

First Night's midnight fireworks over harbor may be moved



GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Fireworks filled the sky above Boston Harbor during First Night 2004.

By **Laura Crimaldi** GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 20, 2016

Organizers of Boston's First Night festivities are considering plans to scrap the traditional midnight fireworks on the city's waterfront in favor of a pyrotechnics display in Copley Square because of sluggish fund-raising, according to the company that puts on the event.

Conventures, Inc., which was tapped last year to organize the celebration, said in a statement Saturday that the signature feature of the New Year's Eve party will take place in Copley Square unless donations pick up.

It costs more than \$300,000 to put on the two-day event and so far about \$200,000 has been raised, said Antonio Nunziante, a Conventures spokesman. He said the company organizes the festival pro bono.

Conventures said it recently sent a letter to restaurants, hotels, and businesses on the waterfront to ask for contributions.

“We would be pleased to continue this tradition but the funding is simply not there,” the statement said. “If our outreach is positive and the funding is available, a fireworks display on the harbor could happen.”

The potential end for the harbor fireworks was first reported by the website NorthEndWaterfront.com.

David Mugar, whose family foundation sponsors an annual fireworks display on Boston Common at 7 p.m. on New Year’s Eve, said the popularity of the midnight fireworks has waned in recent years.

“I don’t think it [the harbor fireworks] will happen,” Mugar said in a telephone interview Saturday evening. “It’s always expensive to do anything on the water because you have to use barges and tugboats.”

He said the display on Boston Common has thrived, however, perhaps to the detriment of the midnight show.

“It’s just a lot more family friendly,” said Mugar, who ran the July Fourth fireworks in Boston for 43 years until retiring after this year’s show. “It’s probably siphoned off a lot of their audience.”

The midnight pyrotechnic display in Copley Square debuted last year as organizers said they focused the celebration in that section of Back Bay because of “a dramatic drop in funding” and a desire to retool the event.

Midnight fireworks were also held on the waterfront, but Conventures said the display was “geographically disconnected” from the other festivities.

The celebration has endured a number of changes since 2013 when the nonprofit that organized the party for nearly four decades shuttered. After that, the city ran the celebration for two years until Mayor Martin J. Walsh appealed to private companies to take it over in 2015.

Conventures ran into trouble raising money last year, but cobbled together more than \$100,000 in donations in the weeks leading up to the event.

While the city does pay for some First Night expenses, donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations cover the majority of the bills, an official said. The exact amount of the city’s contribution was not available Saturday night. The events include live entertainment from noon to midnight on New Year’s Eve, and beginning at noon on New Year’s Day, the First Night website said. All events are free and open to all.

Many of this year's festivities are to take place at the Boston Public Library, Old South Church, and Copley Square, the First Night website said. The People's Parade to Boston Common is to begin processing down Boylston Street at 6 p.m. on New Year's Eve. In a statement, Walsh did not address the potential change in the midnight fireworks this year, and only expressed optimism about First Night, calling it a "long-standing tradition and special celebration that brings together thousands of residents and visitors to ring in the New Year."

"As Conventures works to secure funding for a fireworks celebration, we are excited for another fun and successful celebration as we look ahead to 2017," Walsh said.

City Councilor Salvatore LaMattina, whose district includes the North End, said many residents along the waterfront hold New Year's Eve gatherings at their homes because of their proximity to the fireworks display. The event is also a draw for brides and grooms who book New Year's Eve weddings at neighborhood venues so their celebration will include fireworks, LaMattina said.

"It's terrible that they want to change. I'm very, very disappointed that they'd do that," LaMattina said. "I will let them know how disappointed I am."

Laura Crimaldi can be reached at laura.crimaldi@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@lauracrimaldi](https://twitter.com/lauracrimaldi).