



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Office of the Borough Manager

350 East Dahlia Avenue • Palmer, AK 99645

Phone (907) 861-8689 • Fax (907) 861-8669

Mike.Brown@matsugov.us

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 20, 2022
TO: Mayor and Assembly
FROM: Michael Brown, Borough Manager
RE: Manager's Weekly Post

Pools and Swimming Lessons Update: In May 2022, the Assembly asked about pools and swimming lesson availability. The following is a summary of challenges related to sustaining pool operations over the past few years and potential solutions to improve swimming lesson availability.

Prior to 2018, both of the Borough Pools had nearly 100% swimming lesson enrollment across most age groups. The pools were able to accommodate over 90% of the requests for lesson times. Lesson times, dates, age group and level of instruction are not set in stone. With each new session, students are grouped with children of similar abilities and available timeframes (both for instructors and student requests). On occasion, there are not enough students to offer a particular level of instruction at a requested time or there may be too many children of a certain level at a requested time. This may result in putting some children on a waiting list or adding a second class. Occasionally, there are simply too many variables to find a place for everyone at their requested time.

With the passage of the Borough Recreation Bond in 2018, the Wasilla Pool closed for renovations. When the construction began, the Palmer Pool staff worked to absorb three high school swim teams, two swim clubs, learn to swim lessons, open swim, lap swim, private rentals and number of other programs and events. The time available for swim lessons diminished due to a lack of pool time, even with the sharing of various programs. We were unable to offer the same number of lessons as in 2017 and prior because of the many programs we had to fit into the daily schedule.

In 2019, the Wasilla Pool reopened and the Palmer Pool closed, shifting the same challenges from one pool to another. We still had the same numbers of teams and clubs, competing for lessons, lap swim and the various programs listed above.

In March 2020, the Wasilla Pool was closed due to COVID-19 while the Palmer Pool remained closed due to construction. Our on-call pool staff were laid off at both facilities during the reconstruction project and again when COVID-19 hit. Our on-call staff accounts for approximately 70% of our overall pool employees.

Borough pools were the first in Alaska to reopen however, many of our on-call staff had sought other employment or simply chose not to return. Rigorous attempts to recruit new on-call staff are ongoing, but have not produced pre-COVID-19 results. We continue to offer classes to train lifeguards and recruit our high school graduates. It is important to note that there is additional training required to become a swim instructor before they are able to teach lessons. Due to the young age 16-19 of most of our on-call staff, even after they have gone through all the training, we have historically had high turnover.

The additive impacts of the reconstruction of two pools, COVID-19, post-COVID-19 protocols, and staffing shortages that our pools have experienced since 2018, our ability to meet the demands of the public have been stretched. Despite these challenges, we are still offering a number of quality lessons, programs and activities. We estimate that we are able to accommodate approximately 70% of those who wish to attend our learn to swim lessons.

The following are some potential solutions for improving swimming lesson availability:

1. Reduce the number of on-call staff creating the high turnover rate and repetitive training needs and hire one full-time swim instructor for each pool to have a more consistent and robust offering of lessons. The added cost of converting four (4) on-call positions (two at Wasilla Pool and two at Palmer Pool) and replacing them with two full-time positions, one at each pool, is approximately \$81,000 per year total.
2. Tuition reimbursement for people who enroll in our lifeguarding/water safety instructor classes. This is approximately \$250 per student for instruction and materials.
3. Offer classes at non-traditional times, such as weekends. This option would dislocate private rentals and has been unpopular with our patrons.
4. Have a more “concrete” schedule that places kids based on age rather than ability. This could potentially turn away higher ability swimmers being lumped in with inexperienced students.
5. Encourage and incentivize staff to acquire Water Safety Instructor Trainer Certificate Training through the American Red Cross. Currently we have only one on staff and this would require out of State travel.
6. Re-open school swim lessons through the School District if we are able to incentivize hiring and retention of on-call staff and/or hire one additional full-time staff per pool.

Public Affairs Media Flyover:

Trails

[State trail funding vetoes give time for 'discussions' | Local News Stories - Frontiersman](#)

[State seeks management plan for Jonesville Recreation Area – Alaska News Source](#)

River watch

[Forecasters warn wet weather could flood areas from the Mat-Su through Kenai Peninsula](#)

[Local Rivers Rising. Most Forecast to Crest Below Flood Stage by Wednesday - KTNA](#)

Election

[Mat-Su Borough special election unofficial results-all proposals likely to pass. - Frontiersman](#)

[Low voter turnout recorded for Mat-Su Special Election - Alaska's News Source](#)

[Mat-Su voters hit the polls Tuesday for Special Election - Fox 8](#)

Future Events:

As discussed during the July 19 Assembly meeting, the Department of Emergency Services is hosting an emergency services capabilities demonstration on Saturday August 27th, from 10 am until 4 pm for elected officials at Station 6-2 in Wasilla. Lunch will be provided. The intent of this day is to provide the Assembly and potentially other elected officials familiarization with the various capabilities and equipment the Borough resources to support fire, rescue and emergency medical services.

This event will focus on common emergency services responses and provide attendees the opportunity to learn and engage in the services we frequently provide. Examples include: 1) cardiac arrest medical emergency with CPR and advanced life support; 2) vehicle accident simulation with entrapped victims; 3) fire attack; 4) aerial operations; 5) and a real-time roll-up operation of a training fire showing the coordination required for a successful fire attack on a structure fire.

Participants can attend as OBSERVERS or active PARTICIPANTS (actively engage at each skill station). If you plan to register as a participant, the individual must make arrangements prior to the event to stop by Station 6-2 to be sized for protective clothing. Whether observing or participating, please confirm attendance by August 10th with Director Ken Barkley.