



Dear Residents,

The City recently announced the closure of the Sunset Hills outdoor aquatic facility for the 2020 season due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since that announcement I have received a few questions from residents about how and why the City came to that decision. Much of this information was included in the City's press release however I will try and provide some further context here.

For starters, St. Louis County did not release guidelines for pools to open until today, May 27th. Our pool would normally have been scheduled to open last Friday, May 22nd. Without knowing what the guidelines were, we were unable to prepare the pool for opening. It takes around four weeks to prepare a pool for opening, including filling the pool, de-winterizing the equipment, hiring and training lifeguards. Given those limitations the earliest the pool could open would be late June, significantly impacting the swim season.

Furthermore, St. Louis County has placed significant limitations on pools this summer due to Covid-19. Those limitations include (but are not limited to) limiting capacity to 25% or less, requiring masks to be worn except when swimming or eating, removing chairs, requiring patrons to bring their own chairs, more frequent cleaning, and a staff member on duty at all times just to enforce these rules. Each of these rules, while necessary, would increase our costs of operating the pool while at the same time limiting the enjoyment of our patrons.

In addition to County requirements, we had to consider the health and safety of our patrons and our lifeguards. With the crowds that our pool usually generates, it would be difficult if not impossible to ensure proper cleanliness and safety of all involved. As we stated in the press release, when the aquatic facility is open, our lifeguards typically average at least one emergency response weekly where a lifeguard enters a pool to assist a guest who is in distress. Lifeguards also respond to about five to seven First Aid cases each day when the pool is open. Each response would expose our lifeguards to an unprotected situation and place them in jeopardy. Oftentimes, more than one lifeguard responds to an incident.

Finally, although nobody likes to think about finances when it comes to these wonderful City amenities, we must acknowledge that the pool loses money each year. Even in a normal year, the City has to subsidize the operation of the pool by around \$50,000 per year. This subsidy is typical among area pools, and is a cost the City normally bears in an effort to provide amenities to our residents. Given the additional restrictions due to Covid-19, our loss this year would likely have been over \$100,000. We must keep in mind that almost half of the City's budget is funded by sales tax. With so many stores and restaurants closed, and no certainty about when they will resume normal operation it would be irresponsible to re-open the pool, with higher expenses than normal, at a time that we are having to cut so many other things from our City budget to make ends meet.

I assure you that I, and City staff, have agonized over this decision in recent weeks. We considered all available options, including limiting the pool to residents only, or opening only a portion of the pool. For

various reasons those options just didn't make sense either from a safety or financial perspective, or both. I consulted almost daily with City staff including the City Administrator, Parks Director, and Police Chief. In addition, this matter was discussed in public at the May 12th Board of Aldermen meeting. No Alderman voiced any objections to a potential closure at that time.

Many municipal pools are closing this summer, including Ballwin, Manchester, Chesterfield, Ellisville, City of St. Louis, St. Peters, and others. Some communities likely will open their pools and we wish them well. Each community has their own set of circumstances and must make their own decision, as we have done here. Like many things with the Covid-19 pandemic, there is no one size fits all solution.

While the pool may be closed this year, we are currently in the process of planning the re-opening of many of our other amenities for the summer, including our Community Center, our summer camp, and the remainder of our parks and playgrounds. We do believe we will be able to provide all of these services in a safe, responsible manner starting sometime in June or July.

As a resident of Sunset Hills for over 40 years I've been a pool patron for almost that entire time. I helped gather signatures to get the first City pool built. My kids, and now my grandkids, were and are involved in the City's swim and dive team. I serve on the Pool Advisory Committee. Nobody knows more than me the value that outdoor recreation and swimming can bring to children and the community. However, safety and common sense must come first. We will all be excited to return to the pool in better times in 2021.

If you have any questions about the pool or this decision, please feel free to contact me. I am happy to discuss my thoughts with anyone.

Sincerely,

Mayor Patricia Fribis