



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council Members

THRU: Shannon Jones, Interim Assistant City Manager

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

DATE: January 22, 2021

SUBJECT: Aquatic Division Operational Status Update

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update regarding maintenance and staffing associated with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department's (PAR) aquatic facilities in preparation for the 2021 summer swim season. PAR will continue to provide City Council with updates on all splash pads and swimming pools as the summer season approaches.

SPLASH PADS AND SWIMMING POOLS

The Aquatic Division continues to operate under modified COVID-19 operations. Utilizing available staff resources, the Aquatic Division is operating all five - year-round facilities - Bartholomew, Barton Springs, Deep Eddy, Springwoods and Stacy Pools - with three - closure days per week. With the elevation to COVID-19 Community Risk-Stage 5, the Aquatic Division is only offering lap swimming until the stage elevation reduces.

PAR is expeditiously working to fill vacant mechanic positions. With the current available Aquatic Division maintenance staff, along with contractors, fall and winter maintenance projects have commenced in preparation for summer 2021. PAR does not expect the planned maintenance projects to delay season opening; however, should unforeseeable repairs cause a delay, PAR will communicate any maintenance related delays.

LIFEGUARD RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

In response to COVID-19, the PAR Aquatic Division ceased training and onboarding lifeguards during spring break of 2020. There has been no lifeguard training for new guards since March 2020. The Aquatic Division currently 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 will be a challenging task. In order to overcome these obstacles, the Aquatic Division plans to make 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
- Streamlining the hiring process through robust use of technology and automation of processes

Even with the above outlined modifications to the staff recruiting plan, lifeguard training requires in-person instruction inclusive of person-to-person contact. It is not appropriate to conduct typical lifeguard training courses while Austin-Travis County remains in Stage 4 and Stage 5 Risk categories. The Aquatic Division has modified in-person training protocols which are likely to impact the swim season. Those modifications include but are not limited to:

- The Aquatic Division will reduce lifeguard class size to 10 participants per class. This requires roughly 60 lifeguard certification courses (each certification course is 40 hours) before May 2021.
- The Aquatic Division will resume in-water person-to-person lifeguard training/certifications when the City returns to Stage 3.
- Open water certifications (a required certification for staff working at Barton Springs Pool) will begin to expire in February 2021. If not able to resume in-water training prior to expiration, the Aquatic Division may be forced to cease or limit the operation of Barton Springs Pool, until person-to-person training is conducted and completed.

The Aquatic Division has begun to develop alternative tiered schedules based on the number of staff they are able to train and hire. PARD 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 to provide safe pool access to patrons.

Should you have any questions, please contact my office at (512) 974-6717.

cc: Liana Kallivoka, PhD., P.E. LEED Fellow, Director
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