

Pool to remain closed due to COVID spike

November 19, 2020



As Monday opened at Crescent City City Hall, city employees fully intended to present a plan to reopen the city pool to city council that night.

By early afternoon, it was clear any plan to open the pool would have to be delayed. With COVID-19 cases rising, the state of California moved Del Norte County from the orange tier to the tier. Under the orange tier, which Del Norte County had been in for months, indoor swimming pools are allowed to open with certain protections in place. In the red tier, indoor swimming is not allowed.

Despite the setback, City Manager Eric Wier and Recreation Director Holly Wendt presented their plan, giving the council the option of forging ahead or waiting until COVID cases slowed down.

The Fred Endert Municipal Pool, an indoor facility that is usually opened year-round, was closed in March due to COVID. Wendt said the plan staff had prepared was to reopen the pool for services such as lap swims, exercise programs and swim lessons. Open swim, the slide, sauna and spa were to remain closed. Wendt said there was also plans to bring in the swim team, physical therapy and masters swimming back.

Wendt said the city's plan would take six weeks to implement before opening. She explained that all the lifeguards would have to go through training, and with many students, training time was limited.

"We planned that it would take six weeks, and we could have all our lifeguards certified, conditioned and ready for reopening," Wendt said.

The proposal would include costs of between \$23,000 and \$29,000 a month for payroll and other expenses. In addition, the city is hoping to hire an aquatics supervisor to lead the pool. In all, the plan called for expenses of \$315,000 for the remainder of the fiscal year. Wendt and Wier said the recent passing of Measure S would provide much of the funding needed for the pool. Measure S raises tax revenue for police, fire and the city pool. It was approved by more than 64 percent of voters.

Once open, Wendt said each activity would be set for 45 minutes, giving staff 15 minutes to sanitize the pool area before a new group began. Heading into Monday, that was the plan, with a reopening date of early January.

"Things have changed substantially over the last couple of days," Wier said. "The numbers have skyrocketed, and we're seeing this all over the nation. Del Norte has gone from orange to red. The pool cannot open in red. Is this an anomaly or is this something we can expect for the winter months."

Del Norte County reported five cases Thursday, 10 Friday and an additional 15 over the weekend.

Wendt said while opening the pool was no longer allowed, the city still wanted to move forward with hiring an aquatics director. Even if work at the pool is limited short-term, the person hired can help in other areas. Wier said several good candidates have applied, and interviews could begin almost immediately, with council approval.

After hearing the presentation, council members said opening the pool right now just isn't feasible.

"I think out of public health concerns, it doesn't make sense to open the pool," Councilman Alex Fallman said. "We have time to wait a little while longer. I'm not anxious to open the pool. Del Norte is not protected because of our isolated status."

"There is a lot of work to be done to where we could open," Mayor Pro Tem Heidi Kime said. "I think taking a measured approach would be the right way."

Mayor Blake Inscore said it would not be responsible for the council to move forward with no certainty about when the pool can open.

"With that kind of uncertainty, I cannot fiscally bring all the employees on," the mayor said. "We can't be spending \$40,000 a month on employees and not be able to open the pool. I think for the sake of our community and clear messaging to our community, I don't think we need to consider a reopening plan until the first of the year."

After discussing the proposal, the council voted 5-0 to move ahead with hiring the aquatics director while holding off on any action that would reopen the pool. The council agreed to get updates regularly, but for now the pool will remain closed.