

City council discusses, debates rodeo back numbers

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Are they good for marketing?

Is the number on a rodeo buckaroo's back a marketing tool?

That was the question for city councilors on July 26, and ultimately they decided the answer is yes, if it includes certain design features.

At issue was whether Lodger's Tax funds, which are designated for marketing efforts to get "heads in beds," could be used to pay for rodeo back numbers. The question came up because Lodger's Tax rules were updated about a year ago and back numbers were excluded from the list of approved marketing uses.

"One of the things recommended was that back numbers for participants wouldn't be eligible. The idea was that it was a piece of paper pinned on the back with a number. That could not be eligible as promotion and marketing," City Manager Maryann Ustick said. "When I saw them it was pretty obvious that it wasn't a piece of paper with a number. They are really advertisements for the event and the city of Gallup."

The felt numbers include the event name and the Visit Gallup logo. WildThing organizer Larry Peterson asked the council to interpret the rule to mean that the back numbers qualify for reimbursement of the over \$1,700 that was spent on this year's back numbers.

The question was financially inconsequential, as the cost would be within the budget of the Lodger's Tax funds granted already. The issue was more about proper accounting.

"I don't understand how this logo going on the back really brings people in," Councilor Sarah Piano, Dist. 3, who was ultimately the only vote against the revision, said. "It's already on there and it's very small, so you can't really see it. Is this logo on the backs really bringing in tourism?"

Peterson pointed to word-of-mouth and social media exposure to make his case.

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“Just so you know, as of yesterday, our Cowboy Poker TikTok [...] has been viewed almost 15 million times, and [riders] were wearing those,” he said. “I’m not big on the internet stuff, but the *Daily Mail* [a British tabloid with international circulation and 21 million Facebook followers] called me and did a 10-minute interview and they posted a story about the Cowboy Poker. The video went worldwide, and they [riders] were wearing those.”

Meanwhile, back numbers are a prized souvenir for contestants, and may lure others to participate in future years.

“All our rodeo champions and our bull riders, everybody gets them. They wear ‘em everywhere and they take ‘em home with them. Gallup is portrayed right up front,” Peterson said, noting that 350 contestants at Best of the Best wore them and took them home to their states. “We had Brazilians there. We had Canadians there. They go home everywhere, and they’re not going to throw them away, they’re going to show them to everyone.”

Best of the Best organizer Walt Eddy stepped up to support the rule change.

“They’re used as part of the promotional package trying to get contestants and people from out of town to come in. That is a souvenir from Gallup,” he said. “They take ‘em home, they have ‘em enshrined. It’s somewhat advertising, but more of a promotional incentive to bring the contestants into town.”

While Piano said she’d feel more comfortable if the funds were supporting a video than back numbers, other councilors felt the numbers do enough to make the cut.

The council voted 4-1 to approve the rule change. Future rodeo back numbers will be eligible for Lodger’s Tax funds, as long as they meet design requirements for marketing purposes and get approval in advance.

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