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CHAMBERSBURG COUNCIL TO OPEN AQUATIC CENTER WITH NEW RULES & DECIDES TO POSTPONE INDEPENDENCE DAY EVENT TO LABOR DAY (COVID-19)

Chambersburg, Pennsylvania – At the June 22 Regular Town Council meeting in Chambersburg Borough, a number of decisions were made to address the ongoing health crisis as a result of COVID-19. Previously, Council had twice before extended a State of Emergency, which was declared due to the crisis by Mayor Walter Bietsch on March 13, 2020.

“Originally the Borough made a number of significant steps to ensure the health and safety of the public and Borough workers,” according to Borough Manager Jeffrey Stonehill. “Over time, as the Borough has moved to the Green Phase of Governor Wolf’s Plan for the Reopening of Pennsylvania, many of these steps have been rolled back or modified. In each case, we continue to follow the guidelines from the Pennsylvania Department of Health or the US Centers for Disease Control, whenever practical.”

Town Council has decided to end the State of Emergency in Chambersburg at 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, June 30, 2020. It was pointed out that the Governor’s statewide State of Emergency remains in effect for now and supersedes local declarations. Further, the Mayor and Town Council can re-declare a State of Emergency at any future time, should the conditions deteriorate or if it becomes necessary. Finally, it was pointed out that 99% of the policies and procedures adopted by the Borough of Chambersburg can continue, unabated, regardless of whether a declared State of Emergency is in effect.

According to Stonehill, “Every day for the last three months, staff has been working on issues caused by the COVID-19 crisis and their impacts on the Borough of Chambersburg operations and our community. No issue has consumed more time and discussion than the Chambersburg Aquatic Center.”

On June 22, Town Council decided to open the Aquatic Center to the public beginning June 25. Chambersburg Borough has operated a state-of-the-art aquatic center at Memorial Park for the last two swim seasons. The facility, complete with multiple bodies of water, three slides, picnic pavilions, an events space, beach volleyball and skate park, has seen more than 1,000 visitors per day at the height of each swim season in 2018 and 2019.

Council adopted a new set of rules and policies in response to guidelines issued by the State Department of Health. To open, the Borough must limit occupancy, establish systematic disinfection protocols, limit or prohibit rentals, and address other operating issues. The approved set of policies and rules for the facility is available on the Recreation Department website at http://www.chambersburgpa.gov/rec_dep/index.php and is available at the Aquatic Center.

As the COVID-19 health crisis impacted each local government organization across the mid-state, it became clear that one of the most unique municipal facilities in Central Pennsylvania was going to be impacted as well. Chambersburg is in Franklin County, just north of Maryland, and the Aquatic Center draws crowds from Harrisburg to Martinsburg to Gettysburg. “Pools are licensed facilities and must follow Department of Health guidelines,” added Stonehill. “Now that we are in the Green Phase, as determined by Governor Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the Borough may reopen the facility. That being said, citizens will notice some significant operational changes. We will ask visitors to consider face coverings and social distancing while not in the water. Further, the facility occupancy will be limited to only 500 guests, which is less than half of what the Aquatic Center can normally handle. There will be limits to occupancy in the different pools as well.”

“We want to make sure our procedures are working as we begin this process,” added Stonehill. This is a “social compact, and we want guests to enjoy the facility, be responsible, be safe, and follow the new rules.”

Finally, the Town Council discussed procedures for deep cleaning the facility should a visitor or employee test positive for COVID-19. It was explained that a plan is in place, should that occur, where the facility will be shut for one-day, and a special disinfection protocol will be followed. Council wanted to ensure that the public was aware that these plans are being made and while no plan is perfect, it is the hope of all that this important outdoor recreation resource will help the community with its return to normalcy. “The Aquatic Center,” added Recreation Superintendent Julie Redding, “is important to the mental and physical health of our community. Our staff has worked tirelessly on these rules and we want the public to know that we will do our best in this situation. While we do not have the authority under law to expel people from the facility, we will encourage good behavior, and we can, if necessary, not permit a guest from returning in the future, if they choose to disregard the rules.”

On a related note, Town Council has decided to postpone the Day-In-The-Park celebration originally scheduled for July 4, 2020. This year was the first year that the Borough of Chambersburg Recreation Department was preparing to sponsor and host the Day-In-The-Park celebration for Independence Day, which was sponsored by the Cumberland Valley 21 Day Retreat organization in prior years.

The celebration was to include a Food Truck Festival, bouncy houses and other games, a VIP party at the Aquatic Center, and regular height fireworks. A non-refundable deposit for the fireworks was paid to the vendor in December 2019 of \$7,250.

Council determined that there was no practical way to hold the event and while they considered fireworks alone, with no Day-In-The-Park celebration, there remained concerns that even fireworks could violate the guidelines for special events in the Green Phase of the Governor’s Plan for the Reopening of Pennsylvania.

Staff voiced concern that it was unrealistic to expect enforcement during the fireworks. The Borough of Chambersburg has had as many as 10,000 people witness the fireworks; 3,000 in a slow year. Jeffrey Stonehill pointed out “there's no real way to close Memorial Park to crowds; it doesn't have a gate.”

It was discussed that perhaps Council could hold the fireworks alone and encourage folks to watch from their cars. However, even if the Borough were somehow to close the park, with barricades and police, people will congregate on sidewalks, and backyards, in area parking lots, and so on, as they do every year. Council shared that they do not believe most people would just stay home and watch it or sit in their cars.

In the end, the Day-In-The-Park celebration and fireworks were rescheduled to Labor Day 2020. The balance owed the vendor is a second \$7,250 payment. An additional payment of a deposit for 2021 will be required before the end of the year. The celebration was important to generate some of the funding to offset the expense of the event.

Please contact Julie Redding, Recreation Superintendent, for details about the operation of the Aquatic Center or the Day-In-The-Park celebration. She can be reached by calling 717-261-3275 or by email at jredding@chambersburgpa.gov.

If you have any questions about this information, contact Borough Manager Jeffrey Stonehill at jstonehill@chambersburgpa.gov; due to emergency operations, calling and visiting may be challenging to schedule.