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Chateau Boo granted permit exemption

In a decision that may be as mysterious as Halloween itself, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has decided to grant Chateau Boo a reprieve, allowing it to be held as usual at Dunvegan Gardens this October.

In August, the municipality ruffled some feathers by forcing the spooky attraction to relocate, citing a special events permit was required in order for it to be held at Dunvegan.

"I got a phone call to ask me to attend at city hall, and when I got there, I was presented with this special events permit, which I signed for," said Howard Rensler, executive director of the Boys and Girls Club, which organizes the haunted house every year. "There was one condition, an insurance condition, which I had no problem complying with.

"This is not to say that the land use designation issues surrounding Dunvegan have changed. As I understand it, that's still in process, but the municipality has been kind enough to grant us an exemption. Next year we'll have to see what the story is."

Rensler said he has no idea why the municipality has decided to show mercy to Chateau Boo — and only Chateau Boo, as the Country Fair was granted no such exemption — but isn't too concerned about the motives behind the decision.

"I was just so happy to hear the news, I didn't investigate or question it," Rensler said. "I do have a hypothesis — and it's just that — but one of the heart warming things about this whole issue is, when we were told a few weeks back that we'd have to relocate, there was a great deal of response from the community, by way of social media, phone calls, and reporting in the media. It was a considerable response, I'm not sure if I'd call it an outcry necessarily, but it's because Chateau Boo is not only a significant fundraising event for the Boys and Girls Club, but it has become a Fort McMurray tradition, a real community event.

"Somehow, I think that the concern about the possibility of it being compromised found its way into city hall, and to those who had the authority to grant such permissions. And they did."

Although the municipality is not releasing many details on the situation, Rensler may not be too far off the mark in suggesting that public outcry played a part in reinstating Chateau Boo at Dunvegan Gardens.

"An independent application has been made to amend the bylaw which oversees special events in the RMWB," said Matt Harrison, spokesman for the municipality. "Under the current bylaw, the RMWB can only issue a special events permit for municipal land. This may be changed under an amended bylaw, which will come to council for first reading in early October, followed by a public hearing, and a second and third reading in mid- October. If the bylaw is approved, an events permit could be issued for private property.

"In the interim, the RMWB has issued a one- time special events permit under the current bylaw to allow the applicant to start planning."

When the location for the haunted house was still up in the air, Rensler was considering just having it right at the Boys and Girls Club, but said being allowed back at Dunvegan for this year is the most ideal situation, and will allow them to put on the biggest and best Chateau Boo yet.

"It's physically a larger venue, so this year there will be nine rooms to the house," Rensler said. "And it's just a perfect setting for it. As the ad says, 'On the outskirts of town where no one can hear you scream.'

"Dunvegan has been a great partner and sponsor, and has done a lot of the logistics for us very well. It just allows us to present a bigger, better venue. The alternative would have sustained the event, but it would have been a much smaller, less authentic halloween setting."

Chateau Boo will run from Oct. 26 to 31 this year, from 7 to 10 p. m. at Dunvegan Gardens.

The Boys and Girls Club also hosts a tamer alternative for the younger trick- or- treaters in the family, called Junior Boo. The children's event will run Oct. 27- 28 at the Boys and Girls Club, with activities like face painting and bouncy castles.