

CITY OF RICHLAND CENTER - AGENDA ITEM DATA SHEET

Agenda Item: Discussion on future Pool schedule and season.

Committee Review: Park Board

Meeting Date: June 30th, 2025

Requested by: Jodi Mieden- Recreation Director

Background: 30-Minute Swim Break vs. 15-Minute Swim Break

- **Benefits of Keeping Full Length**
 - **Mealtime:** A full 30-minute break allows guards to sit down and eat an actual meal, which is crucial for maintaining energy and alertness—especially during long, hot shifts.
 - **Lifeguard Alertness = Patron Safety:** Lifeguards spend extended periods exposed to the sun, making the 30-minute break essential for physical recovery and preventing heat exhaustion or other heat-related illnesses. This time also allows guards to mentally recharge, which is crucial for sustaining the focus and vigilance required for patron safety. Shortening this break could lead to increased fatigue or burnout, raising the risk of missed incidents or delayed response times—ultimately compromising swimmer safety and increasing liability for the facility.
 - **Hourly Breaks Aren't True Breaks:** While guards technically rotate every hour, they are often required to assist patrons, clean up, respond to injuries, or handle behavior issues—meaning these “breaks” are often just a change of duties.
 - **15 Minutes is Not Logistically Feasible:** By the time the pool clears and guards return early, a 15-minute break becomes more like 8-10 of actual downtime—not enough for a meal, recovery, or reset. We even tried this two years ago. Guards were extremely tired and vocalized that they needed a longer time off of the stand to recover.
 - **Revenue During Breaks:** The 30-minute break significantly boosts concession sales, as patrons take advantage of the time to purchase snacks or meals, an important source of revenue for the facility. Reducing this window to 15 minutes would likely lead to a noticeable decline in sales, as families may not view it as sufficient time to comfortably get food and return. Additionally, the 30-minute break allows visitors to eat at a relaxed pace. If rushed, it's likely we would see an increase in bodily fluid incidents, potentially resulting in facility closures.
 - **Time to Use Facilities:** A full 30-minute break gives patrons time to use the bathroom, reapply sunscreen, hydrate, and check in on their own wellness, especially important for young children or elderly swimmers.
- **Potential Benefits of Shortening Length of Break**
 - **Perception of Idle Time:** The break may be viewed by some board members and community members as downtime or inefficiency, especially if guards are seen swimming while patrons are idle.
 - **More Swim Time:** A shorter break allows for more continuous swim time, which patrons—especially those who paid for daily passes—may prefer.

Manager's Perspective

As the pool manager, now in my sixth summer at this facility—three of which I spent on the lifeguard stand—I have seen firsthand how demanding and exhausting this job truly is. Lifeguards are responsible for the safety of hundreds of patrons, often in extreme heat, with limited opportunity to mentally or physically rest. While on paper they receive breaks every hour, the reality is that those “breaks” are frequently consumed by addressing patron concerns, assisting with injuries, enforcing rules, or even helping clean up. The 30-minute daily swim break has become one of the only reliable windows in the day where guards can cool down, eat a full meal, and recharge their focus before returning to the stand.

Shortening this break to 15 minutes may seem like a minor change, but in practice it will drastically reduce the actual downtime guards receive, especially when you account for the time it takes to clear the pool and the expectation that they return to their stands early. I am concerned that this reduction will contribute to faster burnout and potentially drive some of our best guards to not return next year. The 30-minute break isn't just a convenience—it's a safety measure. It helps ensure our staff is sharp, fueled, and ready to perform the critical job of preventing accidents before they happen. Cutting this time in half would undermine the well-being of our staff and, by extension, the safety and overall experience of our patrons. If you were to ask me to choose between giving patrons an additional 15 minutes of swimming time over the wellbeing of the lifeguards, I know what I pick without hesitation.

Opening the Pool Prior to the End of School

- **Challenges:**
 - **Lifeguard Shortage:** We already struggle to hire enough full-time guards for the summer season; opening early would increase demand for staff we don't have. Symons has been dealing with this issue for years.
 - **Competing Jobs:** Many potential guards opt for higher-paying jobs in retail, food service, or trades during this time, making recruitment more difficult. We've seen a consistent loss of strong, reliable lifeguards after one or two seasons, often to higher-paying job opportunities.
 - **Student Schedules:** Most of our current guards are still in school and involved in spring sports, theater, band, or other activities, leaving them with extremely limited availability.
 - **Training & Certification Timing:** New lifeguards may not be certified or fully trained in time to staff early-season hours safely and legally. Many of them do not have the time to take a certification course until they are out of school. We offer classes in March and April on weekends, but just don't get kids attention until later in the Spring/early Summer.