



City of Pleasant Ridge

James Breuckman, City Manager

From: Jim Breuckman, City Manager
To: City Commission
Date: June 5, 2020
Re: Pool Status for 2020 Season

Overview

The Governor and Oakland County have authorized public pools to open at 50% capacity starting June 8. Pleasant Ridge had previously announced our pool closed for the season along with Oak Park, Huntington Woods, and Oakland County pools. The City Commission can now revisit that decision.

Staff cautions that even if the City Commission directs us to work towards an opening, it is not certain that we will be able to open this summer. Staffing the pool is the biggest unknown, explained in greater detail below.

Finally, Oak Park, Huntington Woods, Troy, Southfield, Oakland County, and Washtenaw County had all closed their pools for the summer before June 1. They are all keeping their pools closed for the summer even after the Governor's announcement on June 1 citing reasons of safety, and also that it is too late to hire and train staff, the time to prepare facilities, and the potential for losing significant staff in August.

Background

There are several issues and challenges involved in opening the pool at this late date during a pandemic, and the pool will be a very different experience than what residents are used to if we can open it.

By law, we still have to meet all of the normal codes and requirements, and the pool must be staffed by lifeguards.

Safety

While we have successfully flattened the curve and are in the process of re-opening the economy, we are still in a pandemic. Safety concerns are primary. Opening the pool will require many new and restrictive policies. It also may prevent our lifeguards from observing social distancing, and in fact, require body-to-body contact if they must make a save.

The CDC has advised¹ that **swimmers should remain 6 feet apart even while in the pool**. It is unclear how we will enforce this requirement if we reopen the pool. The rest of the CDC guidance for public pools is

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/aquatic-venues.html>

manageable but creates additional work for our pool staff to clean and disinfect often, and changes in the physical layout and operation of the pool.

Some of the changes will require us to have increased staff numbers compared to normal. We will need extra staff to work the check in desk as there will be enhanced reservation and screening required, we will have to monitor the locker rooms and the pool deck to ensure that patrons are observing proper social distancing requirements.

We would probably have to remove all deck furniture, as we will not have the capability to effectively clean it after every visitor.

We are awaiting guidance from the Oakland County Health Department on whether we would be allowed to open the zero-depth/splash area or the diving boards.

Finally, all lifeguards would be required to have a parental waiver accepting the risks of guarding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staffing

Opening the pool requires a complement of about 25 lifeguards, and without a full complement of guards we cannot open the pool. While we will be operating at half capacity, we still need a full complement of lifeguards. We have surveyed lifeguards from last year if they would work this summer. As of the date of this memo we have heard from 22 guards, 14 of which indicate that they would work and 8 will not.

Of the 14 guards who would work:

- 8 indicate that their last day of availability is on or before August 10. Many schools and universities are planning on starting fall classes earlier this year, and if fall sports start earlier as well, we will lose many of our guards. It is very possible that we would have to close the pool as early as August 10 due to a lack of staff.
- Only 5 are available until August 29, and only one can work through the normal end of pool season on Labor Day (September 7). External factors such as schools and universities opening earlier than normal appear to preclude us opening the pool this summer.
- Only 5 have certifications that extend through this season. The remaining 9 need to be recertified.

Beyond locating staff willing to work, there are other challenges involved:

- The American Red Cross (ARC) is our training and certifying organization for new guards and for returning guards whose certifications have expired. It is unknown when classes will be available to train new or re-certify returning guards. Currently there is one class scheduled at an indoor pool that starts on July 11 and ends July 18, but it is uncertain if that will occur as it is dependent on the Governor opening indoor pools. There are no classes scheduled at an outdoor pool, so we are completely dependent on this outside factor that is not under our control.
- The ARC certification course requires about 20 hours of in-person classes for a new lifeguard and a week to complete. Based on the one existing ARC class, it would be July 18 at the earliest that we could get lifeguards certified and that is dependent on that class actually occurring.

- If our staff is exposed to COVID-19 and must go into quarantine, this will further impair our ability to keep the pool open, particularly if multiple staff members are exposed to a known case.

The remaining considerations that follow are important, unless we can find and train enough lifeguards we cannot open the pool.

Duration of Pool Season

It is likely that our pool season would not begin until mid-July or later, and end on August 10.

Opening a public pool is a complex and time-consuming activity. Normally we have an 8-week process to prepare the pool for opening, starting in March and ending on Memorial Day when the pool opens. We must:

- Hire staff
- Ensure all guards have current certifications
- Schedule the contractor to open the pool
- Make necessary repairs
- Get the water chemistry established
- Pass Oakland County Health Department inspections

Capacity

Our pool capacity would likely be 80 swimmers at one time. By the Governor's order we are limited to 50% capacity. Our normal capacity is 200 persons at the pool, including staff. That means our maximum capacity this year would be 80 swimmers.

Reservation System

If we open, we would have to use a reservation system where swimmers could register for blocks of swim time. At the end of that block, everyone would have to leave the pool so that staff can clean and disinfect the locker rooms, entrance area, and any other common touch surfaces.

Residents would be able to register for one block of time per day to ensure that the greatest number of people have the opportunity to use the pool.

Entry Process and Requirements

If we open, the entry process will be longer this summer. All pool users would have to be screened with a questionnaire and a temperature check. Only residents would be allowed, and all pool users will have to have their own ID tags, including children. In order to obtain a 2020 tag all users will have to present a valid ID, including birth certificates for children showing that they are related to an adult who has a valid ID with a Pleasant Ridge address.

All users would have to wear masks when inside the building, and may have to wear masks when on the pool deck.

Interior Spaces

Pool users are required to enter through a shower room, so we must still have people enter through the building. We cannot have an outside entrance to the pool because we do not have an approved outdoor shower facility. We have investigated constructing a code-compliant outdoor shower and it would cost

about \$20,000. However, we would not be able to have that completed in time for a 2020 summer season.

All users will still have to enter through the locker room. We would have to close off the lockers and no one would be allowed to change at the facility. This would require additional staff to police and clean the locker rooms.

Equipment

There will be additional equipment costs to outfit the building with plexiglass shields, to purchase PPE for pool employees, and to equip each lifeguard with their own lifeguard equipment. We do not have an exact number for what this might be, but it will be significant.

Conclusion

We know that the pool is an essential part of the sense of community that exists in Pleasant Ridge, and we know that it would be an outlet for the many residents and kids who have had their normal social routines upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, but we have to take all of the risks and challenges involved into account when making the decision to try to open.

After investigating this in detail in April, and again over this past week, there are health risks involved in opening the pool that we cannot eliminate. Those risks appear to be lower during the summer and are certainly lower now than they were in April or early May, but they exist and will continue to exist for the foreseeable future.

The biggest operational concern is securing enough lifeguards to be able to open the pool, and how long they will be available for. As of now we have a little more than half of the number of lifeguards that we need, most of them are only available until August 10, and most of them require re-certification.

Accounting for the challenges to open, the risks involved for our staff, the potential to spread COVID at the pool, and the uncertainty about being able to open the pool for more than a mid-July through August 10 time frame, City Staff believes that the prudent course would be to keep the pool closed.

That said, we have been working towards opening the pool over the past week. If it is the decision of the City Commission to try to open the pool, we will continue to work diligently to open the pool as soon as we can and keep it open for the longest possible time, with the possibility that we will not be able to secure adequate certified lifeguard staff to be able to open the pool this summer.

Requested Action

City Commission determination whether we should continue working towards a pool opening, or to confirm the closure of the pool for 2020.