

SPECIAL PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

Date and Time: Thursday, June 4, 2020, at 4:00 pm, (Council Chambers)

Members Present: Rasmussen (C), Herbst, Peckham, Wadinski, and McElhaney

Others Present: Alfonso, Kremer, Rosenberg, Polley, Groat, Polley, Ryan, Dale Grosskurth, Rebecca Mroczenski

Discussion and possible action on opening Wausau's public pools on July 1.

Rasmussen explained that this committee is tasked with looking at the opening of pools from a health and safety perspective. The recommendation from the CDC was that the pools stay closed. This committee will weigh in and the Council will have two perspectives to review to make a decision. You have the minutes from the Park and Rec Committee meeting in your packet. The Park and Rec Committee received a lot of public comment on this issue. It is a mixed bag of concerns. Different Alderpersons are receiving different requests and feedback from residents depending upon location in the City.

Rasmussen asked Jamie Polley, Parks Director, to speak about what the pool opening plan would look like. Polley spoke about the Park and Rec Committee's request to put a plan together on what pools opening would look like. Polley advised that she presented to the Parks and Rec on Monday and with their desire to now open only two pools, some modifications to the original plan were necessary. A decision on which two pools to open has not been made yet.

Polley discussed that some of the plans for opening safely include reducing hours by one hour each day. Hours would be 11-7 on weekends and 1-7 on weekdays. There would be eight guards on deck; four guards would be tasked with solely enforcing social distancing, one guard for admittance and one guard strictly for cleaning. She stated although this will assist us, no matter how many staff we place, we will have difficulty with maintaining social distancing. She indicated the staff may receive a lot of pushback from residents in the pool. The capacities will be reduced to one third and social distancing markings placed at the front gate and on the slide. Signage would be placed for recognizing symptoms, social distancing capacity, disinfecting activities and any new rules necessary.

Polley indicated they are working on a plan for reducing cash transactions. She noted Weston is going to registration system, but we do not have that option in Wausau. Masks required for staff not in guard chairs. Patron amenities would be reduced by reducing lounge chairs by 50% on the deck, try to tape off 6 ft. sections to enforce social distancing. The changing areas of locker rooms will be closed and only have restroom facility open, so people come dressed to swim and not change at the pool. Personal life jackets and goggles would be allowed and we would not provide life jackets as we have in the past.

Polley stated staff would not allow staff to congregate in staff room and would put things in place to keep staff separated. There will be staff training on all guidelines of CDC. She recommended not allowing agency and daycare groups to come in because it is harder to manage large child groups. She also recommended no free days this summer to keep attendance down. We have never reached capacity but the daytime capacity from past years would exceed what we could allow this year under social distancing guidelines. She indicated they will still offer scholarships to people who could not afford to pay to use the pool.

Polley stated if they were to open two of the three pools there is currently just enough staff, but she did not think there was enough staff to open three. If recommendation is to open all three, they would try to recruit extra staff.

Rasmussen felt that opening three would help to spread people out and control social distancing better. She indicated feedback from the public who favor opening, is to open all three and the reverse is true for people who feel they should keep closed. Polley reiterated they likely could get a couple extra people so they could staff all three if that is the decision.

Rasmussen said we could monitor attendance and close one pool with low capacity to free up staff for the other pools if we find that to be efficient. Rasmussen further explained that we are trying to make a decision for what is best for the health of our community. She felt they should take a cautious approach, but also didn't want to be so overly cautious by regulating something that isn't as big a risk as first thought.

Rasmussen question if Polley believed they can offer a safe swimming experience for the public or if she feels it is too risky. Polley explained that she has a hard time answering this because the CDC states that children can be carriers of COVID without showing symptoms and she fears the social distancing will be very difficult to handle. Polley stated that she feels we have the staff to provide the best experience we can.

Rasmussen asked Dale Grosskurth, of Marathon County Health Department, to come forward to speak. Grosskurth indicated he was present along with Becky Mroczenski, Epidemiologist, to help answer questions.

Rasmussen commented the CDC recommends we be at a higher benchmark before opening a public pool. She questioned whether we would be at the set benchmark to open a pool if we were going to use the Badger Bounce Back plan benchmarks to make this decision. Grosskurth said we can't say where we are locally as data on Bounce Back plan is a county metric. He stated the CDC guidance is advising against opening pools. He reiterated, as Polley explained, social distancing standards are the highest risk to manage. He commented we are getting close to doubling our positive cases of COVID in the county, but still have quite low numbers when compared to other communities. Grosskurth stated it is quite hard to predict what COVID numbers will be in a few weeks or a month. The incubation period can take up to 14 days to show up so it is very difficult to make these types of decisions like opening a pool. The biggest issue is that children may be at low risk, but are carriers of the disease, and after leaving the pool these kids will be visiting grandparents, etc. that are in the high risk population for COVID.

Grosskurth felt following CDC and Health Department guidelines are the best guidance we can follow to do our best to mitigate the risk. He advised against opening pools to be on the side of caution, but if a pool is opened, they wouldn't shut down the pool because they do not have the authority to enforce that.

Rasmussen pointed out that some people will be reluctant to come to the pool, so that will keep numbers down. She hoped that if contact tracing showed increase in cases came from our facility, we would agree to close immediately.

Rasmussen stated yesterday Channel 9 reported that we are demanding masks for all people who visit the pool. She clarified that was incorrectly reported and the committee had not discussed that at all. She wanted to set the record straight on that so the public is aware that we are not requiring masks for the public if the pools open.

Polley noted if we were to open all three pools with the modified staffing from July 1 – August 9 there would be a budget shortfall of \$15,000. If we only open two pools, we would not have to ask for additional funds. We would keep one pool open one week longer and would still have enough in the budget for that if only two of the pools open.

Deb Ryan came forward with public comment. Discussed that she is a regular user of the warm pool. The old pool capacity was 250. The number allowed now is 10 in the whole warm pool. At the YMCA, they are only allowing swimming by reservation and there is a time limit. She was concerned about distancing for children and thinks it will be very difficult to maintain. Rasmussen questioned what Ryan is hearing in her district. Ryan indicated she only heard from one resident and the request was not to open.

Rasmussen said that her district input is primarily to keep pools closed, and if the pools open, residents will stay home. She asked committee to comment on their districts. Pat Peckham stated most of the comments that came to him were against the closure of pools. He stated at Parks & Rec Committee meeting Polley and her staff came with a plan to manage the risks of transmission. He stated that having a plan made him think that we could open in a safe way. Peckham commented he received an email today that we shouldn't decide on basis of fear. He explained that he is not deciding on fear, but felt with the plan we have in place, we could open safely.

Jim Tipple, 314 Gerald's Court, came forward with public comment. He suggested limiting pools to City of Wausau residents. He felt that it is also the responsibility of the parents, babysitters and community to keep social distancing standards in check, not just be the Parks department's responsibility. Tipple believed opening all three pools will help with social distancing, instead of downsizing to two pools.

McElhaney discussed that part of her reason for not wanting to open the pools is that she worries about people coming from other communities to use our pools. She worries about how kids are supposed to get to another pool if

the pool in their district is not one to be opened. She expressed concern of our young staff getting push back from the public. She questioned where they draw the line to say someone should leave when people don't or won't adhere to the social distancing rules. She felt we need to protect our staff as well as our residents.

Wadinski commented on what a great asset the pools are to the community. He also expressed concern on people pushing back on rules and how/if we are allowed to deal with these people who won't listen.

Dawn Herbst concerned with how we control who comes to the pool and how would we manage contact tracing if we had an outbreak because we wouldn't know where the people traveled from.

Epidemiologist Becky Mroczenski stated if we needed to do contact tracing due to an outbreak at pool, we would not be able to pick up asymptomatic individuals. If we could identify, the Parks Department would be notified.

Polley spoke about how to deal with uncooperative people coming to the pool. She did not believe respect for social distancing rules will be present because the people visiting the pool will likely be people who are not as concerned about the virus and may be more likely to not want to follow social distancing rules. She indicated she needed to discuss with Chief Bliven and his staff about what their enforcement ability would be as there really isn't a law that you must social distance in any area.

Rasmussen explained that we need to discuss having social distancing as a "pool rule" and the pool management team should have the authority to put rules and enforcement in place without direct oversight of government body.

Polley stated there would not be swim lessons offered due to too many obstacles with social distancing standards. Kids learning to swim spit out water, touch each other and the instructor, etc. and it would be too hard to maintain social distancing for instructors and kids. As staff, we do not feel we could offer lessons safely.

Polley explained that the committee did not recommend to allow only City residents use the pool because we offer the scholarship to all Wausau School District students and also checking residency takes extra time, which would cause a buildup of people waiting. Also, if restricting to residency and a child doesn't have proof, CIVMIC advice was that we should not turn away, so it would be very hard to restrict to only residents.

Peckham said that restricting to residents also creates issues with situations where parents drop a car load of kids off and leave and it is then found that some are not residents. That would create issues with what to do with those children. Peckham indicated he does not support restricting to residents only.

Motion by Peckham, second by McElhaney to open up to three pools as of July 1st with the plan that has presented by Polley.

McElhaney explained that she seconded the motion to get this issue to come before the Council, but it does not necessarily mean that she will vote yes at Council. She advised that as a nurse, she has big concerns with going against CDC guidelines. She indicated she also wants to gather more information from her residents over the weekend. Rasmussen agreed she would also be looking for more feedback before the Council meeting.

A vote on the motion was taken. Motion failed 1-4 with Peckham being the only one to vote in the affirmative.

Adjourn

Motion by Peckham, second by Herbst to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 5:07 p.m.