



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Sara L. Hensley, CPRP, Director
Austin Parks and Recreation 

DATE: April 24, 2015

SUBJECT: 2015 Summer Aquatics Facility Operations and Future Sustainability

In an effort to resolve previous years' operational challenges, the Aquatics Division evaluated its current business model only to reaffirm it is inadequate. In the past, the Aquatics Division found creative ways to continue operations despite challenging fiscal, conservation and management practices. It is no longer feasible or appropriate to repeat past practices and as such, the Parks and Recreation Department will proceed with an alternative operation model starting Summer, 2015.

To summarize, the 2015 operational challenges include:

- Availability of certified lifeguards
- Water conservation issues
- Predicted budget short fall

Below is a brief summary of the challenges followed by the alternative operational model for summer 2015.

Availability of Certified Lifeguards

Historically over 64% of the Aquatics Division summer lifeguards are high school students. Typically, the lifeguard applicants focus on school obligations and activities before considering summer employment. Despite a myriad of recruitment strategies and offering certification classes throughout the spring months, during spring break and via an Austin Independent School District Physical Education class, the Department has less employee applications at this time as compared to previous years. Last year, the Parks and Recreation Department was unable to open the pools as promised on the first day of summer break. This caused an undue amount of citizen complaints and disappointment based on a promise the Department couldn't keep. Based upon current applications, the Department will not meet the expectation of opening all pools on the first day of summer break, June 5, 2015.

Water Conservation Issues

The Parks and Recreation Department is obligated to be good environmental stewards. As you are aware, the City of Austin is experiencing a record drought. It has been discovered that 25 of the 36 swimming pools in the Parks and Recreation Department inventory have some level of water leaks. The magnitude of some leaks is beyond repair without major infrastructure investment, and the water loss at an individual pool can be as much as five million gallons during the season. In addition to the conservation issue, the water loss has a fiscal impact.

Budget

Over the past three (3) fiscal years, the Aquatics Division has exceeded its budget allocation. The overages correlate to water, wastewater, and electricity costs; seasonal staff hourly rates; and general maintenance expenses associated with aging infrastructure. In FY 2015 the Aquatics Division's budget received additional funding to minimize the budget shortfall; however, the estimated cost of operations will exceed the FY 2015 Aquatics Division budget, even with the additional funding. Please know the Department will be monitoring the expense to ensure we do not exceed allocations. The aging Aquatics facilities (the average swimming pool is 50 years old) require a higher level of maintenance and financial investment.

To address the above operational challenges, the Department will modify the 2015 Aquatics operations as follows:

- Return to a balanced staggered facility opening and closing schedule that aims to provide service in a uniform manner.
- Temporarily close 2 pools (Mabel Davis Municipal pool and Metz Neighborhood pool) for the season: due to serious leaks and declined usage.
- Implement a one day closure at each pool to address maintenance issues: this will allow better proactive maintenance so that the pool will hopefully be open when the public expects it.

Beyond the immediate operational changes, it is imperative the City determine its values as they relate to aquatics and the desired future for Austin aquatics. It is important that neither the past practices nor the current failing business model impede the City's ability to visualize a healthy operable aquatic system that contributes to the overall positive social impact provided by the Parks and Recreation Department. To that end, City Departments will convene in an effort to develop a process to creatively address the Austin aquatics challenge with regards to future sustainability and positive social impact. It is the intention of the Parks and Recreation department to provide a more in-depth briefing to the City Council's Open Space, Environment and Sustainability Committee at the earliest possible opportunity. The City's work will offer Council a creative forum for the larger policy discussion regarding future Aquatics Operations in Austin.

cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
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Kimberly McNeeley, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Department
Cheryl Bolin, Division Manager, Parks and Recreation Department