

Dear Mayor of Aurora aka Jim,

In regard to the firework display at the Inns of Aurora Saturday, June 7, 2025:

So many people asked me about last weekend's fireworks that, as you know, I decided to FOIL the permit application to see what the Board and I, as Mayor, must have gotten wrong in passing a law that allowed something so inappropriate in the middle of the village. After reviewing the application and Article IV, Section 4.08 of Village of Aurora Zoning Code, local law #2 of 2024, and recognizing that this was the first time a permit was issued under the new law, I scheduled a meeting with Bob Rhea, Village Code Enforcement Officer, to understand what happened.

The permit application included all the significant information requested. All other property-use permits require the landowner to sign off. The fireworks one doesn't. Maybe it's requested on something else but, in any case, without the landowner's signature there is no ownership responsibility for any mishap. I would recommend it be added to the form.

In the course of our discussion it became clear to both of us that, although the applicant gave all the relevant and correct information, it did not conform with the requirements of the law and the intent to minimize noise and maximize safety. One of the most important problems is that the law in Section B.(2) says that:

"no shells shall be over 2 inches or include aerial salutes to limit height and protect the safety of the environment;"

while the application specifies: 6PCS 1.5" - 2" mid-level multi shot ground cakes
80pcs 2.5" display shells / 70pcs 3" display shells

In order to write Section 4.08 of the Code, the Village Board undertook a major investigation to understand how and why the shell diameter matters. A fractional increase in diameter is an exponential increase in fire power, height, and sound. This was a ten minute display, meaning that with 156 shells, one was fired between every three and four seconds - or maybe faster since I have no idea what "mid-level multi shot ground cakes" are. I have a partial video of the display if you would like it for any reason.

The other important deviation from the law was the failure of the CEO to engage the Aurora Fire Department Chief as required:

"Upon receipt of a complete application and payment of the fee aforesaid, the Fire Chief or his/her designee shall do an investigation of the site and surroundings of the proposed display for the purpose of determining whether issuance of the permit will be consistent with and adequately preserve the public health, safety and welfare. Failure of the Fire Chief to approve the application shall prohibit the intended display within the Village of Aurora and shall constitute sufficient cause for any other state or municipal agency having jurisdiction to deny any other required permit."

There are very specific indications in the law for limited proximity to the public for safety, required distances from surrounding buildings, etc., fire extinguishers, and other safety measures. Without Fire Department oversight and readiness, especially in a congested part of the Village, there is considerable risk. There is also no control over the application plan conforming to the execution of the plan. For instance, our observation was that people were in the Village Park inside the 150' safety zone and that the shells were fired not just from the end of the dock as indicated but also from the center, a distance that may or may not have meet the 50-foot distance from surrounding structures and trees.

Jim, I hope this is useful to you, since you've probably heard more about village reaction than I have. Evan tells me that everybody on Honoco was asking him about the fireworks, and the Gils on Wells Road not only watched but heard it loud and clear. If I had it to do over again I think I might have done what other NY small villages do and just ban anything you can't buy in NY. But I like fireworks so it's a hard call. Bonnie