MEMORANDUM

Date: May 16, 2022

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
   Pima County Board of Supervisors
From: Jan Lesher
   County Administrator

Re: Information on 2022 Summer Recreational Programs and Swimming Pool Operations

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pima County park facilities remained open and provided essential services to the community. To mitigate COVID related risks, some recreational programs were either modified or ceased. As we progress from the pandemic, programming has resumed but has faced certain limitations related to staffing. The attached memorandum from Victor Pereira, Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Director, outlines the 2022 Summer recreational program offerings.

Summer youth recreational programming is being offered at all community centers except for the Arivaca Community Center, which is closed at this time due to not being able to hire staff. The model for this location is being changed to utilize resources of Arivaca Community Center, Inc., a local non-profit organization, to provide youth programs funded by Pima County beginning July 2022. Programming at the Catalina Community Center is being offered, but is limited to what can be operated under the sole staff person at this facility.

Five of the thirteen community centers are operating youth programming plus a 4-day free summer recreation program in June and July. Programming at the Bud Walker Community Center in Ajo includes a full range of youth activities, as well as a half-day science and craft recreational offering, but does not include summer camp program.

Operating hours at Pima County pools will be adjusted because of lifeguard limitations. With three dozen lifeguard vacancies, pools will not be open on Sunday in addition to the traditional down day of Friday. Opening day for pools will be Saturday, May 28, 2022. NRPR will track staffing levels to assess opportunities for safely reopening pools on Sunday.

JKL/mp

Attachments

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
   Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer, Health and Community Services
   Victor Pereira, Director, Natural Resources Parks and Recreation
MEMORANDUM

Date: May 9, 2022

To: Jan Lesher, County Administrator
    Carmine DeBonis, Deputy County Administrator

From: Victor Pereira, Director

Subject: Summer 2022 Recreation Program Offerings

This memo outlines NRPR’s summer recreation community center and swimming pools’ operational plan to address staffing shortages and COVID-related challenges.

Community Centers

Five of thirteen community centers (Drexel, Littlestown, Picture Rocks, Robles and Ellie Towne) have sufficient staff to operate current programs, plus a 4-day per week free summer youth recreation program offered in June and July. Registration for youth programs began on April 28. Per current county policy, mask wearing will be optional for staff and participants, and surface cleaning and hand washing will occur frequently. All community center staff are required to be COVID-19 vaccinated because they interact with vulnerable populations.

Based on our operational experience from last year, we expect a positive outcome while anticipating some minor disruptions to potential COVID-19 outbreaks. Possible scenarios include the cancellation of some summer programs due to staff shortfalls. While we do have some flexibility, the safety of our participants and staff will drive all outcomes. Summer youth participants will be notified of this possibility during orientation.

Youth programs at the Bud Walker Community Center (Ajo, AZ) does not include a summer camp style program, but instead focuses on sports and event-based youth programs. For summer 2022, youth offerings will include T-ball, Coach Pitch, youth baseball and softball clinics, outdoor arts/crafts, ceramics paint and take classes, bi-weekly art classes, a Chalk the Park event, an MLB Pitch, Hit, and Run event, Jr NBA Skills Challenge, and ping pong tournaments. Additionally, a half-day outdoor recreation, science/craft program will be offered in July for ages 7-12.

Arivaca and Catalina, do not have the required staff to provide the standard operating model. Significant modifications are planned to address both short and long-term staffing shortfalls. At Catalina Community Center, despite repeated and varied recruitment efforts, we have been unable to hire a qualified Neighborhood Recreation Center Coordinator. Since the departure of the former Coordinator in January, this site has been supervised by a detailed employee assigned from another location. That individual must return to their respective community center in mid-May to operate summer programs. Unfortunately, there are no other staff currently eligible to detail into the Catalina Coordinator position. Therefore, service reductions at Catalina Community Center will be required to safely operate. This summer, our plan is to only offer the youth recreation program under the leadership of our Recreation Leader for Catalina and re-evaluate additional programming in the fall. NRPR staff will continue to recruit for the Coordinator position and will fully reopen the center once a new Coordinator is identified.
Over the last year at Arivaca, repeated recruitment efforts have failed to attract sufficient staff to manage the Community Center. A review of the area’s demographics (population 700, median age 65) highlights that even if we were able to find appropriate staff, our current operations model is not sustainable long-term. Discussions with local businesses and non-profits have determined that local employers are all recruiting a very limited group of working-age individuals. Therefore, we have proposed converting funding currently programmed for Arivaca into a grant to operationalize a local non-profit group to provide recreation programs. This concept will leverage existing non-profit staff and volunteers to provide recreational services in Arivaca. This initiative has been well received by the community and approved by county administration. On April 29, a planning meeting was held and attended by 20+ residents/members of the Arivaca business and non-profit community. Subsequently, NRPR staff met with the board from the Arivaca Community Center, Inc., (ACC) a local non-profit with infrastructure and volunteer resources, to discuss the proposed venture. Collaboratively, both staffs are currently developing an agreement that will fund recreational activities provided by the ACC beginning July 1. ACC is planning to offer summer programming with their existing resources beginning in the month of June.

Swimming Pools

Several changes in the lifeguard employment workforce (lifeguard, water safety instructors (WSI), principal lifeguard) have occurred over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affects summertime pool operations. A positive element is lifeguard pay is significantly higher than it was 4 years ago. Pima County has implemented both a retention bonus for returning staff and differential pay for those who advance from lifeguard to the WSI and principal lifeguard positions. Conversely, negative impacts have occurred over the course of the pandemic to include youth’s willingness to work full-time in the summer. This coupled with fewer available lifeguards because of COVID related training disruptions; combined with the lifeguard candidate pool who are unwilling or unable (due to parental refusal) to take the COVID vaccine (currently required for staff that work with vulnerable populations) considerably affects operations.

While we anticipate to recruit/train in future years, we will not have sufficient staff for the summer of 2022 to be fully operational. Presently, we have 114/150 (76%) required lifeguards. Our main effort focuses on swim lessons and swim team. Ancillary programs, such as aqua-aerobics, open swim, family swim and party zones will be available commensurate with summer staff availability. Based on the current staffing model, Pima County pools will be closed on Fridays (our traditional down day) and Sundays. Matching community center programs, mask wearing will be optional, per current county policy, and service interruptions may occur if sufficient staff are not available due to COVID-related disruptions.

Opening day for summer swim will begin on Saturday, May 28. As in past years, the Parklands Foundation and TMC Foundation (Vest-it-Up) will subsidize swim lessons for low-income individuals. Holiday hours on Memorial Day and Independence Day will be 1pm – 5 pm and admission on July 4 will be free with a can of food for the Community Food Bank. Weekday hours will continue at each site until the local school district begins their fall semester, typically the first week of August. Beginning on August 6 through Labor Day weekend, weekend open swim and family swim will be offered at Ajo, NW YMCA, Manzanita and Wade McLean. NRPR will continue to monitor staff availability to offer both Saturday and Sunday hours.