

Debra Thompson

From: Kellii Wood <kellii2005@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, August 03, 2019 7:02 AM
To: Assembly
Subject: Fwd: Age Policies Regarding Parks and Recreation
Attachments: all_statistics_20150619.pdf; Correspondence with Wrangell Parks and Recreation.pdf; ParksandRecBudget.pdf; PavittHealthandFitness.pdf; Pictures of Security Descrepancies at Aquatic Center.pdf; riskprotectivefactors.pdf; Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported by Law Enforcement_Bureau of Justice Statistics.pdf; Correspondence with Fairbanks Parks and Rec.pdf; Correspondence with Wrangell Parks and Recreation.pdf; Correspondence with City Manager.pdf; Correspondence with City Manager 2.pdf

8/3/2019

Borough Assembly,

As you are very aware by now, the Petersburg Parks and Recreation are in the process of changing their policies regarding their facility. Approximately, 20 community members, including Assemblyman Wohlhueter, attended a public meeting with the City Manager, Director of Parks and Recreation, and the Parks and Recreation Manager yesterday to discuss these changes and how it will affect our usage. One of these policies directly affects my family and friends of my daughters. That policy change is that they will restrict access to children 10 years and younger from being in the facility without an adult.

My children regularly attend this facility without a parent throughout the year (with heaviest use in the winter and summer months). Due to this change, I have requested and received a refund for their passes that I recently repurchased. The reason why I am upset with this change specifically are because:

1. Petersburg is a place where we can let our children ride their bikes and play in playgrounds by themselves without too much worry. This also includes having the freedom to attend "open swim" and the public library by themselves. This ensures that children grow up to learn independence at an early age, encourages self-confidence, and reduces the risk of childhood obesity, which currently affect 1 in 5 children in the United States, resulting in early death. Closing the doors on this age group is one more door closing on childhood opportunities in our community.
2. Our property tax just increased to pay off our debt reimbursement fund, which we will be paying for another seven years. I understand that Parks and Recreation is one of the facilities that falls under this. I fully support paying more taxes to pay off our debt, but unfortunately, now we will be paying for a facility that we will/can no longer utilize. This is very frustrating to many people in the community with young families.
3. There are children in our community that need places like Parks and Recreation and the public library, that deal with horrible situations at home. I personally know of some of these children. They use this facility every time it is "open swim" because they need a break from their reality. During our meeting, it was brought up that there are children in our community that get their meals from the vending machine at this facility. Again, this age limit is going to close the doors on our most vulnerable.
4. This age limit is going to restrict a large number of children that will attend the facility, resulting in even more reduced revenue for the facility, and potentially a complete closure of "open swim". A majority of attendees of "open swim" are 10 years and younger and typically attend without a parent present. This will lead to a slow decline and functionality of this facility.

I have had multiple discussions with our City Manager prior to this meeting (as he is the only one that has responded to my questions, despite reaching out to the Director of Parks and Recreation). He has told me on multiple occasions that this age limit is an arbitrary number and is unwilling to lower this age, despite my request for facts or research based on his decision ("This age is somewhat arbitrary, but the lower it is, the more chance a serious problem could occur", "The age is arbitrary, but a compromise with our attorney and the insurance providers. We surveyed many other communities, and the age we chose is pretty much in the middle" – see my comments below regarding other communities). During the meeting he told us again, that the age was arbitrary but we need to protect our young children. I shared with him various researched publications that say otherwise. He told us that it will ultimately fall on the decision of the Assembly and that the lawyer will be contacting you with her "recommendations". As a fisheries biologist for the State, I would be fired if I closed a commercial fishery based on arbitrary numbers, and not facts. I, along with a great number of parents, want to keep our children safe, but this decision is the opposite of "safe".

He has also told me that due to increased insurance rates and discussions with the city lawyer, they felt that this age limits risk to the borough and helps to keep our children safe. When I asked what the correlation was between age limits and insurance rates, he responded with:

On your insurance questions, there is no specific language. Insurance does not work this way. Carriers assess risk based upon past events, future expectations and some past precedence. It is the courts and juries who often become the arbitrator of "did an organization do enough to prevent a problem". Unfortunately they also do not give us a road map. They do give "credit" for all effective efforts taken to avoid obvious issues, and they recognize that there are no guarantees. We feel that with the changes we are recommending, our facility will be taking a common sense approach, along with reasonable actions to reduce the risks.

I have asked repeatedly if they have discussed parental waivers (Alaska Statute: Sec. 09.65.292) with the lawyer and have yet to receive a response up until yesterday's meeting. He claimed that they are waiting to hear back from the lawyer on this, but thinks she will think the City could still get sued. A community member asked how this waiver would differ from the ones we already sign for classes at Parks and Recreation and he told us he didn't have an answer. To me, this would completely dissolve this issue with their lawyer.

I will share with you the same statistics I have shared with him (I have also attached these documents along with this email). According to these statistics, children under the age of 17 are most at risk. This particular age group that the facility has proposed appears to be age discrimination and not based on fact.

You will find that these statistics show that closing access to this age group without parents is actually a higher risk to the child, than having them in a safe and warm public facility.

- According to a statistical report published by the US Department of Justice:
 - o 90% of child abuse victims are abused by someone they know, 67% are abused by family members.
 - o 67% of victims were 17 years of age and under.
 - o 1/7 were under the age of 6 years old.
 - o 77% of abused minors were in a residential home.
 - o Most abused adult women are abused outside of a residence.
 - o Highest proportion of abused are under the age of 19 years of age (95%).
 - o Highest rate of child abuse happens to children under the age of 1 (25.3% per 1,000).
- Violent crimes are at a 50-year low, and this includes murder, rape, and assault.

I have also shared some alternatives that were shared at this meeting to keep ALL of our children and adults safe (not just those 10 and under) with our City Manager (some of these were Chief Kerr's ideas that have also been shared with the City Manager in the past), but again, I was told that budget is a concern – even though Parks and Recreation budget has increased by \$180,170 dollars since FY 16/17 and salaries have increased \$52,702 since the last fiscal year. We have learned from the meeting this was to hire more life guards and a program manager (even though they are currently having trouble with keeping the facility fully staffed).

If safety is truly a concern for our facility, then maybe the budget for Parks and Recreation has been misguided. I recommend the Director apply for grants to help cover some of the more expensive safety costs. Also, I feel some of these simple changes would satisfy the lawyers concerns (that were mentioned above):

- The Director of Parks and Recreation should contact the SHARE coalition (for community prevention activities). This group will train Parks and Recreation Staff on how to protect the children in our community.
- Post posters throughout the facility that alert everyone to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity.
- Move the Director/Manager's desk down to the office in the hallway next to the gym. There was a concern about lack of staff presence down the hallway. This would increase security, the presence of an adult, and make the director and manager more accessible. This bullet-point was extremely important to community members at the meeting, as most agreed that there isn't a strong enough adult presence in this location and tends to be an area where children tend to get into trouble.
- Have staff wear Parks and Recreation uniforms/t-shirts. I have heard from other community members that it is difficult to know who works at that facility and that having a uniform will help kids go to the appropriate people if they find themselves in trouble. We were told this will be implemented soon.
- Half hour hallway and locker room checks (I found out by contacting facilities in the lower 48, that many have this policy). The Director told us that staff are currently required to do 20 minute hallway checks, but community members that attend this facility on a regular basis have agreed that they never see anyone walking the hallways and said, as an adult, they would feel safer if they did. The Director seemed surprised by this, which is alarming and shows she isn't spending enough time at this facility.
- Alarms on doors to alert staff someone is in the building when the facility is closed or that a door is open when it shouldn't be (I was told these alarms are fairly cheap to purchase and implement).
- Make entrance to locker rooms inaccessible unless an employee is present.
- Bringing the security televisions to the front desk (they are currently in a closet) and increase number of cameras that look toward the locker rooms, the hall, and the front desk. We were told they are in the process of doing this.
- Bring desk closer to front door to make it impossible for someone to sneak by and increase the need to access the facility by having direct contact with staff (see attached pictures).
- We recommended one way communication from locker rooms to front desk in the event there is an emergency, but would also satisfy privacy issues. Also one way radios from front desk to locker rooms to communicate with the public in the locker rooms.

Our City Manager has also shared with us the "Risk Assessment given by Alaska Public Entity Insurance", which I was initially told, helped to determine an appropriate age limit for our own facility.

The following details how this assessment is a misrepresentation of what other facilities are actually implementing throughout Alaska and how our new policy will be much more restrictive than other comparable Parks and Recreation (I have also attached correspondence I have had with Wrangell Parks and Recreation (somehow not included in this assessment) and with Fairbanks Parks and Recreation (which was edited and incorrect in this assessment)):

Survey from Risk Manager at Alaska Public Entity Insurance

Juneau Pools: Guests using the pool must be 8 years old and able to swim one width of the pool using an over arm crawl stroke Or 8 years old and 48" tall. Guests who do not meet these requirements must be accompanied by another guest age 15 or older who is within arm's reach providing touch supervision while in the pool. Supervision is one adult to every three children.

Nothing in this detail the age that a person must be to attend the facility itself without an adult present or attending locker rooms by themselves. The City Manager has repeatedly told us that this decision is not based on a child's ability to swim.

Pavitt Health and Fitness in Juneau: Guests must be 14 to enter without an adult

This is a facility for adults. There is no pool at this facility and mostly consists of a weight room, exercise classes, and an "endless pool" (which is a pool big enough for one person, that has a current that allows one to swim). They do not offer classes or activities for children other than babysitting services. A copy of their website is attached.

AK Club: Guests must be 13 to enter without an adult.

This is a private facility chain not paid for by taxpayers.

Ketchikan Pools: Persons using the competition pool must be at least 48 inches tall, 7 years of age or be able to swim one width of the pool using over arm crawl stroke. Persons using the recreation pool must be at least 6 years of age or be able to swim one width of the pool. Patrons not meeting these requirements MUST be accompanied at all times and in the direct supervision (within arm's length) of another person 14 years of age or older. The lifeguard on duty shall determine whether the ability of the swimmer is sufficient to allow the swimmer to be in the deep end of the competition pool or recreation pool alone. To attend Lap swim, the patron must be 14 years old or older or 10-13 with a parent or an adult.

A community member at the meeting yesterday said that she was recently at this facility and asked them in person what the minimum age was for children to be in the facility unattended and was told they do not have one for the facility because it is a community center and nobody is ever turned away.

Nothing in this details the age that a person must be to attend the facility itself without an adult present or attending locker rooms by themselves. The City Manager has repeatedly told us that this decision is not based on a child's ability to swim.

Fairbanks Pools: Children 12 and under may not be left unattended in any area of the facility. While in the facility, children under nine (9) years of age must be accompanied by a person sixteen (16) years or older. While in the pool, children six (6) years of age or younger must be accompanied by a person sixteen (16) years of age or older.

I was confused about the conflicting ages, so I contacted the facility. They told me:

From: Robyn Dick <rodick@fnsb.us>
Date: August 2, 2019 at 9:53:07 AM AKDT
To: Kellii Wood <kellii2005@gmail.com>
Cc: Amy Chausse <AChausse@fnsb.us>
Subject: RE: Age question
Hello Kelli,

The age policy is:
Children 5 years and older must dress in same-sex locker rooms.

Children 6 years and younger must be accompanied in the pool by a person 16 years or older.

Children 7 & 8 years old must have a person 16 years or older remain in the facility while they swim.

Thanks,
Robyn Dick
Parks & Recreation
Administrative Assistant IV
1920 Lathrop Street
Fairbanks, AK 99701
P 907.459.1461/1070
F 907.459.1072
Like us on Facebook!

The Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks & Recreation Department preserves and creates an inclusive community culture by providing places and programs designed to enrich the quality of life!

Wasilla Pool: While at the pool, all children under nine years of age must be accompanied in the water, within arm's reach of a responsible individual at least thirteen years of age, at all times.

Nothing in this details the age that a person must be to attend the facility itself without an adult present or attending locker rooms by themselves. The City Manager has repeatedly told us that this decision is not based on a child's ability to swim.

Bethel Fitness and Aquatic Center: Patrons age 16 years or older may use all public areas of the facility.

Children under age 11 years MUST be attended by a parent/guardian over age 18 at all times.

Open Swim: For all children under age 11 years parent/guardian must remain in the activity area with the child.

Programs: Excluding Sports Camp, if a child under age 11 years is in a program with an instructor, parent must remain in the facility, but may leave the activity area. Parent must let instructor know where to find them in the event of an emergency.

Area Specific Age Policies

Pool: All Patrons using the pool must be fully toilet trained or wear protective swimwear to ensure the safety of all swimmers.

Age: 5 years or less: Parent/Guardian must accompany their child in the water and remain within an arm's length distance or closer to their child.

Ages 6 to 11 years: Parent/Guardian must remain in the pool area to supervise their child.

Ages 11 to 15 years are allowed in the pool area without adult supervision if they have passed the swim test and parent/guardian has signed a parent release/waiver.

Again, this is a private facility chain not paid for by taxpayers.

In summary, this is a public facility that should be available to anyone in our community. We pay for this place; it is not a private institution nor a "club". This policy may seem trivial to some, but in reality, it is critical to the quality of life in Petersburg. We cannot afford, monetarily or lifestyle, to close a public facility to this age group. I have shown that this

arbitrary age limit is not a reflection of safety and that there are other more pertinent things Parks and Recreation should do to increase safety. I also fear that this is a slippery slope to disallowing children to attend by themselves in other public facilities. I am frustrated, and this is my last chance to express how important this is to myself and our community. I feel as though our concerns have been dismissed by the City Manager and the Parks and Recreation Director. Important questions have not been answered, and the excuses given have no factual basis. I hope that something can be done, because for every door that closes on our children, the more likely young families are going to leave this community. The community members that attended the meeting last night, agreed that 7 years old should be the minimum age for a child to attend the facility by themselves, as this is more in line with other public Parks and Recreation facilities in Southeast Alaska.

I genuinely thank each of you for your time. I would not reach out to you if this was not something I felt was important, because both of our time is important in this day in age. I don't typically put myself out there like this, but I feel like I had to speak out about what is happening in our town and advocate for those that do not have a voice in this matter.

Sincerely,

Kellii Wood