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Willie Nelson July 4th concert hits sour note

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GONZALES — A decision to refuse singer Willie Nelson a permit for a three-day July 2-4 music concert drew wild cheers and applause Wednesday from spectators crowded into the Gonzales County commissioners' court.

After commissioners denied the mass gathering permit Nelson needs for another of his annual Fourth of July picnics, Nelson's attorney, Richard Mithoff, said the decision would be appealed to district court.

The permit was denied, according to Gonzales County Judge Henry Volentine, because of traffic and safety problems.

The permit to hold the concert at an 840-acre site on the Kelley Ranch on Farm to Market Road 532, halfway between Gonzales and Moulton, was opposed by a group called "Citizens for Law, Order and Decency" (CLOD).

The court Wednesday afternoon heard testimony from Sheriff Donald

Brzozowski and County Health Officer Dr. Robert Williamson.

Brzozowski, under questioning by Mithoff, said he had been told there would be six ambulances with attendants at the concert and 250 law enforcement officers.

"Other than seeing it written on a piece of paper, you don't know whether it will be done or not," said Alvin Wells, representing CLOD. Brzozowski said the promoters had told him it would be done and had been cooperative in planning the event.

Asked what he would do to stop 100,000 people from coming if a permit were revoked a week prior to the concert, the sheriff said, "I don't know how many people will come until it happens. I don't think Willie Nelson knows whether 50,000 or 100,000 or even more people will come."

Commissioner Welly Gibson said he felt the concert would be held no matter what the commissioners decided about the mass gathering permit. The only thing they could do, he said, was try to control it.

Dr. Williamson said as health officer he could inspect the site if the permit were granted, but not if the permit were denied.

Wells said he didn't like being told the concert was going to be held whether the permit was granted or not and asked the commissioners to deny the request.

If the permit is granted, he said, "I hope they carry their morals with them as quick as they do the money you put in their pockets."

Mithoff, speaking for Nelson, said he had advised his client to file an application and do it correctly.

The question is simple, Mithoff said: Have the promoters met the minimum requirements? If they have, the commissioners could approve the permit and exercise controls over the gathering through the health officer and the sheriff, or abdicate control by not approving it and leaving it open.

The permit was unanimously denied by the commissioners.