

Bozeman Swim Center Operational Review

Recommendations and Implementation timelines (last updated: 6/28/2022)

Below are all recommendations and suggestions submitted to City of Bozeman Parks and Recreation as a part of a Bozeman Aquatics Operations Assessment. The assessment was performed by Ballard*King & Associates Recreation Planning and Operations Consultants. The assessment included a week long site visit, site tours, public engagement, and stakeholder and staff interviews. Recommendations are below in black. Staff have inserted timelines for implementation where necessary in red italics.

Implementation Priorities

- Continue to maintain a safe environment for those using the Swim Center.
- Both the Assistant Aquatics Director and the Aquatics Director need a physical presence on the pool deck at high use times. Specifically during the late afternoon and evening hours during the school year. This is not to suggest both are present simultaneously, but a two-person approach is appropriate. This is particularly important in the short term (6-8 months) when changes are implemented. *Begin immediately*
- Address part-time staffing shortage in an obvious and aggressive manner. Over-communicate the need for additional staffing and the steps the City is taking to overcome this shortfall. *In Progress. A short summary of actions regarding addressing recruitment for staff shortages includes: raising wages twice in the past two years, currently \$21/hr for short term (summer) staff, adding hiring and end of season retention bonuses (\$500 each), creating hiring fairs, advertising on social media and employment websites, flyers announcing summer positions, rate, and bonuses installed at parks, pool, restrooms, trailheads and more, paid training for all new hires, and flexible schedules*
- Analyze the recommendations for prioritization of user groups and adopt the resulting prioritization. Once this has been adopted, distribute it to all current user groups. *Finalize and distribute prior to September 2022*
- Compile and document all Swim Center policies and procedures. Once that has been updated, distribute to user groups, and post where necessary. These should be reviewed annually, and changes noted. *Complete by September 1, 2022*
- Explore other avenues to communicate with users of the Swim Center. The newsletter is a great resource. However, consideration should be given to the use of social media, e-mail list serves, and the like. *Currently enacted. Presently using Facebook, Instagram, City Website, and E-notification list serve, in addition to Monthly Newsletter.*

Staffing Recommendations

- The City must begin, if they have not done so already, to look at the total hours required for operation, and not place a hard cap on the total number of part-time lifeguards that can be employed. This can be said for both indoor and outdoor pool operations. *Begun. Continue working with Human Resources to finalize a staffing methodology that better fits the needs of our service, adds flexibility, and yet remains within budget.*

- The City needs to get more aggressive in the hiring of the part-time lifeguard staff. In addition, they need to seek out traditional and non-traditional options for reaching out to prospective staff members. This can take the form of any or all the following: **Partially implemented, the P&R Team will work with H/R and Communications Coordinator to explore examples below**
 - *Signage. Big, Bold, Lots. At the Swim Center have obvious signage that indicates the need for more lifeguards. The same can be said for other City-operated facilities.*
 - *Social Media. Begin to have a much strong presence on the City's social media accounts illustrating the need for more lifeguards. Equally important, are testimonials from current lifeguard staff about the benefits, other than pay, of the job.*
 - *Partnerships.*
 - *School District. The District runs learn to swim classes in the Swim Center. Working with the instructors the Lead Lifeguard Staff should facilitate a conversation between those participating in the class and how they can translate what it is they have learned into a part-time seasonal job.*
 - *Montana State. Working with the University, have a presence at job fairs and hiring opportunities. Equally important, work with the Parks & Recreation Department on campus to get students in-chair lifeguard experience before they go into the field.*
 - *User Groups. Work with user groups in the facility to see if there are opportunities for their participants to be part-time staff. This can create challenges if a large group of them attend a competition, but it is a source of staffing that should not be overlooked.*
 - *Non-Traditional. Tapping into older adults that are looking for part-time employment is an opportunity to fill hours. B*K would not suggest building one's staff around this model, but it is something that should be explored.*

Additional Staffing Recommendations:

- Staff Sharing. Working with the other pool providers in the community and determining if there can be cross-over and having staff work in multiple facilities if their schedule so allows. **Training and availability will be potential challenges, but may provide opportunities not yet considered. Meetings and outreach to begin Fall 2022.**
- Wage Scale. The City budget has allowed for the Swim Center to dramatically increase the entry-level pay. This should continue. **Implemented. Entry-level wages have increased twice in the last two years, from \$11.75/hr to \$15/hr in 2021 and from \$15/hr to \$21/hr in 2022.**
- Training Reimbursement / Fee Waived. The City should continue this practice. **Implemented**
- Signing Bonus & Longevity Pay. The City is currently exploring these possibilities and should continue to do so. **Implemented**
- Hiring Time Frame. The City needs to look at narrowing the timeline it takes to hire part-time lifeguards, and looking at the process in blocks. How long does it take to get from the point of application to the interview? How long does it take to get from interview to hire? How long does it take from hire to on-stand? Making this as quick as possible helps secure potential staff. **In progress with H/R**
- Prerequisite. There is a strong likelihood that most candidates that are interviewed will need to be trained as a lifeguard. That needs to be welcomed, not viewed as an obstacle to employment. The same can be said for availability. If a candidate can only work on specific days and times, and those days and times fill a need, they should be considered. The same could be said for flexibility of shift length. **Implemented**
- Unguarded Swim Practices. B*K would not recommend having swim practices at the Swim Center without City of Bozeman certified lifeguard staff present. **Implemented**

- Lastly, the Swim Center needs to be a place where candidates want to come to work. The staff was nervous about B*K being on-site, but time and time again, the current staff described an environment that is challenging. This does not just fall on the management of the pool, but also on the user groups and how they interface with the part-time and full-time staff of the Swim Center. **In progress with P&R Team, CM Team, and City Legal**

Prioritization & Usage Recommendations

B*K would propose developing a prioritization that resembles the following: ***Implement Prioritization by August 1, 2022 (after competitive swim long-course season).***

Priority #1 General Public

- Defined by the following programs: lap swim, open swim, swim lessons, water fitness, open boating.
- B*K would suggest that there always be water available to the public which will often take the form of lap lanes. For the 25Y and 50M seasons, this could equate to a minimum of 2-4 lanes.

Priority #2 Partners

- Defined as the School District.
- The School District currently pays approximately \$80,000 towards the operation of the Swim Center. In addition, the Swim Center is located on school property.
- Programs would include learn to swim and high school swim team.

Priority #3 Competitive Aquatics

- Defined as competitive swim teams (youth), masters swim team, artistic swim team (youth), Montana State Club, Montana State Triathlon, etc.
- B*K would suggest that priority be given to those programs with the highest enrollment of Bozeman residents and that lane allocations be made from there.
- B*K would also strongly recommend that rosters be provided to the Swim Center and that athletes check-in daily as they enter the facility. It would be the responsibility of the individual groups to provide the Swim Center with accurate rosters and track whether their athletes have paid the team.

Note: In some special instances, in particular when a facility is new, or when there is significant tension amongst the competitive teams, cities have established their own competitive programs, hired their own coaches, and provided their program with the preferred practice times and lane allocations. B*K would not recommend that the City take this immediate step, but it is something to consider.

Priority #4 Private for Profit Agencies

- Defined as groups that are for-profit agencies that use the Swim Center to their financial benefit.
- Programs would include SCUBA and outside (non-City employed) private swim lesson instructors.

Scheduling Recommendation: B*K would recommend a hybrid approach to the schedule. It is important to note that this allocation considers the priorities previously mentioned.

- Pre-Post High School Season 4:00-6:00P and 6:15-8:15P
- High School Season 4:00-5:30P, 5:40-7:10P, and 7:20-8:50P

B*K recognizes that there is some inconvenience in switching practice times mid-way through a season. However, the recommended schedules address the partnership between the School District and the City. Students should not have to leave school at the end of the day and come back later to practice. Also, it addresses a need expressed by the user groups to have a 2-hour window of practice time and access to starting blocks. ***We can do this in a similar but altered fashion in Fall at Bogert due to pool size and then fully implement when we re-open the Swim Center.***

Bulkhead Recommendations:

- B*K would suggest to the City that the time the bulkhead stays in the water be extended, so that it is put in at the beginning of September, and remains in the water through the end of April. The reality is that this will take away a month of long-course practice from the competitive swim team programs. However, it will afford the facility the flexibility with the number of lanes available for an additional month. In B*K's opinion, this will offer the Swim Center additional program flexibility in the month of April.
- The City should consider a commercial solution to the current bulkhead. In that investigation, the City should consider implementing 2 bulkheads in the facility. Many commercial grade bulkheads for pools have a bladder system that inflates and allow the bulkhead to be pushed (2 people) from one location to the next. If the City were to employ 2 movable bulkheads, they would then have 2, 8-lane 25Y courses from the months of September-April, along with 2-3 width lanes between the bulkheads. The positive to this solution is more 25Y lanes for practice purposes. The negative is that if both bulkheads remain in the water, it will take the 50M pool to a 48M pool. The City would need to consider the cost/benefit of this solution. ***A commercial bulkhead will be an improvement. The current system is causing significant wear to the pool's expansion joint. After re-opening the Swim Center is complete we will weigh the benefits of two vs. one (two 25 yard sections or one 25yard and one 25 meter) and schedule in Capital Improvement Plan as appropriate.***

Policies & Procedures

Recommendation: B*K would recommend that all policies, rules, regulations, and otherwise be documented at the swim center. Once those policies have been documented and reviewed, there should be a copy of them available in the Aquatics Director's Office, and the Lead Lifeguard and Lifeguard office. Further, if lifeguards are enforcing, or employing a policy, they can reference said book and have an off-stand staff assist in showing the documentation. ***Complete by September 1, 2022***

B*K would recommend taking the policy manual one step further. There should be a set of expectations for groups that are renting the facility. This should apply to the groups identified in Priorities #2, #3, and #4 previously listed in this document. In developing those expectations, B*K would recommend involving the aforementioned groups. At the beginning of the season, when groups receive their lane allocations for the season, all coaches should be required to sign that they have read the expectations and that they will abide by them while at the Swim Center. ***Behavior Policy complete, will integrate into above recommendation to begin September 1, 2022***

Programs

If the Swim Center were fully staffed, they would need to determine their priorities for programming the facility. B*K would offer the following commentary on the programming of the Swim Center.

- Lap Swim. Currently offering public lap lanes is one program that the Swim Center can accommodate. They should continue to do so and protect that lane space in the evening hours. The guards should be willing to offer unused lap lane space to the competitive programs based on the demand of a particular evening. However, the competitive programs must respect that lap swimming is a program the City offers, and use by lap swim supersedes that of an outside group if a lap lane is offered.
- Group Swim Lessons. For many facilities, this program is a Hallmark. During the school year, a group swim lesson program is typically offered in the evening hours, preferably in the 6:00-8:00P time frame. As has been previously discussed, the Swim Center currently cannot meet the demand for outside groups during this time. To offer a group swim lesson program, it would require the Swim Center to limit the number of lap lanes available to the public, or potentially eliminate them at a

specific time given the size of the program. B*K would suggest that the Swim Center could offer a robust Saturday morning swim lesson program in the fall, winter, and spring months and still accommodate their evening use groups.

- Private Swim Lessons. There are several ways to deliver this program. Some agencies have a request system, and instructors schedule them based on their availability and that of the pool. Other groups schedule them at specific times, with specific instructors and the public can sign up. Finally, other groups like the Swim Center allow outside instructors to use their pool, when available to deliver the program. It is B*K's opinion that the Swim Center could use some or all these methods to deliver the program.
- Group Exercise. This is a program that the Swim Center is currently trying to offer with some success. These programs are typically offered during the morning and mid-day hours. These are typically low-use periods of time when there is ample lane space available. The ability to expand these programs into the evening hours is preferable but would be hampered by lane availability.
- Master Swim. This program is typically designed for those individuals who want a more formal workout than what can be provided by individual lap swimming. The Swim Center currently delivers this program through an outside group. They rent lane space during the day and pay coaches an hourly rate. B*K would recommend the Swim Center continue in this fashion.
- SCUBA. Most municipal pools will have some type of snorkeling or SCUBA program. They are typically offered through an outside group and can take place at a variety of times. Most SCUBA classes are focused on a Fri-Sun time frame. This is the method by which the Swim Center has offered this in the past. The biggest challenge in the delivery of this program is the availability of lane space. That combined with the fact that they are sometimes canceled due to lack of enrollment.
- Open Public Swim. Along with lap swimming, and swim lessons, this is typically a Hallmark of most swim facilities. Currently, and due to the lack of staffing, the Swim Center is not able to accommodate any open swim hours for the public. If the staffing issue were resolved, B*K would suggest that there be a robust open swim time on Saturday and potentially Sunday. To attract maximum participation, it may require the adjustment (slight increase) of the water temperature. Additionally, the Swim Center would want to investigate the use of inflatables (WiBit) to activate the pool and make it more attractive to the non-competitive swimmer who is looking for a social/play experience.

Pricing

Based on historical data that was shared while on-site, B*K would characterize the pricing structure for programs as very reasonable. The price points that B*K reviewed would lead to maximizing participation. Also based on information that was shared while on-site, B*K would characterize the pricing structure for lap lane rental as very reasonable.

Based on the work that B*K has completed across the country the average cost of a 25Y lap lane is between \$10-\$15 per hour with a 50M lane being double that price point. Many pool operators would like to close the subsidy required to operate their pool. If the same facility is heavily involved in the competitive aspects of swimming the per lane rate for a 25Y lane should start close to \$25 per hour.

Group rentals or per day rentals should be and are currently being built off the per lane rental rate that the Swim Center employs.