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CENTRAL OHIO COMMUNITIES ADVISE CANCELLATION OR POSTPONEMENT OF FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATIONS

(MAY 8, 2020) -- Local government associations in central Ohio have decided to advise their members to cancel or postpone Independence Day fireworks displays to protect public health during the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The Central Ohio Mayors and Managers Association (COMMA)—an association of 19 cities within the Columbus region—joined forces with the 17-member Franklin County Township Association (FCTA) in recommending members cancel or postpone their respective large-scale, community-sponsored Fourth of July events. Many communities are actively making plans to provide for alternative forms of celebration for Independence Day, with public health considerations at the forefront of their decision-making process.

The recommendation comes on the heels of yesterday's announcement by the organizers of Red, White & Boom of their plan to cancel this year's fireworks display and develop an alternate celebration.

"The overarching priority guiding our decision is the health and welfare of our residents and communities," said Westerville City Manager Dave Collinsworth and COMMA Chair. "The COMMA/FCTA partnership's recommendation is similar to how central Ohio communities have worked together for years under MORPC's leadership to manage Beggar's Night recommendations."

COMMA and FCTA members agreed unified action was preferable, since municipalities and townships that continued with planned activities while others did not would risk even larger crowds, with people travelling to watch fireworks displays and celebrations outside their home communities.

“We all agree that it is in our region’s best interests if we are united in this unfortunate but appropriate decision,” said Chet Chaney, Perry Township Trustee and President of the Franklin County Township Association. “This policy recommendation supports the foundation of good public health policy and provides clarity regarding traditional community event planning for this very special and patriotic holiday.”

Whitehall Mayor Kim Maggard says social distancing and large group gatherings were carefully and thoughtfully considered. “We don’t foresee the state’s social distancing requirements being reduced significantly enough by early July to allow for the type of large gatherings that occur during a community’s Independence Day celebrations,” said Mayor Maggard. “As difficult as this decision is, the health and safety of our communities comes first. This is the right thing to do at a time when there is so much uncertainty.”

Successfully staging events of this magnitude requires many months of planning and advance expenditures to secure logistics and entertainment vendors. The time is rapidly approaching for communities and event organizers to finalize contracts and commit themselves financially. COMMA and FCTA members agree it is not fiscally responsible to incur unnecessary expenditures for events that are in question during this time of uncertainty.

The action by COMMA and FCTA is advisory in nature and the decision on each community’s fireworks or other special events is made independently by each jurisdiction and the community partners that help organize such events.

“We don’t know when we will be able to gather in celebration and to reclaim a special piece of our community fabric, but we will do so,” said Nancy White, Mifflin Township Administrator and FCTA Vice-President. “In the meantime, we ask our residents for their patience and understanding, and to continue to unite with us in our efforts to safely navigate the pandemic. Our sacrifices now will bring us back together that much sooner.”

COMMA and FCTA member communities recognize how special the traditions of Independence Day parades, festivals and fireworks are to their residents. As they continue to monitor and respond to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic, in partnership with health experts and on behalf of their residents and businesses, leaders in each community are considering opportunities for alternate celebrations and will update their residents as any plans are set forth.

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ABOUT COMMA

The Central Ohio Mayors and Managers Association (COMMA) is comprised of 19 cities: Bexley, Canal Winchester, Columbus, Delaware, Dublin, Gahanna, Grandview Heights, Grove City, Hilliard, Lancaster, Marysville, New Albany, Pickerington, Powell, Reynoldsburg, Upper Arlington, Westerville, Whitehall and Worthington.

COMMA provides a networking forum within which the leadership of its member communities can discuss the interests, opportunities and challenges shared by their respective municipalities, and advocate on behalf of its member communities and constituents to influence State legislation.

ABOUT FCTA

The Franklin County Township Association (FCTA), founded in 1952, is a county-wide organization dedicated to promoting and preserving township government, through educational forums and lobbying efforts on policy matters. The FCTA has more than 70 active members, made up of trustees and fiscal officers from Franklin County's seventeen (17) townships, and more than 125 associate members comprised of township administrators, staff, and interested parties. One of FCTA's primary goals is to secure, from the Ohio General Assembly and county officeholders, legislation which will enable our townships to function more efficiently. The association hosts regular meet-and-greet events with state and local legislators and policy makers. In addition, training is very important to our membership due to the technical nature of the duties of a trustee and fiscal officer. By providing several training sessions and events throughout the year, we aim to educate our members about the many laws that govern townships, how to become better government officials, and encourage them to network with other members to learn best practices of local government and better serve township residents.