

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report



Meeting: November 9, 2023

From: Recreation Division

Subject: Capitola Lifeguard Season Overview

Recommended Action: Receive a report on Capitola Lifeguard service season statistics and approve the proposed operation schedule for future summer and fall seasons.

Background: On July 28, 2022, the City Council approved changes to the Recreation Coordinator job description to include the development and supervision of the Capitola Lifeguard Service. The Recreation Coordinator: Beach Lifeguard Services assisted in developing and supervising the Capitola Lifeguard Service's first season of operations, which concluded in October.

Previously, the City held an agreement with the City of Santa Cruz Fire Department (Santa Cruz) for lifeguard services, which ended in September 2022. The contract with Santa Cruz provided for lifeguard services from Memorial Day Weekend to Labor Day Weekend, after which Santa Cruz would reduce their seasonal staff pool and shift services based on conditions and demand. This 2023 season the City provided lifeguard services during that same time period, plus weekend-only services from the weekend after Labor Day until October 15, which the City Council approved in the Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget.

In September 2023, staff applied to become a Certified Open Water Lifeguard Agency through the United States Lifesaving Association (USLA). USLA is a national organization that certifies lifeguard agencies and ensures that their training program meets or exceeds professional standards. The application has been reviewed and approved at the regional level under the California Surf Lifesaving Association (CSLSA) and will progress to USLA for final approval in November 2023.

Discussion: The City has a responsibility, as a USLA Certified Agency, to provide annual statistics that contribute to USLA national data collection. The City uses a web-based software, Watchtower, to record incidents and identify data trends based on activity on the beach. Below is a summary of data collected from beach activity from Summer and Fall 2023:

- Top two public events that created the most contacts/enforcement actions by lifeguards: July 4th and Art & Wine Festival
- Beach attendance (contacts/enforcement actions) dropped after August 19th (schools returned)
- Following August 19th, majority of activity shifted to weekends, with the exception of Labor Day weekend

Staff is in the process of preparing an update to the City's Special Event Permit process for City Council review. This work has led to questions about when to bill for lifeguard services in response to events that involve activities in, or adjacent to, the ocean, and other events that draw large crowds to Capitola Beach.

Special events regularly require increased staffing levels or workloads. Examples include increased Police Department staffing, parking and/or road closures, and additional garbage pickup. Currently, event producers are billed for staff time related to the extra services necessary for their event. Dense crowds and alcohol are significant risk factors for beach safety, and staff recommends that costs for increased lifeguard services should be expensed to event producers.

Lifeguard operation staff consists of an on-duty Lifeguard Lieutenant (LT) and the appropriate number of Lifeguards (LG) for operations (two per tower). In circumstances where the towers are not able to be used, this is still the appropriate staffing during the busy season or events. The minimum staffing level is one LT and two LGs on Tower 1. The addition of Tower 2 provides faster response time and is needed when the beach is crowded and when the visual workload of scanning demands particular attention. When crowd size, conditions, or an emergency response requires additional lifeguard staffing, beyond the minimum staffing levels, it is referred to as a "callback". During events, any callbacks due to an emergency would not be billed to the event producer.

Based on the data obtained during Summer 2023 and the pending new Special Event Permit process, staff has recommended operation schedules for future summer and fall lifeguard services.

Summer Season

Staff Recommendation: Operate both towers from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend, seven days a week. During the last half of August, staff will monitor conditions and crowds at the beach and reduce staffing to Tower 1 if necessary.

Alternative: Operate from Memorial Day weekend to mid-August, seven days a week. After mid-August, when school has returned, beach lifeguards would be provided on weekends (Saturday & Sunday) until mid-October. This option would reduce the number of days lifeguards are working by 14 days.

Fall Season

Staff Recommendation: Operate Tower 1 on weekends for beach public safety from the end of the summer season (Labor Day weekend) to mid-October. Events that operate during this season would be billed for staffing of Tower 2 and any callbacks necessary to support the large crowd and/or if the event includes activities in the ocean (e.g. swim races, paddling events, etc.).

Alternative: Operate Tower 1 and Tower 2 on weekends for beach public safety from the end of the summer season to mid-October. Events that operate during this season would be billed for callbacks necessary to support the large crowd, or if the event requires City lifeguard staff specifically dedicated to the event.

Fiscal Impact: The direct daily cost of Tower 1 operation (1 LT & 2 LG) is \$557 per 8-hour day. The addition of Tower 2 (2 LG) is \$353 for a direct cost total of \$910/day to operate the two towers. For billing purposes, the City overhead is an additional 30%. Callbacks due to excessive crowds could be billed and could include up to 4 additional lifeguards.

Report Prepared By: Nikki Bryant LeBlond; Recreation Division Manager

Reviewed By: Julia Gautho, City Clerk

Approved By: Jamie Goldstein, City Manager