
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

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Parks and Recreation Commission

Staff Report

January 7, 2021

Recreation Reset – Immediate Action Plan

To: Parks & Recreation Commission

From: Recreation Transition Team and Emily Moon, consultant

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A staff team, facilitated by consultant Emily Moon, has been working since late October on a “reset” plan for the City’s programs in recreation and arts and the Mercer Island Community and Event Center.

The City needs tailored plans to help it emerge from a global pandemic that occurred while the municipality was already reducing programs and services. The reset plan gives the City an opportunity to apply a “zero-based” approach to its programming, services and budget for recreation, arts and the MICEC. The reset will allow the City to align the organizational and programmatic design to its strategic priorities and available resources.

As the emergency continues to evolve, the reset plans need to include ample flexibility. The plans also need to be reviewed periodically and adjusted as conditions and guidance changes. The response to this emergency is not sequential. From time to time, the City - like all entities - may need to repeat or take backward steps. Iterative attempts may be required to find the right solution. In fact, the State of Washington and King County have had to do this, too, as the virus has alternated between subsiding and surging. The City will continue to move on this initial, interim path toward its future state of sustainable services, all while trying to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

The team approached developing the reset plan by breaking it into two major steps:

- Shaping an Immediate Action Plan, under which some limited services and programs will be provided prior to wide distribution of a vaccine and/or King County returning to Phase 4 (business as usual) of the Safe Start plan. The Immediate Action Plan requires rapid implementation to successfully launch intended programs by Summer 2021.
- Constructing a longer-term action plan to design and implement future services and programs. This plan will be developed concurrent to the roll-out of the Immediate Action Plan. It will include developing a cost recovery and resource allocation philosophy, a pricing strategy, and a multi-year road map to assist the City in identifying its future recreation, arts and MICEC services and programs. The Parks and Recreation Commission will play an important role in reviewing and contributing to the longer-term reset plan.

Immediate Action Plan

The team used the following guiding principles as it assessed what facilities, programs and services the City might be able to offer via the Immediate Action Plan:

1. Our decisions will be guided by the health and safety of our community; we will adhere to public health advice from the State of Washington and King County, and any service sector guidance from the Governor's Office.
2. We are committed to taking whatever measures are necessary to slow down the spread of COVID-19. We must all do our part to ensure our individual and collective health and safety.
3. In utilizing City resources, we will prioritize assisting the City and its partners in providing life safety/basic needs services to residents.
4. We will ensure caretaking of City assets such that they are available and in good working order for the future.
5. We will use available data and situational knowledge to make recommendations and decisions, but will be mindful that alternatives, flexibility and small or iterative steps will be necessary.
6. We pledge to communicate with the City Council and the community as we develop plans and make decisions.
7. We will recognize and respond to this situation as an opportunity to examine doing things differently, innovate, work smarter and reset to a new current and future reality.

In addition, the team contemplated which services and programs the City has had prior success delivering, what level of resources would be needed for implementation and what the return on the investment might be.

Lastly, the uncertainty of both the present and the future required that the team utilize some planning assumptions and prepare alternatives:

- The Immediate Action Plan assumes that the City and King County will likely remain in Phase 2 until sometime in the spring of 2021 and may move to Phase 3 by/in the summer.
- The level of resources that are required to meet the distancing, disinfection and occupancy limits in Phase 2 are such that the costs of providing a program, service or public facility outweigh the benefits (e.g., number of people who could be served, effectiveness of the adjusted service) for all but a few of the highest demand, most profitable and most adaptable programs and services. That cost-benefit evaluation is particularly true for indoor activities. (See **Exhibit 1- Summer Camp Revenue/Expenditure Discussion** for more information regarding budget forecasts).
- The City currently has only 2.75 LTE/FTE assigned to Recreation Division functions, services and reset planning. Most of the staff are also currently performing Emergency Operations functions, or some portion of their roles are unrelated to recreation. Implementation of the Immediate Action Plan will require that these staff members allocate more time on recreation services and less time on their temporary assignments.
- In the past, the City used three to four West Mercer Elementary School classrooms for its summer camps. It is uncertain whether the school district will make those rooms available next summer.

With those guiding principles, metrics and assumptions in mind, the team will implement the following Immediate Action Plan:

- Organize and offer 9 weeks of summer camps, hosted at the MICEC and various park locations, designed and operated by contractors (Safe Start Phase 2 or greater)
 - This will require selecting and contracting various camps, ordering any necessary supplies, preparing the facility, developing new COVID-related forms and procedures, and more.
- Offer gymnasium rental to sports programs/teams on weekday evenings and possibly weekends, depending on staffing levels (Safe Start Phase 3 or greater)
 - This will require notifying potential renters, ordering any necessary supplies, preparing the facility, developing new COVID-related forms and procedures, and more.

Options/alternatives/flexibility:

- If King County has not moved into Phase 3 (and dependent on guidance from CDC and Public Health Seattle & King County) by the start of summer camp, all camps will be run

outdoors. As such, the City will focus on selecting camps that are better suited to being conducted outdoors. The City will investigate indoor camp possibilities but will need to determine this spring whether those camps can be held.

- If staffing levels permit and if the county is in Safe Start Phase 3 with vaccine distribution underway, the City will consider resuming special event rentals of the MICEC as early as July 2021.

Longer-term Reset Plan

The team's goal is to finalize the longer-term reset plan by April 2021 and, assuming Safe Start Phase 4 and a vaccine are in place, be in a position to offer some initial, future services and programs by September 2021.

Going forward, the Parks and Recreation Commission's role will be to:

- Understand the Immediate Action Plan and provide comments.
- Review and provide input on the longer-term reset and action plan, which staff will develop this winter and spring.
- Provide City Council with advice regarding a recommended cost recovery and resource allocation philosophy, a pricing strategy and a multi-year road map for arts, recreation and the Mercer Island Community and Events Center.
- Help ensure alignment between the longer-term reset plan and the soon-to-be-updated Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan.
- Continue to service in an advisory role to the City Council in the development of future policies related to the implementation of the recreation reset plan.

The team will develop a Let's Talk page to share information with residents about the reset planning efforts and to solicit input on recreation and Mercer Island Community and Events Center priorities. (The Arts Commission completed an applicable study during Fall 2019.) Information received via that webpage, in public meetings and through the PROS survey (performed in February 2020) will help the Transition Team develop items for the Commission's and Council's consideration. The team anticipates that the long-term reset will take a few years to fully fund and implement, and that public input will be sought periodically along the way. Next steps and recommended meetings with the Parks and Recreation Commission:

- Special meeting workshop, January 21, 2021
- Regular meeting, February 4, 2021
- Special meeting workshop, February 25, 2021