



Office of the City Manager

December 8, 2020

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: *Dee* Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Subject: City of Berkeley Aquatics - COVID-19 Update

## Introduction

This report describes the closure and re-opening of City of Berkeley (City) Pools due to City of Berkeley Health Officer Orders over the course of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The report also provides updates on projects that were completed during our closure, the roadmap to re-opening, and the challenges that have been encountered along the way.

### Timeline

March 16, 2020 – City Recreation Programs canceled due to 3/16 Shelter in Place (SIP) Order.  
September 2, 2020 – Health Order, effective 9/4, allows for restrictive use of outdoor pools.  
September 16, 2020 – King and West Campus Pools Reopen – adapted programming begins.  
December 4, 2020 – Health Order, effective 12/6, continues to allow for restrictive use of outdoor pools – no changes to adapted programming.

## Maintenance Projects in SIP Closure

Staff used time during the SIP closure to complete numerous maintenance projects at the King and West Campus pool sites. Following is a partial list:

- Installation of stationary ADA lifts at the dive tank at both pools;
- Installation of main pool pump and strainer at West Campus Pool;
- Floor resurfacing in locker room and office at King Pool;
- Installation of suction outlet covers at both pools;
- Installation of new chlorine tanks at both pools;
- Installation of new CO2 feed devices and tanks at both pools;
- Deck repair patchwork at both pools;
- Installation of new lighting in pump room at King Pool;
- New pool cover reels for West Campus Pool;
- New guard chairs for both pools;

- New lane line reels for both pools;
- Installation of LED underwater lighting for West Campus Pool;
- New Lifeguard training mannequins in order to adhere to social distancing requirements during training.

Please see pages 6 and 7 for photos and more details.

## **Re-Opening Pools**

In anticipation of re-opening pools in the Fall, staff started preparation and planning for re-opening in early August, based on re-opening guidelines and requirements from San Mateo County (opened 6/1/20) and Contra Costa County (opened 6/5/20). These plans included staffing (recertification, training and scheduling), program scheduling and program registration setup.

### Staffing and Certifications

Part-time staff were contacted in August to gauge interest in who was available and willing to return; 20 out of 47 staff expressed interest in returning to work. Almost half of them had Lifeguard Certifications that had already expired or were about to expire. Due to the pandemic, the American Red Cross gave a 180-day extension for expired certifications, but a re-certification course was required prior to having those staff return to work. Although the Health Order did not allow pools to re-open until September, an exception was provided in order to offer a re-certification course, which was held on August 29, 2020. We offered a blended course (half online and half in-person), which allowed for just one day of in-person instruction. Once pools were allowed to re-open, we scheduled in-service training for all of our staff, which were split up into different groups in order to ensure social distancing. An online Zoom training was held on September 9, 2020, but our September 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in-person trainings were cancelled due to poor air quality. This challenge resulted in the delayed re-opening of our pools and our in-person training was held on September 15<sup>th</sup>.

### Program Scheduling

After determining how many staff were available, a program schedule for each pool was created. Staff focused on offering Lap Swim and Independent Exercise programming during the initial phase, with plans to offer additional programs as the Health Order loosened.

Prior to the pandemic, King Pool operated 60.5 hours a week; an average of 9 hours per day on weekdays, 11.5 hours on Saturday and 4 hours on Sunday (for drop-in programs), and West Campus Pool operated 28 hours per week: an average of 4 hours, 7 days a week (for drop-in programs, per the approved allocated budget). During the pandemic, the pools have been programmed more equitably with King operating 49 hours per week, 7 hours a day and West Campus 42 hours per week, 6 hours a day. West Campus has one fewer hour per day because the Shower Program is being operated out of that site (started in April 2020). Operating this number of hours is not sustainable, but because of the closure from mid-March to mid-September, the pools will operate these same hours through the Winter as long as the Health Officer Orders allow.

During the first 2.5 weeks, only Lap Swim and Independent Exercise in the Dive Tank were offered at both sites. A Lifeguard Certification Course, approved by the Health Officer, was held in order to certify and hire additional staff. On October 5<sup>th</sup>, Family Swim and Independent Exercise in the shallow pool at both sites was added. On October 26<sup>th</sup>, a Barracudas Training Camp (a new program created to run under the youth camp guidelines) was offered at both sites. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Senior Exercise at West Campus Pool, was added under the Adult Fitness Class guidelines. Staff plan to expand hours of operations and programming through the Spring to include youth swim lessons program geared towards low-income families as Health Orders allow.

### Program Registration

Per the Health Order, all participants are required to pre-register for programs, which was a substantial change from previous operations. Prior to the pandemic, swimmers could drop-in and swim at any time when program hours were offered. Staff utilized the registration software, CivicRec, to take-in registration and payment. We are currently taking registration weekly for all programs. Due to the change in process, we had to create many new policies and procedures, as well as tutorial guides for swimmers who were not used to registering for programs online. Despite these changes, demand and usage of the pools has been high.

### **Pool Operations During COVID-19**

In order to comply with the Health Order, pool operations changed dramatically. This required developing many entirely new operations policies and procedures related to social distancing, increased cleaning and disinfecting, and wellness checks. Some examples included limiting the number of people that are allowed in the pool at one time; closing the locker rooms; requiring wearing masks when not in the pool, providing hand sanitizer; creating an outdoor check-in area and taking the temperature of all staff and swimmers before they entered the facility.

### Challenges

Staff have faced many challenges while preparing to re-open and continue to face the challenges as demand out paces availability. Some of the challenges that we are facing are outlined below:

- Creation of New Policies,
  - A new procedures and operations manual to comply with Health Order requirements was created.
- Registration Software Issues
  - Within the first two weeks of operating, CivicRec crashed multiple times, creating roster and payment issues that had to be resolved by staff manually. This was a significant problem that exacerbated the frustration of many swimmers who were already upset about the limited number of swim slots offered.
- Number of Swimmers Allowed Per Lane
  - Staff started off allowing one person per lane during Lap Swim, but in order to allow for more swimmers, approval was given to allow two swimmers per lane beginning on 9/28/20. On 9/30/20, revised guidance was given to revert back to

one swimmer per lane. Both changes in operation generated a significant number of complaints from swimmers.

- High Demand with Limited Hours
  - The demand for swim slots has been extremely high even though we offer 1032 swim slots per week. There are 700-800 Berkeley resident swimmers vying for these swim slots each week, with Lap Swim being the most popular. Currently Lap Swim slots fill minutes after registration opens. We have received complaints from swimmers who have been unable to register for any swim slots week to week. Concern and complaints are expressed by swimmers who either did not have access to a computer or the internet, or who were unable to use the online registration system to enroll in Aquatics programs. Staff efforts to address these inequities are described later in this document.
- Customer Service
  - The demands on our customer service staff have increased exponentially during this time. Swimmers have made dozens of calls, left voicemails, and sent hundreds of emails with questions, comments, and complaints about our new policies and procedures. These are handled by staff individually with a phone call or email response. Customer service staff financial transactions have increased by the thousands, including registrations, cancelations, transfers, and refunds.

### Adjustments

Since the pools reopened on 9/16/20, staff have made numerous adjustments and changes to our operating procedures and policies to provide a more equitable opportunity for everyone in Berkeley to access aquatics. Below is a partial list of changes:

- Recreation Software
  - Staff have worked closely with CivicRec (registration software) to determine solutions to previous registration issues and have changed registration procedures by splitting the start times for each pool and allowed phone registrations 30 minutes after the start of each registration opening.
- Maximum Enrollment and Cancellation Policy
  - In order to get more unique users in the pool, a new policy that only allows each swimmer to register for three swim slots per week between all programs was created. Prior to this policy, some swimmers were registering for 5-6 swim slots per week. We also created a new cancellation policy, due to the number of no-shows, which created empty lanes. Both policies have consequences for those who do not adhere to them.
- Aquatics Auxiliary Registration Program
  - Staff created a new lottery program for those who either did not have access to a computer or the internet, or who were unable to use the online registration system to enroll in Aquatics programs. Swimmers may apply for this program, and if accepted, will be included in a weekly lottery. Each week, 10 swimmers will be chosen at random and will be offered two swim slots for the following week that they can register and pay for prior to the general registration opening.
- Additional Program Offerings
  - As stated above, additional programs have been added within the past two months in order to provide more opportunities for swimmers of all ages to swim

at our pools. The addition of Family Swim and Barracudas Training Camp allowed for kids under the age of 16 to swim. Senior Exercise was added in order to help support our senior population that have limited mobility and are unable to participate in Lap Swim or Independent Exercise. Both the Barracudas Training Camp and Senior Exercise have staff who coach and instruct participants, while social distancing.

## Conclusion

In comparison to the 14 other public municipalities running aquatics programs in Alameda County only three others are running programs at the level of the City. Five of those entities have not reopened their pools during the SIP. Below is a list of Alameda County cities and their current aquatic offerings:

- Alameda: Similar to Berkeley Operation
- Albany: Lap Swim Only
- Dublin: Lap Swim only
- East Bay Regional Park District: CLOSED
- Emeryville: Lap Swim Only
- Fremont: CLOSED
- Hayward Area Recreation District: Lap Swim/Water Walk Only
- Livermore Area Recreation & Park District: Similar to Berkeley Operation
- Newark: CLOSED
- Oakland: Lap Swim Only
- Piedmont: CLOSED
- Pleasanton: Similar to Berkeley Operation
- San Leandro: Lap Swim Only
- Union City: CLOSED

Berkeley has a very active and committed Aquatics community that is eager to swim. For many, it is a vital part of their health and well-being. They have given us a tremendous amount of feedback about our operations during COVID-19, and we have made changes to our operations in response. It has been an exceptionally challenging balance between responding to feedback, complying with the Health Order, and operating within the constraints of our facility and staffing. However, during this time period we have also been reminded of how much Berkeley values its Aquatics facilities and appreciates the services we offer. We will continue to monitor and address feedback as it arises, adjust our operations as updates to the current Health Order are released, and expand our hours and programs as we hire and train new staff. Our commitment to the Berkeley Aquatics community remains strong.

cc: Paul Buddenhagen, Deputy City Manager  
David White, Deputy City Manager  
Jenny Wong, City Auditor  
Mark Numainville, City Clerk  
Scott Ferris, Director, Parks, Recreation & Waterfront  
Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager / Public Information Officer

**Maintenance Projects Completed During SIP Closure**

**Installation of stationary ADA lifts at both dive pools**



**Deck repair patchwork at both pools**



**Installation of new Chlorine Tanks at both pools**



**Installation of new CO2 Tanks and feeders at both pools**

**Installation of new main pool pump and strainer at West Campus**



**New pool cover reel at West Campus Pool**

**New lifeguard chairs at both pools**



**New Lifeguard training mannequins in order to adhere to social distancing requirements during training**

