




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council Members

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

DATE: April 13, 2022

SUBJECT: Parks and Recreation Department Seasonal Employee Resolution No. 20220324-093

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a response related to the Seasonal Employee Resolution No. 20220324-093 associated with Austin Parks and Recreation Department's (Department) summer operations. The Department has identified both short-term and long-term strategies to increase employee recruitment and retention in an effort to solidify operations. Additionally, specific strategies for Barton Springs Pool (BSP) have been identified that will allow for the successful operation of one of Austin's iconic tourist destination's that is equally beloved by the local community.

At this time, despite best efforts from the Department to recruit employees in preparation for the 2022 summer season, the Department is lagging behind the historical recruitment pace. The Aquatic Division (Aquatics) still requires approximately 599 lifeguards to fully operate the aquatic system during the summer season. The Department needs to hire approximately 200 temporary employees for summer camp operations and 25 employees for ongoing summer maintenance.

Incentive Strategies for FY22

Lifeguard Training Fee Waivers

The Department is prepared to waive the \$20.00 training fee to become a lifeguard with the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. This fee waiver will result in an estimated \$12,000 in expense refunds and requires Council action to implement. An Item from Council or Request for Council Action will need to be initiated.

In the past, training fee waivers have resulted in applicants' sporadic commitment to attend training classes i.e., even a small investment increases commitment to complete the necessary training. While past experience is worth noting, the addition of a work complete incentive bonus is a previously non-existent motivator.

Uniform Distribution

The Department intends to provide staff uniforms to all temporary employees (inclusive of lifeguard uniforms). The cost estimate for staff uniforms is \$38,000 which will be absorbed by this year's vacancy savings.

Summer Work Complete Bonuses

The Department implemented summer bonuses to incentivize job applications and reboot operations expeditiously. The Department has advertised and funded (through vacancy savings) a summer work completion bonus of \$500.00. This bonus is available to all temporary employees who meet work complete requirements for the specific area of operation within the Department.

The Department surveyed other Parks and Recreation agencies (both in state and out of state) and found several agencies implemented a bonus incentive program ranging from \$350 to \$2500.

Expanding the incentive bonus is a flexible strategy that can be applied one time or annually. While the Department has significant need in most summer positions, the need for lifeguards outpaces the other position needs. Expanding the program to include a “signing bonus” may be considered as follows:

- An additional \$500.00 for lifeguards and other temporary aquatic staff who commit to working a specified number of work shifts through mid-season.
- An additional bonus of \$250.00 to
 - any lifeguard staff member who obtains an advanced certification of Open Water Lifeguarding, Swim Instructor Certifications, or Lifeguard Instructor Certifications
 - Summer Program and Park staff who being work by June 6, 2022.

The Department will reprioritize vacancy savings usage and work with partners to fund this 2022 summer employee bonus program.

Pay Rates

The strategy to increase hourly pay rates for summer employment has been suggested by stakeholders and the Parks and Recreation Board. Any hourly pay rate increase (of any amount) requires Council Action. A \$1.00 per hour rate increase represents an increase of \$729,000.

In addition to the fiscal impact directly associated with temporary employees, the Department has summarily analyzed compression issue impacts to full-time employee (FTE) positions within the Parks and Recreation Department. The compression issues associated with a \$1.00 hourly pay rate increase are minimal within the Parks and Recreation Department. Compression issues for dollar amounts larger than \$1.00 per hour are significant for the Department and range between \$650,677 to \$3,904,062, depending on associated pay rate. **It is important to note, hourly pay rate considerations have the potential to result in pay rate issues within other City Departments.** The extent of these impacts requires more in-depth consideration.

In lieu of increased pay rates, PARD has placed a greater emphasis on incentives and bonuses to increase applications and retentions. This decision helps minimize pay rate compression issues.

Transportation Options

In order to appropriately staff all pools within the system, lifeguards are asked to work within a given region. The Department recognizes this scheduling practice may present transportation challenges for some employees. In response to this feedback, the Department will:

- Emphasize the already approved free bus pass available to all City employees on all recruiting materials.
- Review the hiring process and scheduling requirements associated with 15-year-old lifeguards increasing the number of aquatic locations available to them for working
- In the future, review the region boundaries and consider further refinement to reduce travel requirements.

There are no additional funding needs to implement this operational change.

Marketing and Advertising

The Department has used standard recruiting and advertising to include, media campaigns, social media, direct marketing, and paid advertising. Additionally, the Department continues to re-boot summer work programs to including Ranger Cadets and Swim ATX, which is a partnership with AISD that trains students to swim and creates opportunities for summer employment.

In addition to the standard recruitment and advertising outlined above, the Department dedicated \$100K from this year's vacancy savings to develop and execute a comprehensive recruitment and advertising campaign for all temporary summer positions within the Department. To sustain this practice, the Department will work with partners to fund increased marketing and advertising in subsequent years.

Service Incentive Pay / Longevity Pay

More research and consultation will be required to provide information about Service Incentive Pay or Longevity Pay.

Long Term Personnel Needs

As outlined in the adopted 2018 Aquatics Vision Plan, the Department should "Establish and hire the needed quantity of full-time lifeguard employees to support a year-round aquatic system." It is important to note, several other goals outlined in the 2018 Aquatics Vision Plan have been accomplished; however, the staffing model has not yet been addressed.

The Department has modeled several long-term personnel needs for increased year-round success of all aquatic facilities. Of specific interest is establishing a staffing model appropriate for Barton Springs. The increased population in Austin, when combined with an increasing tourism rate, transforms Barton Springs Pool into more of a "theme park" environment than a "local swimming hole."

Consistent with the established FY2023 Budget Development and Council Budget Approval Process, the Department will incorporate staffing models and budget requests through the already established standard protocols.

Partner Support

The Department is currently working with the Austin Parks Foundation, the Friends of Barton Springs, Save Our Springs, and other support groups to develop additional strategies to overcome workforce and operational challenges. These efforts currently include but are not limited to:

- Fiscal donations
- Volunteer work related to Barton Springs cleaning/programming
- Joint marketing efforts
- Incentive programs

The Department will continue to work with partners to support strategies that align with partnership goals.

Conclusion

The Department recognizes that other departments and organizations are also experiencing unprecedented recruiting challenges in the current job market. The Department's Aquatic Division has

recently been contacted by three separate agencies in two different states also expressing dire circumstances regarding lifeguard recruitment. Local Austin TV stations have produced stories related to the personnel challenges of local non-profit organizations in the business of summer programming. PARD believes that the strategies outlined in this communication will position the Department to be successful in the recruitment and retention of employees, not only for this year, but for years to come.

Should you have any questions, please contact my office at (512) 947-6717.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager