




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council Members

THRU: Shannon Jones, Interim Assistant City Manager

FROM: Kimberly A. McNeeley, M. Ed., CPRP, Director
Austin Parks and Recreation Department 

DATE: April 6, 2021

SUBJECT: Parks and Recreation Department Summer Programming

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update regarding the Parks and Recreation Department's programming plan for the 2021 Summer Season. Below is a summary related to COVID-19 modified protocols, winter storm recovery challenges and general operational details for the season.

Summer Camp Operations

Summer Camp Program Schedule

As you know, the Parks and Recreation Department (Department) typically offers Summer Camp registration in the month of February to allow parents and families a generous amount of time to plan summer activities. In January 2021, the Department announced a postponement of registration. A postponement allowed more time to gain information about public health conditions and to plan camp operations to comply with the most recent CDC and health authority recommendations. The Department, with input from Austin Public Health, is confident that in-person Summer Camps can be delivered safely and effectively with modified operations in place.

The Department is pleased to announce it has a Summer Camp program plan that successfully complies with health and safety modifications and will offer the following camps:

Virtual "Stay Creative" Summer Camp	Beginning June 7 th
In-person Summer Camp (nature, art, general)	Beginning June 21 st
Summer Playground Program	Beginning July 6 th

To comply with CDC and health authority recommendations, the following operational modifications will be in place for 2021 in-person Summer Camp Programs:

- All campers and staff will be required to wear masks in accordance with developed guidelines.
- Reduced number of participants per indoor facility.
- Campers will be assigned to Pods no larger than eight individuals.
- Off-site field trips will be suspended.

- Swimming and water activities will be suspended.
- Free lunches will continue to be distributed but sack lunches are encouraged.

To ensure equity in the registration process, this year's in-person Summer Camp Registration will be conducted using a lottery. Between April 19th and May 16th, individuals will be able to register interest in a specific camp. The Department will begin processing lottery results on May 17th and will then contact households to confirm registration through May 28th. All individuals selected for camp will be asked to pay a deposit for all selected weeks to ensure enrollment. The Department has made all deposits refundable this year.

Summer Camp Staffing

In response to COVID-19, the Programming Divisions ceased hiring and onboarding temporary staff members in spring 2020. The Programming Divisions recently resumed the hiring process and are seeking to fill approximately 150 positions needed to assist in the delivery of Summer Camp and related programming.

Modified operations will allow for hiring and some onboarding to take place virtually into the month of May. Some in-person onboarding will be needed to deliver site specific trainings and trainings dealing with inclusion. These will take place in the weeks leading up to the camp start dates and will be conducted with appropriate masking, social distancing, cleaning, and individual hygiene protocols to ensure the health and safety of staff.

The Department will continue to monitor the local characteristic of the COVID-19 Virus and work closely with local health officials to ensure the safety of our current and future staff members and will adjust modified operations to meet health requirements as needed.

Winter Storm Uri Impacts

Significant damages occurred in several recreation centers as a result of Winter Storm Uri. Specifically, flooding occurred at Turner-Roberts Recreation Center and AB Cantu/Pan Am Recreation Center (Pan Am).

Damages at Turner-Roberts Recreation Center are extensive, and repairs are in progress under the management of the Public Works Department. The project timeline is currently six to eight months and will limit the availability of classrooms and the main building. The auxiliary building will be used to host all programs, including summer camp, until repairs can be finalized. The Department is working to utilize outdoor spaces in the park to increase program capacity.

Pan Am also sustained flood damage, albeit to a lesser extent. The gymnasium floor was damaged beyond repair and is scheduled for a complete replacement. Lead and asbestos testing will be required, and no definitive timeline has been finalized yet as the testing and results are pending. Programming, including summer camps, will continue and will utilize the outdoor courts until the gymnasium floor can be fully replaced.

Park Ranger Summer Operations

As the summer progresses, the Park Rangers will be increasingly called upon to respond to unwanted behaviors throughout the public park system. Typically, this is inclusive of a variety of park monitoring duties including but not limited to:

- Dogs off leash
- Vehicles parked inappropriately on parkland
- Inappropriate greenbelt behavior
- Monitoring notices to vacate related to individuals experiencing homeless camping on parkland

The Department anticipates that increased park usage will continue as the summer progresses and the Park Ranger team will be challenged to respond to the numerous concerns with available resources.

As you may recall, due to the pandemic in 2020, the Ranger Team was able to supplement monitoring resources with a Park Monitor program comprised primarily of temporary employees who were reassigned from lifeguarding and summer camp duties. With pools and Summer Camps planning to operate in 2021, the Park Monitor program will cease to exist and the Department will revert to utilizing Park Ranger patrols to address any concerns.

Currently 21 Park Rangers provide coverage seven days a week. That means each day there are approximately 10 Park Rangers for approximately 300 parks spread across 271.8 square miles. The Department has started to strategically implement overtime patrols during peak usage hours to help address reported concerns.

It is important to note in response to reconsidering policing, the Austin Police Department (APD) dissolved its Park Police Unit. The absence of Park Police has reduced the ability to directly partner with APD to address some of these park issues. The Department has taken action to help mitigate challenges as follows:

- Increasing Park Ranger greenbelt patrols and working with Austin Transportation Department (ATD) to develop parking measures at specific greenbelt access points
- Working with ATD to enforce parking violations across the park system
- Implementing measures to decrease parking violations and unapproved parking and driving on parkland
- Creating an Off-leash Working Group with Animal Services that can develop action items to reduce dog off-leash issues in the park system
- Working with Austin Public Health to address camping on parkland in a holistic manner
- Working with the Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce related to Park Ranger park rule enforcement approaches

Summer Aquatic Season Operations

Lifeguard Recruitment and Training

In response to COVID-19, the Aquatic Division ceased training and onboarding lifeguards in March 2020. There has been no lifeguard training for new guards since that time. The Aquatic Division recently resumed in-water person-to-person lifeguard training/certifications when the City returned to Risk Stage

3. The first training courses resumed on March 27th and the Aquatic Division has a rigorous schedule of both full lifeguard training courses and renewal classes planned throughout the spring season.

In accordance with public health authority recommendations, the Aquatic Division has modified in-person training protocols. These modifications are likely to impact the swim season because training class numbers must be reduced to ensure the health and safety of employees and trainees. Those modifications include but are not limited to:

- Reduced lifeguard class size to 10 participants per class. This requires roughly 60 lifeguard certification courses (each certification course is 40 hours) before May 2021.
- Additional training supplies so that participants do not share equipment.

The Department will continue to monitor the local characteristics of COVID-19; will work closely with local health officials to ensure the safety of our current and future staff members; and will adjust modified training protocols as needed. As the risk stages decrease, the Department hopes to incrementally increase class sizes while ensuring health and safety.

Currently, the Aquatic Division has 130 lifeguards trained with valid certifications and ready to work. Recruiting, hiring, and training the nearly 600 additional lifeguards needed for the summer of 2021 continues to be a challenging task.

To overcome these obstacles, the Aquatic Division has made the following modifications to its 2021 recruiting plan, hiring, and training processes:

- Online/virtual hiring events and question and answer sessions,
- Attending online/virtual college job fairs,
- Comprehensive social media campaign,
- Partnerships with local high schools' announcement, publications, and PTA's,
- Increased paid advertising,
- Streamlining lifeguard training classes to include more blended learning (both in-person and virtual) options reducing the in-person class times and
- Streamlining the hiring process through robust use of technology and automation of processes.

To date, the Department has 178 lifeguard applicants. Of those, 43 are enrolled in full or renewal certification courses. The Department will continue to utilize social media platforms for lifeguard recruiting.

It is important to note, lifeguard training classes must be held in swimming pools that meet specific training criteria. Not all pools within the aquatic system meet the established base training facility criteria. The pool repair schedule may impact the lifeguard training schedule; however, the Aquatic Division is prioritizing swimming pool repairs to accommodate training classes.

Aquatic Facilities Operations

All five-year round pools: Barton Springs Pool, Deep Eddy Pool, Springwoods Pool, Big Stacy Pool and Bartholomew Pool, received significant damage due to Winter Storm Uri. The repair schedule has been impacted by requirements for lead and asbestos testing, available parts, and contractor availability.

Barton Springs, Deep Eddy, Big Stacy and Springwoods Pools are currently open to the public with minor repairs still needed that do not impact daily operations. Staff are currently finalizing repairs at

Bartholomew Pool. The anticipated reopening for Bartholomew Pool is April 11th with some amenity limitations.

Aquatic staff have completed assessments of the remaining swimming pools and have found multiple issues including plumbing breaks due to the winter storm. Lead and asbestos testing will be required prior to work being performed. Contractors are standing by to complete the work once required testing is completed with this work contingent upon the area of abatement where the repairs will be made.

Pools awaiting repairs and lead and asbestos testing and/or results include:

- Shipe Pool
- Govalle Pool
- Westenfield Pool
- Balcones Pool
- Dick Nichols Pool
- Dittmar Pool
- Dove Springs Pool
- Garrison Pool
- Kennemer Pool
- Mabel Davis Pool
- Metz Pool
- Northwest Pool

At this point in the assessment, swimming pool and splash pad repairs are estimated to be approximately \$310,000. Assessments of all Splash Pads have been completed and repairs are in process. Currently, the focus has been the repairs to the year-round pools and seasonal summer pools as outlined above. Repairs to all pools needed for lifeguard training have been a priority. Staff will continue to make repairs and develop an opening schedule as they are completed. While no catastrophic failures have been identified at this time, there is always the possibility that other necessary repairs will be discovered during the season opening process.

Aquatic Facility Access

The Aquatic Division has developed a modified tiered schedule for the summer operations that is based on the number of staff trained and hired for summer season. The tiered approach to opening pools focuses first on the five year-round pools and then adds additional pools and programming as additional lifeguards are trained and hired.

Both general swim access and swim programming will adhere to CDC and local public health operational modifications to ensure the health and safety of both employees and patrons. Aquatic programming including modified schedules for swim lessons and swim teams will be available when the Aquatic Division has recruited and trained 250 lifeguards and instructors.

There is no expected impact to Barton Springs Pool summer operations due to the bathhouse renovation since construction is not expected to begin until 2022.

Facility Rentals and Events Information

The Office of Special Events has developed a modified plan for a staged reopening of rental sites and facilities as follows:

- Beginning on April 12:
 - Resume allowing Special Event Applicants to review safety compliance techniques and plans for special events for permitting. The Austin Health Authority/Austin Public Health in conjunction with the Austin Center for Events released reopening guidelines which establish a clear process and tools for consideration of in-person special events. Most large in-person events have moved to fall dates until better conditions may be present. However, smaller athletic events with inherent activity distancing, such as a rowing event, may be able to safely proceed. In addition, this will also allow summer and fall events to consider viability of the pathway for success and begin making budgetary and planning decisions.
- Beginning on April 19:
 - Resume reservations for Picnic Sites/Shelters. Limited to two groups of 10 people while in Stage 3 and incrementally increasing to three groups of 10 as community health improves once the City of Austin downgrades to Stage 2.
 - Resume volleyball and field reservations for social sport leagues adult play. Groups will be limited to pre-registered participants only without spectators in Stage 3, with expansion consideration in Stage 2. Pre and post event activities, ceremonies or similar will not be permitted in initial opening uses. Safety plans will be required to be filed by each applicant/renter.
- Beginning on April 26:
 - Resume stand-alone Event Facility Rentals. Event building rentals in Stage 3 will resume with seven day spacing between uses, limited to two groups of 10 people, and increase to 50% occupancy in Stage 2. The seven-day spacing between uses along with staff protocols established for facility set ups/cleaning will ensure City staff safety is maximized while minimizing contact between renters and staff. Spacing between uses will also increase customer safety in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Emma Long Metropolitan Park

Emma Long Metropolitan Park remains at 50% of sites available for booking since summer 2020. Those limits will remain in place until Stage 2 upon which time all utility sites will be available for booking. Bluff camping sites will remain at 50% availability until at least Stage 1. The Grove camping sites are under construction and not expected to reopen until mid-May. Upon reopening they will be bookable at 50% levels until at least Stage 1 is achieved. In addition, vehicle capacity ticketing commenced in March for the 2021 peak season and continues to help maintain safe capacity at the park.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office at (512) 974-6717.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Deputy City Manager
Anthony Segura, MPA, MS, Assistant Director
Liana Kallivoka, PhD., P.E. LEED Fellow, Director
Lucas Massie, M.Ed., CPRP, Assistant Director
Suzanne Piper, DBA, Chief Administrative Office