



CITY OF SAN DIEGO



PARKS MASTER PLAN

people | community | parks

RECREATION EQUITY REPORT 2022

PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT



CONTENTS

DEFINING EQUITY..... 2

BACKGROUND 3

ACCOMPLISHMENTS..... 5

Summer for All of Us..... 5

Come Play Outside..... 5

Back to Work SD: Youth and Environmental Corps Program..... 8

SD Access 4 All..... 9

Reduce the Digital Divide 9

Department Fee Schedule Update10

Opportunity Fund Development11

Fee Waiver Program Improvements.....12

VACANCIES13

CONCLUSION.....15

Attachments:

- A. 2019 Parks and Recreation Department Equity Report
- B. Performance Audit of Equity in Recreation Programming
- C. Fiscal Year 2023 Parks and Recreation Fee Schedule
- D. 2022 Fee Waiver Program and Application

DEFINING EQUITY

Equity is a cornerstone operating principle of the recently adopted City of San Diego Strategic Plan (adopted January 2022).¹ Established under Mayor Todd Gloria, the Strategic Plan states that the City values equity and inclusion by taking intentional action to create equal access to opportunity and resources. “Equity is an achievable outcome when disparities are eliminated in systems, and when everyone has access to inclusive City services and resources essential to reaching opportunities and thriving in San Diego. To do this successfully, we need to honestly and directly address persistent issues connected to neighborhood inequity and systemic racism in the City of San Diego. Creating equitable outcomes requires an intentional approach that includes and empowers our communities experiencing structural exclusion through ensuring disparities are eliminated in systems. We recognize the strength, worth, and promise of each person in San Diego, and will work towards creating a better future...for all of us.”

The Parks Master Plan (adopted August 2021) has an equity-based approach that recognizes “certain areas of a city, where people of color have historically disproportionately lived, are likelier to have fewer, quality recreational opportunities due to factors such as the era of community development and historical levels of investment” (Section 4.5, page 83). The Parks Master Plan equity goal states that the City must address “long -standing inequities experienced by people in communities of concern and other marginalized populations allowing everyone to fairly share the same benefits from parks and attain full and equal access to recreational opportunities regardless of one’s background, identity, ability, and location” (Equity Goal, page 95).²

Living near parks, recreational programs, and green space encourages greater physical activity and positive health benefits, strengthens community engagement, expands economic opportunity, and improves environmental quality. Historically, some communities have seen greater investment than others in their parks and recreation services. The availability and condition of the park facilities significantly impacts the City’s ability to provide recreational opportunities. Therefore, it is important to make equitable investments so all communities can access and enjoy the same recreational benefits.

The following graphic shows the difference between equality and equity. In the equality example, every person receives a bicycle of the same size, but not everyone is able to ride the bicycle. With equity, each person receives a bicycle catered to their needs and abilities. Providing the appropriate resources to address the various needs of the City’s many diverse communities is crucial to ending the cycle of inequity.

¹ The City of San Diego Strategic Plan (January 2022) is available at: <https://performance.sandiego.gov/>

² Parks Master Plan (August 2021) is available at: <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/parks-master-plan-adopted-2021.pdf>. “Communities of concern” are defined in the Climate Equity Index (2019), which is available at: https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2019_climate_equity_index_report.pdf.



Source: HERE Center, California State University, Northridge

One of several recommendations from the Parks Master Plan to address the City’s equity goals includes Recommendation E6, which states “Prepare a report to examine equity and access within the City’s recreation centers, aquatic complexes, and programs.” This staff report is the first to provide this update, and it is intended to be updated annually with the latest efforts undertaken by the Parks and Recreation Department and its many partners to provide equitable access to quality parks and recreational programs for all.

BACKGROUND

For several decades, the Department operated under a decentralized model of offering recreation programs and services. Historically, budgeting for the Department focused on a generally equal share of funding and resources between various parks from the City’s General Fund. Each recreation center had a companion recreation council that advised the Department on its assigned parks and programs, and the recreation council managed the provision of recreation programs that could be fully cost recovered through user fees. Recreation councils evolved over time to become nonprofit organizations in partnership with the City to deliver recreational programs. While this model was well-established in the City, benchmarking revealed that the recreation council role was unique to the City and not replicated in other municipalities.

In 2017, the City Council approved changing the model of recreation program provision based on a finding that user fees collected for permits are considered City funds and must be expended in accordance with City policies and procedures. Program fees were placed into Recreation Center Funds (RCFs) rather than in the recreation councils. This approach to funding and contracting for recreation is more consistent with other municipalities and ensures proper controls are in place for the use of fees collected by the Department. Many recreation councils ceased operations during this timeframe, as their nonprofit status could not be maintained without funding.

During the transition, staff compared revenues and expenses associated with each recreation center. That analysis revealed that some centers have significantly more pass-through revenue due to the number of cost-recoverable programs offered at those centers. Other

centers relied more heavily on the funding provided by the General Fund and by extension the staff assigned to the site. A key finding was that some centers have more range in programming particularly where patrons can afford to pay for specialty programs, and the Department needed to find ways to offer similar programs at low or no cost for areas of the City that could not afford to pay for these programs. Annual review of the Recreation Center Funds (RCF) budgets starting in 2018 exposed the inequitable distribution of resources for recreation services, and the Department began annual presentation of an equity (only interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic).

In 2018, the Department conducted its first analysis of equity across the City park system (see Attachment A). The report compared available park acreage and amenities, maintenance levels, and recreation opportunities across all nine council districts and park operating divisions. The report concluded that inequities existed across all spectrums of the Department, with the following notable findings about the RCFs:

- Permit revenue is derived from facility and field rentals, and proceeds are divided between the General Fund and RCF. When reviewing the proposed RCF budgets, staff noted that some communities generate higher permit revenue as the facilities in these areas have a higher level of usage by the community as compared to other communities. In those areas, the RCF provides additional maintenance needed to keep the fields safe and playable and to replace high use equipment and furnishings worn down from the increased usage.
- Community Parks II Division (serving City Council Districts 3, 4, 8, and 9) has a larger general fund budget for recreation operations and higher levels of subsidized programs than the other divisions, but Community Parks I Division (serving City Council Districts 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7) notably had far more program participants than Community Parks II Division.
- Of the programs offered in the Community Parks I Division, 59% of the participants paid the full price for program. Typically, full priced programs use program contractors with specialize skill sets. Funds from these programs make up over 76% of Recreation Center Funds (RCF) revenue.
- Those RCFs that have significant revenue also have a high number of participants that pay the full cost of the program. Many of the RCFs that have less revenue have a higher level of general fund subsidized programs based on the number of participants.

At the request of Councilmember Vivian Moreno, the Office of the City Auditor investigated the RCFs and inherent inequities found in recreation programming, with a focus on historically underserved communities. The resulting Equity in Recreation Programming Audit was released on November 2021 and contains five core findings that resulted in 16 recommendations for the Department to pursue (see Attachment B).³ The findings of the audit discovered that the Department lacks resources to adequately support a strategic data driven approach to identify and evaluate community recreation needs, existing programs,

³ The Performance Audit of Equity in Recreation Programming, November 2021 is available at: https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/22-005_equity_recreation_programming.pdf

marketing, language and financial barriers, thus limiting the Department’s ability to effectively allocate resources and provide recreation programs more equitably across the City. The Department agreed with the findings and agreed to implement all recommendations, with some contingent upon the availability of additional resources as noted in the Management Response contained in Attachment B.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The City Strategic Plan, Parks Master Plan, Recreation Equity Audit, and 2019 Equity Report brought attention to significant inequities across the Department. As a result, the Department began actively seeking opportunities to build resources to support equitable programming and reduce barriers to program participation in communities of concern. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic that shut down most recreation operations for 15 months, the Department still managed to successfully collaborate with stakeholders and partners to support various aspects of identifying community needs, such as developing strategies to reduce barriers and providing access to enhanced programming and free wireless internet (wi-fi).

This section reviews the Department’s core accomplishments, which include implementation of the Come Play Outside and Back to Work SD programs as part of the Summer for all of Us initiative,⁴ the Department Fee Schedule updates which includes the creation of the Opportunity Fund and revisions to the Low Income Fee Waiver Program, completion of the Parks Master Plan, and introduction to the Digital Navigator program.

SUMMER FOR ALL OF US

COME PLAY OUTSIDE



Come Play Outside began as a response to the long-term COVID-19 pandemic closure that started in March 2020 and continued into the first half of 2021. During this time, many public facing amenities such as parks, schools, recreational amenities, programs, and aquatic facilities in the City saw temporary closure due to public health orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Parks and Recreation Department continued to maintain and sanitize parks, and while some areas reopened much earlier (such as golf, swimming, and tennis), most recreational staff were redeployed to assist with these efforts. With the uncertainty the pandemic brought, many staff left the Department for a variety of personal reasons, including elder care, childcare, and overall concerns for health and safety.

Park closures during the pandemic resulted in youth remaining indoors at their homes, which resulted in a significant decrease of physical and social activity. Recognizing this, and to help reopen parks and welcome the community back to the City’s recreational programs,

⁴ Mayor Todd Gloria’s Summer for All of Us Initiative is outlined in the Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Budget: <https://www.sandiego.gov/mayor/mayor-gloria-proposes-engage-equip-and-employ-youth-through-%E2%80%98summer-all-us%E2%80%99>

Mayor Todd Gloria created the “Summer for All of Us” initiative, which included Come Play Outside and Back to Work SD. This program targeted youth in historically underserved communities, identified as communities of concern in the 2019 Climate Equity Index. Department staff focused efforts on 21 recreation centers and pools based on this data.

Funding and Partnerships

Specific funding allocations and in-kind contributions included:

- Fiscal Year 2022 City budget allocations of \$400,000 for Come Play Outside (recreation programs and activities) and \$250,000 for Back to Work SD (youth employment, internship, and mentorship program)
- County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) in cooperation with Board of Supervisors Chair Nathan Fletcher (District 4) in the amount of \$750,000
- San Diego Parks Foundation
- Price Philanthropies Foundation

With these partnerships, community-based organizations and service providers came together with the City and County to make Come Play Outside a success.

Programming

The Come Play Outside program focused on expanded programming over the summer at 21 recreation centers and aquatic centers in San Diego’s most underserved communities, which are located in Council Districts 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9. It focused on providing funding for a variety of equitable programs and events connecting youth with the outdoors, promoting mental and physical health and wellness, and culturally relevant programs and activities. Come Play Outside programs included swim and lifeguard classes, recreational classes, adventure camps, teen nite, movies in the park, and the Fern Street Circus. These programs began in May–June 2021, right as the Department reopened many of its recreational facilities for public use.

To ensure successful implementation of Come Play Outside within this timeframe, the Department needed to overcome multiple factors:

- Attrition and rehiring of staff, as many job classifications including recreation leaders and pool guards saw vacancy rates between 20% and 30%
- Implementation of COVID-19 safety measures for park patrons and employees, such as signage, social distancing, face coverings, sanitation practices and stations, and additional cleanings
- Connection and contract development with multiple recreation service providers
- Receipt of non-City funds and development of process to securely utilize these funds for the program elements
- Staff training on these measures

Within a month, Department staff, developed and coordinated a summer full of fun activities and events. These began in June 2021 and ended in December 2021. Over 340 classes and

campers were scheduled across 21 sites, including 120 teen nights at 15 locations, 30 movies in the park, 30 seasonal community events, and seven (7) Fern Street Circus and Maraya Dance Performance events.

While the primary goal was to utilize the funds over the course of the summer season, there was still an adequate amount remaining to continue supporting equitable programs and events into fall and winter of Fiscal Year 2022.

Goals and Outcomes

Outreach for all programs and events was targeted at 15,000 children, adolescents, and young adults. With assistance from the Mayor’s office, Council offices, the County, San Diego Parks Foundation, and Price Philanthropies in getting the word out about this exciting new opportunity, the Come Play Outside program was able to engage with over 16,500 participants, exceeding the goal of 15,000 participants.

Program	Funding allocated	Funding expended	# of Participating Sites	Target Attendance	Actual Attendance
Outdoor Adventure Camp	\$110,300	\$41,692	16 Recreation Centers	320	314
Teen Nite	\$42,000	\$42,000	15 Recreation Centers	6,747	6,394
Learn to Swim	\$43,881	\$7,941	5 Pools	500	602
Junior Pool Guard	\$65,344	\$53,720	5 Pools	48	559
Fern Street Circus	\$20,300	\$20,300	7 Community Parks	2,100	1,445
Movies in the Park	\$22,400	\$22,165	21 Parks & Pools (30 movies)	2,100	4,900
Flexible Programs and Events	\$400,000	\$178,429	17 Recreation Centers	3,185	2,646
			Totals	15,000	16,680

Three programs that far exceeded the target attendance were the Learn to Swim classes, Junior Pool Guard program and the Movies in the Park. These programs and events are typically very popular, with the aquatic’s programs filling to capacity across the city and

movies in the park well attended by families. While the Outdoor Adventure Camp, Teen Nite, Fern Street Circus, and flexible programs fell just shy of their target attendance, they still present great success with the outcome achieved.

One of the key measures of the Come Play Outside program was satisfaction surveys. With the help of the Performance and Analytics Department, over 4,000 surveys were distributed to program participants. Of the 585 surveys that were completed by participants and caregivers, the Come Play Outside programs received an overall satisfaction rate of 92%.

With the support of Mayor Gloria, the City Council, the County of San Diego, the San Diego Parks Foundation, and Price Philanthropies, the Department managed to execute a year's worth of planning an incredible summer line-up of programs and events into two months, all the while navigating the pandemic and continuously changing protocols. The Department embraced the Come Play Outside program with excitement and enthusiasm as they called upon their communities to get outside, get back into their parks, and come together with their peers and neighbors. This opportunity provided equitable and enriching programs across communities of concern at little to no cost to participants. The Department looks forward to the possibilities that lie ahead as we continue to work closely with our partners to develop exciting programs for the upcoming year.

BACK TO WORK SD: YOUTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CORPS PROGRAM

The Fiscal Year 2022 budget provided a onetime allocation of \$250,000 to support the Youth and Environmental Corps Program, which is part of the Back to Work SD. The funding was intended to prioritize opportunity youth and students from communities of concern with employment and scholarship opportunities.

Job Fairs

Over the course of the fiscal year the Department partnered with, and continues to partner with, the Human Resources Department, San Diego Parks Foundation, San Diego Department of Education, San Diego Youth Workforce Partnership, and many other nonprofit community organizations to develop, publicize and execute two virtual job fairs (September 2021 and November 2021). In addition, the Department participated in the recent SDSU and Promise Zone job fairs (February 2022 and March 2022). These job fairs were marketed to youth and students in communities of concern ages 16 to 24 years of age.

The job fairs included a presentation from the County Department of Education and Human Resources on resume writing and interview skills, as well as various break out rooms to learn about job opportunities, internships and mentorships available in the Department including Natural Resources and Management, Asset Management, Web Design, Recreation and Aquatics hourly positions, Golf Operations, Volunteer, Safety and Training Office, Digital Navigators, Park Rangers, and Citywide Maintenance and Horticultural Management. Attendees had the chance to attend as many break out rooms as they desired to find positions that piqued their interest. There were question and answer opportunities and follow up meet and greet sessions with those that applied for the various positions available. As a result of the virtual job fairs, the Department hired 25 interns, 23 pool guards, 17 recreation aides, and 5 recreation leaders as of March 2022.

LEADER Academy

As part of the on-boarding process these recruits attended the Departments LEADER Academy which is an acronym for Leadership, Education, and Development for Employment in Recreation. Recruits attended this 24-hour academy over the course of five weeks to learn about San Diego civics, special event creation and support, coaching sports, teaching crafts, interview skills and the City’s job application process. Furthermore, the LEADER Academy is expanding in partnership with the San Diego Parks Foundation and the San Diego Workforce Partnership to become the “Parks Ambassador LEADER Academy” program.

The expanded opportunity is a paid 12-week course where attendees will learn about various aspects of Parks and Recreation job opportunities including Recreation Programs, Leagues and Special Events, Age Well and Therapeutic Services, Regional Parks and Natural Resources Management, City governance and employment opportunities outside of Parks and Recreation, City of San Diego budget process and why its relevant to City employment, food handling protocols and cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automatic external defibrillator (AED) training. Attendees will volunteer at three city events for a hand-on experience and have dedicated sessions for career goal development, applying for City jobs, interview skills and complete the course with a formal interview process for a Recreation Aide or Recreation Leader I position.

Future Opportunities

The Department found great success in the Youth and Environmental Corps program and continues to develop on-going recruitment and training opportunities to build the City workforce. With additional resources, the Department will have the ability to develop a recruitment campaign, establish social media platforms and other marketing strategies and continue to expand in-person and virtual job fairs and training programs.

SD ACCESS 4 ALL

REDUCE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The Digital Navigator Program is the latest push to help close the digital divide that leaves an estimated 53,000 San Diego households without internet access. Through the SD Access 4 All initiative,⁵ the Department partnered with the San Diego Parks Foundation to install free public wireless internet (wi-fi) access at all recreation centers.

Historically, most individuals have had to navigate home access to internet, devices, and technical support on their own, which leaves many residents unable to socially connect or access economic resources. To address the disparity in navigating access to technology and digital skills, a consortium of partners in the San Diego region launched the Digital Navigator program and Digital Equity Hotline, managed by the San Diego Futures Foundation in partnership with the City. This free service provides Digital Navigators to

⁵ The SD Access 4 All Program is available at: <https://www.sandiego.gov/sdaccess>

assist community members with internet adoption and the use of computing devices, home connectivity, and digital skills with community members through repeated interactions. These services are currently being offered through the AgeWell Services section of the Department at Park de la Cruz Recreation Center and will continue to grow in locations as Digital Navigators are brought on-board.

DEPARTMENT FEE SCHEDULE UPDATE

In 2019, the Department retained a consultant to review the 2015 cost of service study and provide updates for fees that may be regulated by California’s Proposition 26 (P26), which amended Section 1 of Article XIII C of the California Constitution. In January 2021, the Parks and Recreation Fee Committee completed a review of all fees and provided recommendations for changes to the Fee Schedule, which the City Council approved on February 14, 2022 (see Attachment C). Changes include a complete restructuring of the Department’s fee schedule to eliminate duplication of information, simplification of the fee structure, clarification of rules and processes associated with fees and permits, and implementation of a new Opportunity Fund Fee applied to building and park facility rental/use.

These recommendations also include a 10.8% increase for most fees, including Mount Hope Cemetery burial fees (excluding low-income burials). The increases represent Consumer Price Index increases between 2015 – 2019. Sports leagues and sport facility rentals fees were restructured (not increased), a few fees were eliminated, and the Opportunity Fund Fee was added.

Fee Schedule Restructure

The revised fee schedule makes fee calculations simpler and easier to understand for customers and staff. To eliminate duplication of information and reduce confusion, Department policies and regulations for facility use and programs were consolidated into the “Terms and Conditions” section. Key changes also included:

- Restructuring athletic fees
- Defining processing fees, RCF fees, and recreation program fees
- Eliminating unnecessary fees
- Replacing certain fees with the Opportunity Fund Fee
- Converting aquatics program group rates to identify the hourly rate rather than the program rate

Recreation Program Fees

Historically, recreation program fees for special-interest contract service classes and similar activities were not included in the fee schedule because the fees were set by the former recreation councils and deposited in the recreation council accounts. In 2018, it was determined that these fees were City funds collected for City programs. As a result, the Department now collects and deposits these funds into the RCF accounts and General Fund

in accordance with the requirements of the fee schedule. The Department expends the RCFs for contracted recreation programs and related expenses at the assigned site.

The fee structure in the proposed fee schedule is consistent with the methods used to set fees historically. This revenue source is from patrons that voluntarily pay for recreation programs. Revenue and costs are based on current market rates, the community desire for the program, and the patron's ability to pay for the program. The camp surcharge fee for City-operated Indoor/Outdoor Youth Camps was eliminated to reduce the cost for youth camp programs.

OPPORTUNITY FUND DEVELOPMENT

In accordance with the Parks Master Plan, the Department is identifying new ways to provide equitable programs. The revised fee schedule includes the fee to contribute to the Opportunity Fund, which is a mechanism to increase recreation opportunities in communities of concern as identified in the Climate Equity Index.

The new Opportunity Fund fee is applied to permitted events, facility use by sports leagues, room and pool rentals, and on-going recreation-based business operations by commercial and non-profit entities. These fees are applied in addition to applicable park use and facility rental fees. The Opportunity Fund will help the Department to offer equity-based recreation programs focusing on communities of concern.

Staff is developing a formal policy for managing this new fund and plans public input workshops via the Park and Recreation Board over the summer months and presented to City Council in the fall for consideration. Some preliminary concepts for this proposed policy include:

- Opportunity Fund proceeds would transfer into each RCF located in communities of concern as defined by the Climate Equity Index
- As noted in the Recreation Equity Audit (Recommendation #1), staff should conduct a needs assessment for recreation programming for each community of concern; completion of this is dependent upon availability of resources
- As community needs data becomes available and staff receives feedback from each Community Recreation Group (CRG), each Recreation Center Director will prepare preliminary program proposals that can be funded by the Opportunity Fund and supported by the CRG
- The Recreation Services Program Manager will consolidate all requests for the Opportunity Fund each fall and determine whether requests can be accommodated within anticipated fund revenue
- The Department will create a diverse Program Evaluation Committee to include job classifications such as Recreation Specialists and Management Analysts

- Through the workshop process, the Department will create an objective scoring process that can help determine which proposals may be funded. Potential scoring criteria may include:
 - Available room at the site to conduct the program
 - Uniqueness of program as compared to existing programs at the site
 - Demand by the community for the program
 - Target service group served by the program (youth, seniors, therapeutic recreation, etc.)
 - Number of participants served by the program
 - Uniqueness of program to avoid duplication of similar programs in adjacent recreation centers

Staff will keep the City Council apprised as to progress in development of the Opportunity Fund policy.

FEE WAIVER PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

Through the authority of the Fee Schedule, the Department offers reduced fees for income qualified participants. The goal of the reduced fee program is to minimize financial barriers for low-income residents to participate in recreation and aquatic programs. Fees for City-conducted programs and the surcharge on contractual programs are waived for individuals from families whose gross income in the past twelve months falls within the Lower Living Standard Income Level Guidelines, which is updated annually by the federal government.

Previously, completion of a fee waiver application was required for each activity for which a fee waiver is requested. A copy of the applicant's current Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax return was used to verify income. A Social Security Award-Benefit letter or a Social Security Proof on Income letter also could be used for verification of income. On October 8, 2021, the Department issued the attached memorandum outlining initial changes to the fee waiver program (see Attachment D).

The Recreation Equity Audit noted that the Department can improve its fee waiver program by broadening the reach of the waivers and making the process to obtain a waiver universal with a onetime application. Recommendation #9 states: To ensure that eligible program participants can receive the fee waiver, the Parks and Recreation Department should develop, document, and implement procedures that allow residents to apply fee waivers to all eligible programs on an annual basis and register for classes online while using the fee waiver. The Department is addressing this by expanding opportunities for the fee waiver program in an effort to help all San Diegans access quality recreation programs.

To reduce limitations for residents to participate in Department programs, the Department is currently evaluating the low-income fee waiver application. This resulted in changes

expanding income verification levels and reducing the amount of paperwork required for applicants. Through input from park stakeholders we were able to identify additional documentation, including Medi-Cal and Cal-Fresh, which are more convenient for families to present for income verification. Additionally, the Department revised the application process to allow one application per family per year (see Attachment D). This improved application process will save applicants time and make it easier for them to produce income verification documentation.

As part of the Fee Waiver application improvements, the Department is working with ID.me to develop a clearance application for low-income fee waiver applicants. This process, which is used by the Internal Revenue Service and many other agencies, allows applicants to be screened electronically through the ID.me application. The applicant logs in to ID.me, answers a few questions about themselves, and ID.me verifies their identity, City address, and income. ID.me then send the clearance to the Department to proceed with completing the Fee Waiver application process. ID.me will not only save applicants more time, it will reduce the workload for Department supervisors, improve privacy by eliminating in-person verification activities over the counter at the recreation centers, and provide a more secure method of income verification for applicants. The implementation timeline for ID.me is summer 2022.

The Department remains committed to serving program participants in an equitable manner and reducing barriers to equitable access. Implementation of this new Fee Waiver process will be beneficial for all San Diegans.

VACANCIES

Like many other service industries across the City, State, and Nation, the Department has experienced a significant attrition during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some job classifications experiencing nearly 20% to 30% turnover resulting in vacancies. This is especially acute with entry-level, hourly employees.

As of February 2022, the Department has around 130 full-time equivalent vacancies, and staff turnover rates remain higher than normal. These include grounds maintenance workers, first level and mid-level supervisors/managers, and a variety of office and administrative staff. While the Department is making large-scale hiring, such a current effort to background and hire approximately 30 to 40 Grounds Maintenance Workers, the most difficult area of recruitment remains with hourly employees.

Hourly positions include recreation aide, recreation leader, pool guard, swimming pool manager-hourly, and golf operations assistant. These positions are not benefitted. Employees can identify the number of hours they can work and locations at which they are willing to work. Each hourly employee can work anywhere from a couple hours per week to 39 hours per week, but hourly employees over the course of a year may not exceed an

average of 20 hours per week in accordance with Personnel Manual Index Code H-5.⁶ The Department has hundreds of seats available for hourly employees, which has made the vacancy rate for these entry-level positions appear very high.

However, the Department is generally able to keep recreation centers open by ensuring available hourly employees are allocated across the park system to ensure buildings can be kept open for their scheduled hours. Oftentimes, supervisory staff will work with hourly employees to ensure their desired work hours and locations can match up with deficiencies in coverage at recreation centers. Each recreation center is assigned a Recreation Center Director and most have an assigned Assistant Recreation Center Director. These staff are full-time benefitted that ensure recreation centers are kept open for core hours. Hourly staff fulfill additional hours up to 60 hours per week as well as conducting recreation programs and events. Recreation center hours are dependent on hourly staff availability because each hourly employee chooses how frequently and where they can work; however, the Department will request hourly employee coverage from other sites to minimize recreation center closures.

Recruiting and hiring pool guards for the City's swimming pools is more challenging due to the specialized training and certification required. Only trained pool guards can watch a pool and ensure public safety. Nationwide, recruitment for pool guards has been especially challenging. In December 2021, the City Council voted to authorize a special assignment pay for pool guards in recognition of their unique training requirements, and that makes the City's overall pay for pool guards more competitive with other jurisdictions. However, the Department has noted other jurisdictions are offering pool guards benefits, and the Department is exploring whether pool guards and possibly entry-level recreation staff should be made into part-time benefitted positions, which would have the impact of improving recruitment and increasing availability of pool guards at the City's swimming pools. The Department anticipates staffing challenges to continue at swimming pools this summer and welcomes the continued support and assistance from City Council to aid in recruitment.

Given that each hourly employee has unique availability and ability to transit to various park locations means that the Department may have more seats for hourly employees than it needs, especially if more hourly positions are filled with staff able to work more hours. The Department continues to have an open recruitment for these hourly, entry-level positions.⁷ The Department will also continue to promote these opportunities at job fairs. Staff is willing and available to attend job fairs and resource fairs that are planned in the future.

⁶ The Personnel Manual is available at <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/regs.pdf>. Section H-5 states: "The intent of this policy is to ensure that employees who work on a regular basis for 40 or more hours each pay period and for a substantial period of time should be provided with an appropriate level of fringe benefits."

⁷ See the Personnel Department webpage for current recruitment opportunities at: <https://www.sandiego.gov/jobs>.

CONCLUSION

While the Department has seen successes over the past year, it has many challenges to continue to expand equitable and meaningful program offerings across the City's diverse communities. Those efforts include:

- Filling vacant hourly positions such as recreation aide, recreation leader, pool guard, and golf operations assistant
- Reviewing pay and benefits for recreation and maintenance positions
- Expanding mentorship, internship, and career development opportunities
- Developing a policy that outlines how to distribute and use the Opportunity Fund
- Implementing the recommendations of the City Strategic Plan, Parks Master Plan, and Recreation Equity Audit
- Reducing barriers to recreation programs by simplifying and broadening the availability of the fee waiver process for all programs
- Offering recreation programs that meet the needs of the communities
- Seeking partnerships and funding sources to improve program offerings and reduce costs to participants, especially within communities of concern
- Cultivating relationships with the San Diego Parks Foundation, Price Philanthropies, and other nonprofits to bring additional resources for recreation programming
- Increasing the list of available recreation contractors to meet the needs of the communities
- Training and developing staff to manage recreation contracts and integrating them into the program schedule for all recreation centers
- Implementing the 2022 Come Play Outside and Summer for All of Us program

Other areas of focus include maintenance practices, deferred maintenance, major repairs, capital improvements, additional park acreage, activation of parks, and opportunities for grants and donations. The Department looks forward to partnering with the City Council, community groups, park stakeholders, and all San Diegans to improve recreation offerings and to bring the Heart of Service to each of our communities.