we want to have a Kentuck Festival of the Arts in 2024, we must start planning now," Echols said.

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Kentuck Art Center and Festival was established in 1971. Kentuck's mission is to perpetuate the arts, engage the community, and empower the artist. The Kentuck Festival of the Arts is nationally recognized for its quality, diversity, and celebration of artistic style ranging from folk to contemporary arts and traditional crafts.

Our Contact Information

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