

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Re: Opening Facilities

March 12, 2021

Mr. Boyles and City Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to relay to you our support for safely opening the City's pools and recreational facilities using recommended guidelines. As you know, private pools and recreational facilities have been operating for many months, including during the height of the pandemic. The continued full closure of our City's wonderful parks and rec facilities has created a major inequity in access to recreation in our community, in addition to loss of all the physical and mental health benefits that users have missed out on.

Charlottesville has taken a conservative approach to dealing with the pandemic, and this has without a doubt helped protect members of our community as well as preserved the capacity of our health care system. We further do recognize the very real risks the COVID disease and its burgeoning variants continue to present. Moreover, we understand the importance of getting safely through the next couple months until we reach herd immunity through vaccination.

Nevertheless, other local governments in Virginia have opened up their recreation facilities and indoor pools while still following safety guidelines and protocols recommended by experts. Smith pool will be completing a \$ 2.5 million upgrade of its HVAC system (hopefully by the end of May), and presumably that new system will offer further improvements toward making the air inside the building safer for its users. Pools that are outdoors, of course, represent another layer of safety from airborne diseases.

The Parks and Rec Department needs to start hiring now in order to line up enough staff to open up our pools and facilities. Not only are these jobs needed to successfully open up recreational opportunities for the users, but the jobs themselves represent an important economic opportunity for those in our community who are able to fill the job spots.

We have obviously all been through a very difficult and stressful year. Private pools will be opening on time, and the members and their children will be enjoying them and practicing with their swim teams. The Advisory Board believes it is critical not only for reasons of equity, but also for our Community members' mental and physical health, to get our pools open on time and our other recreational facilities open as quickly as can be done while following proper safety protocols.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter and for your service to our Community, generally, during these trying times.

Ned Michie

Ned Michie, Chair
Parks and Rec Advisory Board
(signed electronically)