

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report



Meeting: November 21, 2024

From: Community Services and Recreation Department

Subject: Junior Guard Registration

Recommended Action: Staff recommends the City Council maintain the current Junior Guard registration process.

Background: Since introducing online registration for the Junior Guard program in 2016, the City has followed a two-tier priority registration model. Historically, registration was done in person on a first-come, first-served basis, with returning participants given priority during the first month. The initial 2016 online registration process followed the same two-tier approach, prioritizing returning participants and then new participants, with separate opening days for each to reduce potential online system bottlenecks.

In 2017, the City expanded online priority registration into four tiers: Returning Residents, Returning Non-Residents, New Residents, and Open Registration. This helped further manage system overload. However, due to a software change in 2022, the Department reverted to the two-tier format—Returning and New Participants.

Junior Guard registration is competitive, especially for specific age groups, with some age ranges filling on the first day. Junior Guard registration takes place in early Spring. Current trends show an imbalance between morning and afternoon sessions, with more older participants enrolled in the morning. This year, the Community Services and Recreation Department is planning for a more balanced age distribution across sessions. Staff hopes this change will help with some of the registration challenges, however due to the competitiveness of our programs waitlists will still be generated.

Neighboring agencies have varied practices. For example, the Santa Cruz Junior Guards Program offers four priority tiers, while the State Parks Junior Guards Program uses first-come, first-served registration, with a required swim test for new participants.

Discussion: In response to public interest and internal staff feedback, the Community Services and Recreation Department has explored possible adjustments to the registration process. However, the current system, CivicRec, has limited options for creating multi-tier priority registration. The following options were evaluated:

Option 1: Maintain the Current Two-Tier System (Returning and New Guards)

The two-tier structure aligns with the program’s goal of building competency in ocean safety over multiple summers, as returning guards develop essential skills progressively. Prioritizing returning participants supports continuity and fosters job readiness for older youth interested in lifeguarding roles. Changing this structure would impact about a third of the returning guards from 2024.

Option 2: Two Tiers by Residency (Resident¹ and Non-Resident)

¹ The City defines “resident” as any household that lives within the City Limits, or within Soquel School District boundaries. The City has agreed to use that definition with the School District in the City’s lease for Jade Street Park/Community Center.

This option, from a CivicRec registration system standpoint, is the easiest to administrate but would be the most disruptive to historical expectations of returning guards. About 60% of participants are defined as residents, with many non-residents from nearby areas like Live Oak and Aptos. Shifting to this structure would limit access for long-term non-resident participants, disrupting age progression and potentially compromising safety due to a lack of skill familiarity in newer participants who would enter the program at their age division.

Option 3: Three Tiers (Any variation of Returning, Resident/Non-Resident and Open)

Although this approach would be preferred, CivicRec does not support three-tier filtering. Manual setup for a third tier would require significant staff time, likely resulting in errors and confusion for the user. Additionally, this would increase the workload for permanent staff, who are familiar with CivicRec, along with overtime costs.

The City transitioned to CivicRec software in 2022 after an extensive vendor evaluation process. If the City desired to make a change in software to add a multi-tier registration process, staff would need to issue a Request for Proposals and evaluate the various options for an alternative software system. This process cannot be accomplished before registration for the 2025 Junior Guard season. It is worth noting that the City determined CivicRec was the best available platform in 2022; changing registration systems now may result in gaining a specific system function but will likely compromise other functionalities. In addition, a new registration system would require extra staff time to set up and learn. Public participants using the new system may need to create new accounts and familiarize themselves with a new registration process, resulting in errors and confusion for users.

Conclusion: Maintaining the current two-tier system is the recommended option for the upcoming 2025 registration. This structure best supports returning participants and minimizes disruption to the program's operations.

Fiscal Impact: Options 1 and 2 would have minimal fiscal impact, except for potential minor enrollment fluctuations. Option 3 would incur additional costs due to the overtime required for manual setup in CivicRec. Staff estimates the additional overtime set up costs for Option 3 to be \$4,026 depending on the three-tier option; additional time needed to resolve issues arising due to registration confusion are unknown.

Attachments: None

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