

Promoters singing the blues

FEE ON CONCERT PLANNERS APPROVED

By John Woolfolk
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Budding Bill Grahams will have to shell out nearly \$1,000 to City Hall by October if they want to promote concerts in San Jose.

Over the objection of numerous promoters, musicians and music fans, the city council Tuesday unanimously approved a new ordinance requiring a \$986 permit every two years to promote music. Vice Mayor Dave Cortese was absent.

City officials said San Jose is following the lead of other big cities in order to crack down on promoters whose concerts or dance parties turn into street brawls.

Concerns arose here after a 2005 shooting near the former hip-hop Ambassador's Lounge injured three people. Police said efforts to curb such mayhem were frustrated by club owners blaming promoters they knew little about.

"That finger-pointing has been going on for years," said Councilman Sam Liccardo, who represents the downtown entertainment district. "The real issue with this from day one has been accountability."

Promoters submitted a petition with more than 1,700 names of people they said were opposed to the permit requirement. Opponents said the new rules were too expensive and unfairly saddled them with responsibility for the behavior of people who

attend their shows.

"Asking a thousand dollars for a two-year, non-renewable license is too expensive for most promoters," promoter Rich Wiese told the council.

Added promoter Barbara Wahli: "Promoting is a business that happens before an event. Once the event starts, it's in the hands of the venue - and yet we will be liable for behavior that happens, which should be on the individual. They should be responsible for their own behavior."

Wahli also said other cities San Jose police pointed to as examples aren't being so heavy-handed. Some, including Chicago and San Francisco, have backed off pursuing such laws, she said, while San Diego's ordinance is much simpler.

San Jose's permit ordinance, if finalized by the council at a second reading June 17, would take effect in mid-July. Police said they would begin accepting permit applications in August and start enforcing the rule in October.

The ordinance allows unlicensed promoters to continue operating only if the nightclub hosting their show agrees in writing to accept full responsibility for them. Promoters say club owners are unlikely to make such an offer.

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