

**Allentown Board of Recreation
2020 Annual Report**

Date: April 19, 2021

Powers and Duties

The Board of Recreation shall, with approval of City Council and Board of School Directors, supervise and maintain the playgrounds, playfields and other recreation centers which have been or may be established by the City or the School District. It shall recommend from time to time to City Council and to the Board of School Directors the amounts deemed advisable to be appropriated for the supervision and maintenance of such playgrounds, playfields and other recreation centers. It shall advise with and recommend to the superintendents of Schools the appointment of competent playground instructors and generally act in an advisory capacity to City Council and the Board of School Directors in all matters pertaining to recreation.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CURRENT YEAR'S ACTIVITIES: 2020

- **Accomplishments**

Although recreation activities within the City of Allentown were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board of Recreation convened either in-person or virtually six of the regularly scheduled nine meetings. The time was utilized strategically for planning purposes and moving recreation projects forward.

- Jordan Park Skatepark

A bid was issued for construction of Phase I of the Jordan Skatepark with the contract awarded to Spohn Ranch, Inc. (Los Angeles, CA). Recreation Board director Becki Kiss has been actively involved in this project including attendance at the construction kick-off meeting, informing members of the skateboarding community of skatepark progress and developing future programs at both the Jordan Skatepark and Keck Skatepark.

- Valania Park Rebuild

Board Directors Lou Stalsitz and David Snyder have been actively involved in this project by participating in review of design consultant bids and providing input during the design process. Unfortunately, the pandemic resulted in a significant delay in obtaining Commonwealth approvals, however, the project is slated to move forward in 2021

- Irving Pool Project

Given a number of structural and safety issues, the pool will undergo a rebuild in 2021. A design Request for Proposal was issued; Board Directors David Snyder and Lou Stalsitz participated in the review of the proposals received with BKP being awarded the design project. Messers Snyder and Stalsitz participated in selection of the final design.

- Percy Ruhe Park Master Plan

Of all Allentown parks, Percy Ruhe Park contains the most amenities including four baseball fields, one volleyball court, two handball courts, three basketball courts, two football fields, a walking trail, playground, concessions building, pavilion and restrooms. This park hosts numerous tournaments and has the highest field/amenity reservation rate of all Allentown parks. Unfortunately, stormwater runoff and several other issues plague the fields, so a master plan Request for Proposal was issued to design Percy Ruhe as a sports complex. Board Director David Snyder participated in the selection review process

with the contract awarded to Simone Collins LLC. Moving forward, Mr. Snyder and Pastor Maritza Dolitsch in addition to other Board Directors will participate in various meetings to provide comments and recommendations.

- MyRec Recreation Management Software

In an effort to make field and pavilion rentals more consumer-friendly, Allentown Parks Bureau staff researched numerous recreation management software applications. MyRec was ultimately chosen premised upon considerable due diligence and comments from Recreation Board directors. The primary advantages of this system are the ability of consumers to book rentals at the consumers' convenience without the need for in-person visits during Recreation Bureau office hours as well as the ability to accept credit and debit cards.

- Midnight Basketball Program

This program is one which provides older teens the opportunity to recreate during evening hours. Although activities were limited in 2020 due to the pandemic, Recreation Board director Michael Comick was actively engaged in discussions with Recreation Bureau staff regarding strategies in the event COVID restrictions were eased or lifted during the 2020-2021 season.

- **Challenges**

The most significant challenge during 2020 were restrictions on recreation activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the city's sports fields, playgrounds and pools were closed, the Allentown Summer Playground Program and activities typically held in cooperation with the Allentown School District did not occur. Although the challenge was negative, Recreation Bureau staff attempted to mitigate the impacts of that challenge by creating "Recreation at Home" virtual programming with a wide array of sports, recreation and health-related programs primarily targeting elementary-aged children. Recreation Board members provided comments on the programs developed as well as suggestions for additional offerings.

PLANS FOR 2021

- **Opportunities**

- Development of a Therapeutic Recreation program

Given the numerous challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, a therapeutic recreation program will be developed to address inclusion, diversity, mental and physical health issues. The program will be developed in cooperation with the Departments of Social Work and Education at Cedar Crest College.

- Recreation expansion activities to include youth Soccer

Recognizing the significant interest in youth soccer, Recreation Bureau staff will offer soccer clinics with the intent to organize activities similar to current offerings of basketball and volleyball.

- Development of skatepark programming

With the anticipated completion of Phase 1 of the Jordan Park Skatepark coupled with the existing Keck Park Skatepark, skateboard programming will be developed to engage Allentown youth as well as persons of all ages.

- Continuation of "Recreation at Home" virtual programming

Given the success of this virtual program, offerings will continue and expand to capitalize upon the information presented during the 2020 programs. In addition, the opportunity may arise to incorporate components of the therapeutic recreation program.

- Recreation expansion activities to include Pickleball
With the installation of pickleball courts, programming for both youth and adult pickleball activities are anticipated for 2021.
- Strategic review and rejuvenation of the A-Youth organization and activities
- Development of outdoor winter recreation activities
There is expressed interest in providing opportunities for outdoor winter activities. Additional information will be gathered to identify appropriate parks and possible activities.
- Continuation of environmental education programs
Education programs in Allentown elementary schools were cancelled due to the pandemic. These programs addressed various environment-related subjects (eg, water conservation, bats, birds, bugs, trees and more) which included fun, hands-on activities such as tree potting and planting in an Allentown park. While perhaps not considered recreation activities *per se*, these sessions include a recreation component. With anticipated return to in-person classes in 2021, these education/recreational sessions should continue.
- Capital Projects
 - Jordan Park Skatepark – construction of Phase 1 should be completed in 2021
 - Valania Park Rebuild – construction should begin in 2021
 - Irving Pool – design should be completed in 2021 with possible construction to begin in 2021
 - MLK Trail – design should be completed in 2021
 - Jordan Creek Greenway Trail – trail should be under construction in 2021

- **Challenges**

- The COVID-19 pandemic will likely remain an issue during 2021, however, the hope is that restrictions/limitations on recreation activities will be eased or possibly lifted. If restrictions are re-instituted or new restrictions applied, the potential exists to limit all indoor and outdoor recreation activities including the Allentown Summer Playground program.
- With the impact of the pandemic on city revenue during 2020, the 2021 recreation budget was reduced accordingly. As a result, funding for additional recreation programs may not be available which may curtail possible offerings.
- The Recreation Bureau works cooperatively with the Allentown School District for access to both indoor and outdoor facilities. School District pandemic-related restrictions during 2020 limited Recreation Bureau youth sports offerings. It is anticipated that this will continue during 2021 until school activities resume and restrictions eased.
- Employment of summer seasonal employees for pools may be quite difficult given that individuals did not have access to swim programs during 2020 so may not have acquired the necessary skill sets. There is also likely to be significant demand for these individuals from competing employers.

- Consideration for additional locations for the Allentown Summer Playground program may not be viable given the potential difficulty in identifying additional instructors necessary to ensure adherence to COVID/CDC guidelines. Given budget concerns, funding for additional locations and staff may not be available.
- **Recommendations**
 - The Board of Recreation recommends that all projects and activities for which funding is secured should move forward.
 - Projects for which funding is not secured should be prioritized and grants and/or other financial sources be investigated and pursued.
 - A-Youth and other youth-related programs/activities should receive priority.

LONG-TERM GOALS AND SCENARIOS

- **Opportunities**
 - Identify collaborative opportunities with various city-wide youth organizations
 - Create a strategic plan to address accessibility in all sports-related offerings
 - Create greater diversity of recreation offerings (eg, identify possible non-traditional or new, up and coming recreation activities)
 - Continue to expand education and related recreation activities in the schools
 - Identify potential opportunities to collaborate with Patriots Park
 - Identify possible organized opportunities to increase utilization of trails
 - Jordan Pool Project – Similar to Irving Pool, given significant infrastructure issues Jordan Pool needs to be replaced
 - Jordan Skatepark – Construct and complete Phase 2
 - Convert Fountain Pool facility into a Parks Tourist Center – with trails extending from Trexler Park (west) along MLK Boulevard to Jordan Park (north), Fountain Park could be a mid-point. Converting the pool building/parking lot into a Parks Tourist Center would provide a permanent restroom facility for trail-goers as well as provide information on Parks, Trails and Recreation activities in addition to other city offerings
 - Install and/or replace park pavilions – there is great demand for pavilion usage. As such many of the existing pavilions need to be replaced, and, there is considerable opportunity to place new pavilions in key locations
 - Upgrade Bicentennial Park and Stadium
- **Challenges**
 - Funding, staffing and prioritizing activities are the most significant challenges
- **Recommendations**
 - Additional emphasis needs to be placed on strategic alignment of projects, programs and other activities with public needs and desires
 - Identification of funding sources is needed for the myriad of capital projects and recreation activities for Allentown youth

- As appropriate, complete implementation of parks and recreation master plans (eg Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Connecting our Communities, Swimming Towards the Future, etc.) within the context of Allentown's Vision 2030

SUPPORT/SUGGESTIONS REQUESTED OF CITY COUNCIL

- Support and approval to increase number of Parks Maintenance staff and funding as a significant number of projects are anticipated for completion in 2021 and beyond. As trails are completed, the maintenance of those trails is the responsibility of the Parks Bureau. This includes litter collection, snow removal of trails in winter, maintaining vegetation growth (ie, mowing), keeping trails clear of fallen trees and other debris in addition to the existing maintenance activities of the current 2,000 acres of park land and 35 miles of trails (please refer to 2019 Parks/Recreation Budget slide).
- Support in identifying and engaging organizations to aid in expanding recreation opportunities for youth
- Support and approval to increase funding for expansion into new and non-traditional recreation programs.
- Support in identifying new funding sources

