



April Board Cycle

Milwaukee County Parks
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Date: March 21, 2019
To: Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman, County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, CPRP, Executive Director
Subject: **Water Safety and Staffing Needs at Aquatics Facilities (INFORMATION)**

Issue

Lifeguard staffing challenges and the impact on facilities and water safety in Milwaukee County Parks.

Background

There is over 70 years of history within the Milwaukee County Park Lifeguard Corps which values high standards and an excellent safety record. The Lifeguard Corps staffs facilities throughout Milwaukee County Parks, however is recognized by the State of Wisconsin as a lifesaving agency, and therefore is enabled to work anywhere in the State. The ongoing shortage of lifeguards continues to threaten the ability to adequately staff all facilities. The Parks Department continues to be creative and has strategically planned hours of operation, staggering night hours across the aquatics facilities, and reducing hours based on attendance, all in order to maximize our limited number of lifeguards at as many facilities as possible. In 2018, Milwaukee County Parks had to reduce hours at the two large Aquatic Facilities: Cool Waters and David F. Schulz Aquatic Center. Staffing any facility with less than needed lifeguards is not an option, as public safety is our greatest concern.

The Milwaukee County Parks Aquatics Division is responsible for the safe oversight and operation of year-round aquatics facilities, deep well pools, and Bradford Beach during the summer. The Division is managed by three full-time employees who hire and manage all seasonal lifeguards and seasonal park workers to staff fourteen facilities. There are also two full time Head Lifeguard positions that oversee day to day management at the Noyes and Pulaski indoor pools. Attachment 1 to this report includes the targeted seasonal and full-time positions needed at each aquatics facility, and importantly the number of lifeguards that are needed to maintain water safety at each facility. In summary, each year Milwaukee County Parks needs to hire approximately 210 seasonal lifeguards and 77 seasonal park workers for the safe operation of the entire aquatics system. Last season Parks was only able to hire 187 seasonal employees and in turn had



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to reduce hours of operation and limit pool rental availability, which in turn has a negative impact on revenue generated at these facilities.

Currently, for the 2019 summer season, we have a commitment from 95 returning lifeguards, though they will still need to pass the physical in-water skills test. Assuming all 95 return for this summer, we will need to hire a minimum of 100 additional lifeguards. Despite continuous year-round recruitment efforts, with a dedication to the 2019 season beginning in October of 2018, Milwaukee County Parks has experienced increasing difficulty in recruiting new candidates. As of March 8th, the Parks Department has only had 8 candidates successfully complete the civil service exam, despite offering three free classes since January. Attachment 2 lists the recruiting efforts in Milwaukee County schools.

Over the past 6 months, in attempt to recruit additional lifeguards Parks staff distributed recruitment posters as well as attended schools throughout Milwaukee County. In addition, aquatic staff attended job fairs and hiring events, advertised in brochures at city swim meets, attended a conference swim meet, and worked with Parks Marketing on outreach efforts to assist in recruitment of lifeguards and park workers.

This declining trend in the lifeguard workforce is a national issue. Various factors are contributing to this, including competition from summer internships, wages that are uncompetitive with other seasonal positions, national immigration policy limiting work visas, and a high barrier to entry due to training and swimming requirements. In Milwaukee the school year now begins in mid-August which results in seasonal lifeguards going back to school before the pools close later in the month. Tactics to address these hiring challenges include subsidizing the cost of lifeguard certification¹ (which Milwaukee County Parks currently does), and raising seasonal wages. In 2017, the State of Wisconsin lowered the minimum age of lifeguards to 15 to increase the number of potential recruits for all municipalities². Milwaukee County Parks staff will continuously recruit and pursue innovative strategies to lower the barriers of entry for seasonal lifeguards, but the policy makers at Milwaukee County should be aware of the increasing challenges in maintaining a safe level of staffing at our aquatics facilities and the impact this has on the ability to open facilities.

Public safety is a primary concern of the Parks Department and without adequate staff in place, certain facilities may not be able to stay open consistently throughout the summer months. As we approach the outdoor swimming season, Parks staff will closely monitor staffing levels and in case of a lifeguard shortage will adjust each facility's hours of

¹ <https://www.tmj4.com/news/local-news/waukesha-county-offers-incentive-to-fill-lifeguard-jobs>

² <https://www.tmj4.com/news/local-news/wisconsin-senate-passes-bill-lowering-minimum-lifeguard-age>

operation as needed. Another alternative is to rotate temporary closures of facilities to be able to safely deploy however many lifeguards are hired across the system.

Lifeguard Training Requirements

Attachment 3 describes the lifeguard training program in detail. Minimum requirements to begin the Milwaukee County lifeguard training program:

- Must be at least 15 years of age to train and 16 years of age by the time of employment
- Resident of the State of Wisconsin
- Able to swim 100 meters in 1:45 or less

Milwaukee County Lifeguard requirements:

- Must Pass Civil Service exam - Skills taught in 12 hours of in-water training
- Must obtain Emergency Medical Responder Certificate - Obtained through 40-hour Emergency Medical Responder Course
- Must obtain CPR and AED Certification - Certification as AHA BLS for Healthcare Providers

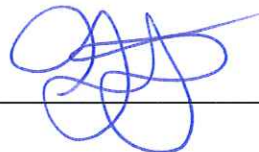
Rescues and Response

The need to have adequate lifeguarding is evident every year. In summer of 2018, Milwaukee County lifeguards rescued 33 patrons, and treated another 12 patrons with emergency medical care.

Recommendation

There is no recommendation at this time, this report is for informational purposes.

Approved By: Guy Smith, CPRP, Executive Director



Attachments

- Attachment 1 – Staffing Needs at Milwaukee County Aquatics Facilities
- Attachment 2 – Summary of Recruiting Efforts
- Attachment 3 – Lifeguard training program

Copy

- Chris Abele, County Executive
- Raisa Koltun, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
- Jason Haas, Parks, Energy & Environment Chair, Supervisor District 14



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- Sheldon Wasserman, Parks, Energy & Environment Vice-Chair, Supervisor District 3
- Marcelia Nicholson, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 5
- Felesia Martin, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 7
- Steven Shea, Parks, Energy & Environment Committee Member, Supervisor District 8
- Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors
- Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
- Emily Peterson, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller



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