

Q&A: Situation Involving Demonstrators

Recent demonstrations and the response have led to some misinformation and to the community and media seeking answers from the town. Below are questions and answers surrounding these events.

When did this situation start?

Small groups of two to five people have been coming to Hillsborough from time to time over the past few months and holding Confederate flags on public sidewalks. Hillsborough is the seat of Orange County and the location of the Orange County Courthouse and the Orange County Historical Courthouse. In the situation that has gained attention, three individuals holding Confederate flags were standing on the public sidewalk on the northeast corner of Churton and King streets on July 27, 2019. The owner of a nearby business, Matthew's Chocolates, placed a message on a sidewalk sign that day which garnered attention on social media.

Did police ask the business owner to remove the sidewalk sign or message on the sign?

No. Officers responded to a call made at about 12:30 p.m. July 27 from the owner of Matthew's Chocolates in which a complaint was made about the people holding flags. The owner was creating the sign message upon officers' arrival into the store and showed it to them. The officers did not tell the owner he could not display the sign. Towns can regulate the manner in which a sign is displayed but not the message.

Were demonstrators asked to leave or move?

No. Hillsborough police have not observed demonstrators significantly impairing people's ability to use the sidewalks or to access businesses. They have been standing on the northeast corner of Churton and King streets on the public sidewalk, about 50 feet south of Matthew's Chocolates and not in front of any business. Police have not received any reports that demonstrators have threatened others or engaged in behavior which endangers the public.

Why haven't demonstrators been asked to leave or move?

Freedom of speech is protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Demonstrators on public sidewalks will not be asked to move or leave unless they are blocking access to business entrances or sidewalks, threatening others, or engaging in behavior that endangers the public.

Do the demonstrators have any kind of permit from the town to assemble?

No. None of the groups that have been in town related to this incident has had any kind of permit. They also have not communicated with the Police Department or the town in any way prior to arriving.

Will the demonstrators in this situation be demonstrating again this weekend (Aug. 10 and 11)?

The group has not communicated any plans to the Police Department.

Has any report been filed with police regarding this situation?

The owner of Matthew's Chocolates filed a report with the Hillsborough Police Department on July 30 regarding threats he said he was receiving via social media. His report is being investigated. At this time, there is no connection with any of the people who were demonstrating in town on July 27. As the investigation is active, the Police Department cannot release any further details or information.

Are there any recommendations for local businesses or community members?

Businesses and community members should call the Police Department through 911 if they are concerned for their safety or if any demonstrators are blocking entrances to businesses or access to sidewalks.

Are there any recommendations for demonstrators?

Anyone choosing to invite the public to participate in an event or to gather in public spaces should apply for a [special event permit](#). The permit helps ensure public safety and the continued provision of public services since attendance cannot be reasonably anticipated at events open to the general public. The Hillsborough Code of Ordinances waives provisions of the permit requirement for First Amendment-related activities, including permit fees and a 60-day advance submittal of the request. However, submitting a special events permit request is highly recommended.