

Wed, Dec 21, 2022 7:00PM

Item 22-1564: Request Approval of Aquatic Fees and Charges Policy

Common Council

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Mayor Jake Woodford 27:24

All right this is item 22-1564 request approval for aquatics fees and charges policy. A motion and a second to approve. All right, Alder Thyssen.

Aldersperson Joss Thyssen (District 8) 27:42

Thank you Chair. I understand the need to increase these fees for the pool admission and the pool passes. Inflation is happening and affecting everyone including the cost of housing, the cost of the trip to a grocery store, and other necessities other people would have in their household budgets. And when cuts happen in people's in families budgets, the thing that's going to go in most cases first is going to be fun things and recreation, more so if that cost of recreation is increasing in price as well.

There shouldn't be a financial barrier in the way of youth in our city accessing our pools, especially in the summertime. There is a financial assistance program that is available via the recreation program fee waiver to families who qualify for free and reduced lunches, and that automatically gives them a pool pass for 15 pool admissions for the summer for that family.

In my correspondence this last week with Director Gazza and Niki Wendt, I discovered that the number of fee waiver applications last year was 45. The Appleton Area School District reports on their website that 42% of students are considered economically disadvantaged in the district. When accessing the aquatics information online—excuse me—the information for the cost of admission was easily accessible as well as the pool passes, and there is a form where you can get your 2023 pool pass. There is no mention on that aquatics section of the fee waiver application. I would suggest that there would be a link directing someone from that aquatics directly to the information and application for that fee waiver.

There's also the early bird discount as an option to obtain a pass at a reduced rate. The deadline for that is the first Thursday in May. That was also when we had the pass as an annual pass and now it is considered to be a summer pass. So many may not take advantage of that discount when the pool doesn't open till June. So I am proposing two amendments. In the summer swim pass section for youth passes, resident annual, resident discount, and non-resident annual no increase for 2023 for the youth passes.

Mayor Jake Woodford 30:23

All right, that's a motion to amend. Is there a second? Second from Alder Wolff. All right. We'll take, we'll take up this this amendment, this first amendment you're proposing.

Mayor Jake Woodford 30:49

All right, Alder Hartzheim.

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Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 30:53

Thank you, chair. When we took this up under Parks and Rec, we heard from folks who worked very hard on these changes. But I would be interested in hearing again, or hearing more from the Parks and Rec committee or from the Parks and Rec Director. Obviously, Director, Gazza is not here tonight, but perhaps Deputy Director Flick might be able to address this. What—why they felt that these changes should be made.

Mayor Jake Woodford 31:24

Send the mic over. Deputy Director Flick.

Deputy Director Tom Flick (Parks and Rec) 31:37

Thank you Chair. Our department viewed this as a need across the board instead of singling out individual passes. One, for consistency in collection of fees. It can get a little bit challenging, you know, this fee or that fee when you're charging, etc. So just for consistency, we did it. We would have no issues with you carving out, you know, youth passes and keeping them the same in 2023. It's not going to be a budget buster or anything like that in our in our revenue projections. We just wanted to keep it consistent for our increases.

Mayor Jake Woodford 32:21

Alder Hartzheim, did you have another point or?

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 32:23

Yes, please.

Mayor Jake Woodford 32:24

Okay, go ahead.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 32:24

Thank you, Chair. And thank you, Deputy Director. My question then, in thinking about this amendment, would be what impact does this have on all the other families when they look at all of the other increases occurring but not in youth? I'm not opposed to this amendment. I just want us to think about are we doing this sort of singling out. And again, it might be appropriate to do that singling out. I just want us to think about that. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 32:59

Alder Meltzer. Oh, you've got a dead mic too. Alright. Alder Firkus, thank you.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 33:07

Thank you. I think that it is completely appropriate to do this singling out. I am very grateful for my colleague, Aldersperson Thyssen bringing our attention to this and I really appreciate the opportunity to support this amendment. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 33:32

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Alder Doran.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 33:33

Thank you. Can I just ask of staff to speak to the application process for the fee waiver? I think it was mentioned there were 40 or so you had last year? Can you just talk through the process, I guess, of the criteria that you use to approve or deny or maybe have you in the past denied a request. Kind of just how that process works?

Mayor Jake Woodford 33:57

Deputy Director Flick

Deputy Director Tom Flick (Parks and Rec) 33:59

Sure, to my knowledge, we have not denied anybody in my time with the city from applying for a fee waiver. The process is pretty simple. We follow what the what the school district follows. So the family or individual fills out the application. They can do it online, they can come down to City Hall first floor customer service. It gets filled out. It gets processed through our recreational manager. And we confirm with the school district if they're approved or not for the for the fee waiver. Very, very simple, very streamlined and quick.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 34:36

Thank you. Just I guess, trying to think through the idea and the intent behind the resolution, which on its face seems to make a lot of sense, but also I'm just sort of stuck on the idea that that the information about the waiver application isn't readily available for families and if the staff doesn't really turn anyone down for that, once they've confirmed that information, I guess I'm just wondering if there's, you know, if this is maybe an opportunity to see if that makes a real difference here. And also, I guess just share sort of share the same concern Alder Hartzheim has just about the difference then we have in the fees and what that looks like for families who are looking at the different pass, options also. Just kind of struggling to wrap my mind around all that I guess at this point, but happy to hear some more discussion about it.

Mayor Jake Woodford 35:48

Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 35:50

Thank you Chair, my mics working. I think I like this amendment. I think that, especially because it's not a budget buster and it works for the city, it works for the school district, and it'll, you know, help some kids. I think we should go ahead and amend it. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 36:10

[Microphone cut out] Jones.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 36:12

Thank you. Thank you, Chair. I don't want to go against the amendment, but I think that we also need to take into consideration, yes, the youth fees are important, but also looking at our senior fees are also

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going up by \$20 and seniors are living on a fixed income, which is even harder in these times. So I don't know if singling out youth as opposed to other age groups that also face these issues are the best. But just making sure that we think about the elderly with a fixed incomes as we make these decisions.

Mayor Jake Woodford 36:50

Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 36:52

Thank you, chair. It's my belief that there is not a timing issue in regards to this. Might it be good for us to take it back to committee to have this discussion?

Mayor Jake Woodford 37:04

Deputy Director Flick, can you speak to the timing?

Deputy Director Tom Flick (Parks and Rec) 37:07

Absolutely. It would be very beneficial on—for our department to have a decision tonight, as we will be going into final print and approval for our spring/summer activity guide. Pushing us into January could cause us some issues with getting out the program book on time.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 37:28

Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 37:33

Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 37:36

Thank you, chair. Appreciate this discussion coming up and the attention paid by our colleagues. I think the challenge that we have is how do we deal with the fact that we have increased costs and somehow, somehow be equitable across the board on it? And there is no way to do that without having all parts take an increase. I will say that the information on how many people are eligible for waivers versus how many actually utilize it is astounding. I would hope that coming out of this discussion, the biggest thing we hear is that we could help advertise that for our community and get more and more people involved and take advantage of the system that we have laid out for them.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 38:20

In terms of the amendment, I would agree with my colleagues in that it's difficult to decide who's going to pay more and who's going to pay not. So in this case, I would recommend we maintain it and do not approve the amendment. But I do appreciate the information being brought up and I think we can do a better job for our community utilizing the waivers.

Mayor Jake Woodford 38:45

Any further discussion? All right, this is on the amendment to keep youth passes the same in 2023. We have motion and a second on this amendment, so we'll vote now please.

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Mayor Jake Woodford 39:18

Motion passes eight to six with alders Firkus, Jones, Alfheim, Hartzheim, Croatt, and Doran opposed. The item has been amended.

Mayor Jake Woodford 39:27

Alright, we're back to the to the main motion. Further discussion. Alder Thyssen.

Aldersperson Joss Thyssen (District 8) 39:38

Thank you chair. Um, this second amendment that I was proposed—would be proposing—would be in Section D of the policy under implementation. Second bullet point where it would say "summer passes purchased after the first of Thursday in May, will be charged the regular rate." I would like to change that to "the first Thursday in June" with this being a summer pass now instead of an annual pass available at the beginning of the year.

Mayor Jake Woodford 40:14

We have a motion to amend from Alder Thyssen and seconded by Alder Schultz.

Mayor Jake Woodford 40:27

Okay. Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 40:29

Thank you Chair. If I could just ask the Deputy Director Flick if there's any kind of administrative issue with that.

Mayor Jake Woodford 40:35

Deputy Director Flick, is there any administrative issue with that type change?

Deputy Director Tom Flick (Parks and Rec) 40:39

None that I am aware of.

Mayor Jake Woodford 40:44

Any further discussion? Hearing none, please cast your votes. This is on the amendment. Motion passes 14 to zero. The item has been amended again.

Mayor Jake Woodford 41:06

Alright, we're back to the main motion. This is the item as amended twice. Any further discussion?

Mayor Jake Woodford 41:19

Hearing none, please cast your votes.

Mayor Jake Woodford 41:36

Motion passes 13-1 with Alder Jones opposed.