Fate of Port Pirate Fest uncertain as city leaders irked by past problems clash with founder of event

The fate of Port Washington's Pirate Festival is up in the air.

Tension was evident between festival organizer Kim McCulloch and City Administrator Mark Grams and Mayor Tom Mlada, as the officials told the Common Council Tuesday there are serious problems with the festival that have yet to be resolved.

McCulloch, they said, has not been forthcoming with basic information requested by the city — including the names and contact information for festival committee members in charge of such things as security and garbage collection — and has missed repeated deadlines to provide that information.

Despite the fact the festival is not a city-sponsored event, they said a number of vendors from last year's festival have contacted the city because they haven't been paid by Port Washington Festivals Inc., which runs the event.

McCulloch said she has been poorly treated by city officials, particularly Grams, who she said has repeatedly threatened to turn the festival over to others to run.

Because of that, she said, she is reluctant to turn over information to the city. Other festival organizers have asked her not to provide their identities or contact information because she has been treated so poorly, she said.

She also said that health problems forced her to delegate tasks last year, including the payments to vendors, and there were problems with that. She is in the process of liquidating some assets to pay the outstanding bills, McCulloch said.

After the meeting, McCulloch said that she isn't sure what will happen with this year's festival.

"It seems the city doesn't want it," she said. "I'm not going to go forward. It's been very difficult. Why would I want to do this for a city that's not interested?

"I'll have to talk to my committee and see what they think."

Pirate Festival, which is scheduled for June 7 to 9, has been an extremely popular event, drawing as many as 30,000 people to the city at the beginning of the summer tourist season.

Although there were problems in the past, officials became concerned by several issues last year, including the fact that garbage wasn't collected in a timely fashion. When a generator at the festival site failed, McCulloch couldn't be reached, and there were also concerns about security, officials said.