



BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

AB 5814
February 16, 2021
Consent Calendar

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	AB 5814: Authorizing a Limited-Term Recreation Specialist Position	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Authorize up to \$72,000 of the approved 2021 Recreation Recovery Plan Startup Funding to hire a limited-term Recreation Specialist.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution

DEPARTMENT:	Parks and Recreation
STAFF:	Ryan Daly, Operations & Transition Team Manager Merrill Thomas-Schadt, Recreation & Operations Coordinator Emily Moon (Consultant)
COUNCIL LIAISON:	Jake Jacobson
EXHIBITS:	n/a
CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:	2. Articulate, confirm, and communicate a vision for effective and efficient city services. Stabilize the organization, optimize resources, and develop a long-term plan for fiscal sustainability.

AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE	\$ 72,000
AMOUNT BUDGETED	\$ n/a
APPROPRIATION REQUIRED	\$ n/a

SUMMARY

This agenda bill authorizes the use of up to \$72,000 of the 2021 Recreation Recovery Plan Startup funding to hire a limited-term Recreation Specialist. This position will support the phased reinstatement of recreation programs and services. The near-term priority is restarting summer camp programs, which are anticipated to begin at the end of June, and an additional staff position is needed to support this work. This authorization will fund this position through the end of 2021. The long-term programming and staffing plan for the Recreation Division is still under development and will come to the City Council for review and approval later this year.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 Pandemic (Pandemic) significantly impacted the Parks & Recreation Department. The Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC) was closed in March 2020 and all recreation programs were suspended. As a result, nearly all of the positions within the Recreation Division were laid off. The three remaining Recreation Division staff are supporting limited recreation services and also performing duties associated with the City's emergency response to the Pandemic.

During the 2021-2022 biennial budget process, the City Council allocated \$400,000 in 2021 to facilitate the restart of recreation services and programs. This funding was tied to the completion of a Recreation Restart Plan (Restart Plan), which is currently in development in collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Commission. An update on this planning work was scheduled for this City Council meeting but was postponed due to other agenda priorities.

RECREATION SPECIALIST POSITION REQUEST

City staff recommend that the City Council authorize the use of up to \$72,000 (includes salary and benefits) from the 2021 Recreation Recovery Plan Startup funding to hire a limited-term Recreation Specialist. The Recreation Specialist will immediately begin work on coordinating and planning for the reinstatement of summer camp programming. This position will also assist with field scheduling, which is currently in high demand and expected to remain so through the fall. It is anticipated that additional recreation programs and MICEC facility rentals will resume this year, pending the completion of the Restart Plan. The duties of this position will expand and adapt as additional services are restored.

Although the update on the Recreation Reset Plan was delayed to March, the authorization to fund this limited-term position is needed now to meet the timeline to resume summer camp programs.

UPDATE ON RECREATION, MICEC, AND ARTS RESET/RECOVERY PLANNING

City Leadership recognizes the importance of recreation programs and services to the Mercer Island community's quality of life. In late October 2020, a staff team, facilitated by consultant Emily Moon, began work on the Reset Plan for the City's recreational and art programs, the MICEC, and other suspended departmental services. This work includes reviewing past offerings and policies, evaluating community needs and investments, and creating a strategy to phase-in prioritized services.

This Reset Plan strategy focuses on implementing a cost recovery model and resource allocation philosophy to guide future service decisions, enhance financial sustainability, and return on investment of limited public funds. This Reset Plan gives the City an opportunity to apply a "zero-based" approach to its programming, services, and recreation budget. The Reset Plan also allows the City to align organizational and programmatic design with strategic priorities and available resources.

The Reset Team spent November and December gathering and analyzing program expenditures and revenues, participation levels, current resources and constraints, input from previous community surveys, State of Washington public health guidance and regulations, and more. Staff developed a Pandemic framework to guide near-term program delivery, outlining the feasibility of offering one or more services this summer, gathering additional input on community priorities, and creating a cost recovery and resource allocation philosophy with the Parks and Recreation Commission. The Reset Team also spent time reviewing the Arts Council's governance policies, strategy plans, and discussing an appropriate approach to restarting the Arts Council's work.

The Reset Team is working with the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Arts Council to craft an Immediate Action Plan, which can be implemented now and will apply for the remainder of 2021. A Long-Term Reset Plan is in the works, which will guide the focus, actions, and services for the next two plus years. The Reset Team plans to present periodic progress updates to the City Council and to convey recommendations for the City Council's consideration in April.

The Recreation and MICEC Immediate Action Plan and the process for the Long-Term Reset Plan were presented during the January 7 Parks & Recreation Commission (PRC) [Regular Meeting](#). The focus of the Immediate Action Plan is to implement contractor-led summer camp programming and prepare for limited MICEC rentals beginning this summer. Any resumption of programs and services will require allocating an additional percentage of the existing Recreation staff's work time. Staff is working diligently to manage this increased workload, consider how contractors or limited term employees may assist, and contemplate how staff can devote time to the long-term efforts and the possibility of expanding services in the fall.

The Parks and Recreation Commission held a [Special Meeting](#) on January 21 that included a presentation by consultant Emily Moon. During the meeting, Commissioners sorted past and potential categories of services and programs into cost recovery target tiers. Services were sorted principally according to (1) who benefits from the service and (2) who should bear the cost of providing the service. Additional factors that influenced the categorization included whether:

- The service was required,
- It was reasonable to assume that taxpayers should subsidize the service (in part or whole),
- Other providers of the service exist on Mercer Island,
- There was equal access to the service, and
- The perceived value to residents of the service were being provided by the City of Mercer Island.

The Commission was also introduced to recommended cost recovery targets for recreation and MICEC programs and services based on tier placements. For future planning, staff will establish a process that will enable periodic report outs about performance and make recommendations on adjustments to tier placements and targets. Cost recovery targets and the placement of each service can be altered as the City sets fees, receives expenditure and revenue data, or as community priorities change. Commissioners displayed a strong understanding of both the range of programs and services offered by the Recreation division and the need to act strategically in the provision of future services and programs.

In early January, the Arts Council received materials related to the reset project and a recorded presentation from the consultant that introduced the project and the Arts Council's related objectives. On January 28, the Arts Council held its first [reset project workshop](#). Members were asked to discuss the prioritization of Arts Council programs and services, related resource needs, and what was desired in the Arts Council's Immediate Action Plan. These discussions will continue at the Arts Council's next regular meeting on February 10 and during a second workshop on February 23. The Reset Team anticipates that the Arts Council will be able to deliver an Immediate Action Plan to the City Council later this spring, but that long-term planning work will extend throughout 2021.

Running concurrently with the Reset Plan in 2021, is the re-start of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan process, which was suspended in April 2020 due to the Pandemic. Staff is closely tracking work of the Parks and Recreation Commission, consultants, and community engagement components on both projects to ensure complimentary efforts. Outcomes from the Recreation Reset work, including the policy framework for the restart of services, will be integrated into the PROS Plan recommendations.

NEXT STEPS

The Recreation and MICEC Reset Team and the Parks and Recreation Commission will hold a second workshop on February 25, 2021. The anticipated agenda for that meeting includes:

- Sharing the Let's Talk survey results,
- Introducing fee study data and resource allocation recommendations,

- Discussing ideas for program and service offerings that may begin in the fall of 2021,
- Identifying resource needs for those offerings, and
- Reviewing a list of policies and procedures that require attention in order to successfully implement the new strategy.

The Reset Team will return to City Council to report on progress and anticipates discussing the recommendations from the Parks & Recreation Commission and Arts Council with City Council later this spring.

RECOMMENDATION

Authorize up to \$72,000 of the 2021 Recreation Recovery Plan Startup funding to hire a limited-term Recreation Specialist through the end of 2021.