



Roll Call Number

Agenda Item Number

37

Date October 7, 2013

Communication from the Chair of the Park and Recreation Board regarding Board approval of changes to the Greater Des Moines Recreational Activity Scholarship Program.

MOVED by _____ to receive and file.

Approved as to Form:

Ann DiDonato
Assistant City Attorney

COUNCIL ACTION	YEAS	NAYS	PASS	ABSENT
COWNIE				
COLEMAN				
GRIESS				
HENSLEY				
MAHAFFEY				
MEYER				
MOORE				
TOTAL				

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVED

Mayor

CERTIFICATE

I, DIANE RAUH, City Clerk of said City hereby certify that at a meeting of the City Council of said City of Des Moines, held on the above date, among other proceedings the above was adopted.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal the day and year first above written.

City Clerk



October 7, 2013

Honorable Mayor
And
Members of the City Council

Re: Financial assistance program

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

Des Moines Parks and Recreation has a variety of programs and facilities that have a tremendous impact on the quality of life in Des Moines. Every Des Moines citizen deserves the opportunity to participate in these programs and facilities regardless of their ability to pay.

On May 4, 2009, by Roll Call No. 09-799, the Des Moines City Council approved a temporary expansion in eligibility for the Park and Recreation Scholarship Program, which subsidizes recreational program fees, and was then administered by the City's Community Development Department through the Community Services site locations (now the Des Moines Community Action Agency of the City's Housing Services Department). The expanded, "Fun Pass" scholarship program, which was to last for the remainder of calendar year 2009, waived income parameters and other qualifying factors for residents of the City of Des Moines and was recommended by Parks staff due to the wide-ranging adverse financial repercussions and number of people impacted by factors such as loss of employment, reduction of work hours, or reduction of wages then affecting the nation's economy.

The program was offered again in 2010 as the city and nation struggled to recover from the financial downturn. The relaxed-qualification scholarship program offerings, amounts of subsidization and qualifications changed somewhat as it continued year after year, and into 2013. The lenient application process, that does not require verification through presentation of personal information documentation, has continued, with the subsidy cards, now named GRASP (Greater Des Moines Recreational Activity Scholarship Program) being issued primarily through the Park and Recreation administrative office, but also at Pioneer Columbus and Four Mile Community Centers, and the Community Action Site Office.

At the end of 2010, Des Moines' unemployment rate peaked at 6.3%. The nation's unemployment rate continues to be more than 7%; however, the city's unemployment rate shows the strength of the local economy and has decreased to 4.5% as of June 2013.

Although the City's economic climate has improved dramatically since the scholarship program's temporary expansion in eligibility was initiated in 2009, the number of people signing up for the program has not decreased but rather has dramatically increased the past three years. In 2011, 411 cards were issued; in 2012, 1226 cards were issued; and to date in 2013, 1719 cards have been issued. As would be expected, scholarship card usage, along with the cost due to lost revenue from the eight discounted activities, has also risen dramatically.

The registration system of participants self-declaring that their income level falls within established parameters with a simple signature accomplished what the City intended to do during tough economic times among the general population. But, Parks and Recreation staff now believes the intentional leniency of the application process has come full circle and is now possibly leading to abuse of the financial assistance program. They have therefore recommended the Park and Recreation Board's approval to discontinue the temporary expansion in eligibility effective October 8, 2013 and also that the former process for the Park and Recreation Scholarship Program qualification be reinstated and carried out only by Des Moines Community Action Agency staff, who will review the required personal documents which verify income and residency. That same application process qualifies applicants for such community services as energy assistance, for which the program year begins in October.

As a part of this change, Parks and Recreation will transfer \$3,000 to the Community Action Site Office for administration support of verifying income and issuing GRASP cards this year. The site office currently issues GRASP cards on behalf of the Parks and Recreation Department and already verifies income for the programs they offer so logistically this made the most sense to staffs from both departments for administering the program.

At the same time, they have also recommended that the income level required for eligibility in the recreation scholarship program be raised from 225% to 250% of poverty. Examples of the new eligibility level are illustrated below:

Household Size	1	2	3	4	5	6
2013 program	\$25,000	\$34,000	\$43,000	\$52,000	\$61,000	\$69,500
2014 program	\$28,725	\$38,775	\$48,825	\$58,875	\$68,925	\$78,975

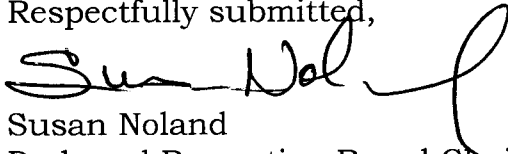
This letter is to notify Council that the Park and Recreation Board approved the recommended changes at its September 24, 2013 meeting.

Partial funding of the scholarship program, in particular the subsidization pertaining to the swimming lessons, has been underwritten by the Friends of Des Moines Parks and Recreation since 2008. The Friends' swim lesson commitment for the newly-revised scholarship program will continue. Funds for the remainder of the reduced-fee program will continue to be underwritten by the Park and Recreation Department operating budget as a loss in revenue; however, it is anticipated that, with the approved program changes, the cost to the Friends and the City's amount of revenue loss will be lower.

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The Park and Recreation Board is proud to work with a department committed to meeting the needs of all citizens in Des Moines and appreciates City Council's support of the financial assistance program over the years

Respectfully submitted,



Susan Noland
Park and Recreation Board Chair

Cc: Richard A. Clark, City Manager
Benjamin R. Page, Parks and Recreation Director