

City of Piedmont  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

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DATE: September 8, 2020

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Sara Lillevand, City Administrator

SUBJECT: Update on the Status of the Closure of the Piedmont Community Pool

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a Special Meeting on June 29, 2020, the City Council directed staff to research and consider possible options for reopening the Piedmont Community Pool with COVID-19 restrictions. Since that time, Recreation staff have learned more about the operation of pools allowed to open in other counties, and have examined various models for reopening based on Alameda County's health and safety requirements. Given the pool's current state of disrepair (including a non-functional heater), COVID-19 restrictions which severely limit the number of swimmers who would be allowed in the facility, and significant staffing challenges, staff has determined that it is not feasible to reopen the pool at this time.

BACKGROUND

The Piedmont Community Pool (PCP) is now 56 years old. Due to the diligence of City staff and the Piedmont Swim Club (PSC) before them, the PCP has managed to exceed the normal lifespan for an outdoor pool of its vintage, but has effectively reached the end of its useful life. The task of keeping the pool safe and operational has become more and more difficult each year with unexpected closure days on the rise. In 2018-19, the PCP had 10 unplanned closure days. In 2019-20, the PCP had 25 unplanned closure days including some of the warmest, most desirable swim days of the year. The baby pool has been fraught with safety and operational issues and was closed three different times for a total of 33 days this past year. The pool is becoming less able to serve the needs of the community while simultaneously becoming more expensive to operate every year. In addition, the pool has been fully closed since March 16, 2020, due to the COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders.

As of August 28, 2020, aquatics facilities in Alameda County are allowed to open under significant restrictions, regulations, and guidelines which include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Limited Capacity:**

- Pool operators must limit the number of swimmers in shared swimming areas of the pool to one swimmer (including staff members) per 300 square feet of pool area. By

comparison, pools in Contra Costa County are limited to one swimmer per 75 square feet of pool area. This limits the capacity of pools in Alameda County to 25% of what is allowed in Contra Costa County.

- Lap swimming is limited to one person per lane unless they are members of the same household or living unit. Circle swimming is not permitted in a single lane.
- Aquatic fitness classes are allowed to operate as long as the classes comply with this guidance, including: physical distancing for all persons outside of a household, 1 person per lane or 1 person per 300 square feet of pool area, no sharing of the equipment during the class, and equipment must be sanitized between uses.

#### **Increased Staffing Requirements:**

- Designate a staff person to monitor COVID-19 safety. All pools must have at least one staff person, in addition to a lifeguard, on duty at all times to make sure that the State and County Orders, and this guidance is adhered to by staff and by swimmers.
- All swimmers must be screened upon entry at the pool area for their designated swim time. Swimmers who do not pass the screening must be refused entry and their reservation should be rescheduled or canceled.
- Staff must clean and disinfect all commonly touched surfaces regularly, including pool maintenance equipment. This includes: door handles, doorknobs, railings, light switches, sanitizing stations, restrooms, sinks, toilets, benches, the front desk area, keyboards, computers, phones, and all shared equipment, following guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

#### **Closed Areas:**

- All indoor areas including locker rooms, indoor showers, and all drinking fountains must remain closed. Locker rooms may only be open to allow access to restrooms that are properly cleaned and sanitized. Restroom users are required to maintain physical distance and the restroom must be stocked with liquid soap, water, and paper towels in dispensers.
- Common areas, including snack bars, and lounging or sunbathing areas must remain closed. No use of the deck areas or poolside furniture.

Based on direction from Council at its June 29<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting, Recreation Department (PRD) staff have reviewed the operations of pools allowed to open earlier in other counties. PRD staff have also examined various models for reopening based on Alameda County's health and safety requirements, which as shown above, are significantly more limiting than those of neighboring Contra Costa County.

With the county mandated limit of one person per 300 square feet, the medium pool would be allowed four persons at one time. This resulted in the elimination of the medium pool and swim

lessons from being included in the possible reopening scenarios. The baby pool was also eliminated from consideration as it would be allowed only one person based on its size. In addition, approximately \$40,000 of repairs, unrelated to COVID-19, would be necessary in order to safely operate the baby pool.

Under the County's order, the capacity of the main pool is limited to one swimmer per lane (totaling six) or ten swimmers for aquatic fitness classes with proper physical distancing. These restrictions effectively eliminated any family or leisure swim from the models for reopening. As such, the only remaining activities able to be conducted would be lap swim, swim team and possibly a small aqua aerobics class although aquatic fitness classes tend to take place in the shallow end of the pool which would severely restrict allowable enrollment.

Ultimately, all reopening scenarios involve severe restrictions on the number of people allowed in the facility at any given time, coupled with a simultaneous increase in staffing requirements. Essentially, at any given time we would see a maximum of six to ten swimmers and a minimum of three staff members. Thus, all scenarios result in a model high in resource use and low in breadth of service. More salient than cost considerations, is the fact that reopening requires functioning equipment and a robust team of trained lifeguards and aquatic staff, neither of which are achievable in short order.

Currently one of the main pool heaters is not operational and would require repair or replacement before opening. It is unclear how the aging pumps, filters and other equipment will function after a six-month hiatus. Furthermore, all aquatic staff who were employed in March have been laid off or reassigned to a PRD childcare program. To safely reopen, 15-20 staff would have to be hired and trained. These staff would serve in various roles including Lifeguards, Office Staff, and COVID Safety Staff.

Since April, PRD has been primarily focused on providing safe and appropriate pre-school and childcare in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, with the commencement of the Piedmont Unified School District academic year, PRD has devoted its resources and staff to plan for and provide full day childcare and distance learning support to elementary school children. PRD has struggled to hire and train enough staff to provide this imperative childcare service. Hiring and training lifeguard staff, which is difficult in non-COVID-19 times, would likely be even more challenging in these times.

## CONCLUSION

Staff understands that residents rely upon the Piedmont Community Pool as a resource to learn to swim, exercise, compete, play, and socialize. Unfortunately, given the current staffing challenges, equipment failures, and severe COVID-19 restrictions which will limit the number of people able to use the pool for the foreseeable future, Staff concludes that reopening at this time is not feasible or practicable. Unless Council provides different direction to pursue, staff plans to implement a sustained closure of the Piedmont Community Pool.