

INPUT RE PARKS AND REC PROGRAMS

Hi, my name is Lila Swenson and I live here in Culver City (4331 Keystone Ave). I have two kids, a 10 y.o. son who attends Farragut Elementary and a daughter who is 4 y.o. and will be starting Kinder at Farragut this fall. We have taken classes at Parks and Recs over the years - like balls, balls, balls and sing, dance and play and swim classes, but neither kid has yet participated in the summer camps or after school care programs. This past weekend there were several complaints on a FB community page about the long lines for registration for the summer camps - some people waiting as long as 4 hours - and the discussion evolved to address larger pictures issues regarding the affordability, availability and quality of the camps in general, in addition to the need for a better registration process (especially the early registration for residents). We have never participated in the summer camps because of concerns that I have about the quality of the supervision based on experiences of friends and all in all it struck me that it would be good to pass along these concerns to this commission in hopes that they might be considered as a whole and the programs improved. For that reason, I offered to compile any comments that people wanted passed along to the commission and bring them here tonight.

As a caveat however to all of these comments, let me say first that with regard to the long lines to register this past weekend, the issues are with the process and not the hard working folks at the rec center following current procedure who were all very helpful and patient and pleasant! Also, we understand that you are all very aware of the problem with the long lines this past weekend and have already pledged to work on addressing that and this is greatly appreciated (although, folks reported that although this year was by far the worst that it has been bad in years past as well - like an hour - 1 ½ hr wait instead of 3-4 hr wait so it seems like it's not a new issue, just worse than before).

This all came up over the weekend so there wasn't a lot of time to collect comments but I have a document with several comments to pass along to the Commission - however it is best to do that. Personally, in summary, based on discussions with friends over the past ten years and the various comments on the threads on this community FB page, overall my thought is that there is a big need for affordable childcare options during the school breaks and over summer break but right now these camps aren't fulfilling that need the way they could, and arguably should. It would be wonderful for the community if the Commission could help make these camps really top notch and available to all who need them

with a more modern and efficient registration process, an updated (less “glitchy”) registration system, and better counseling and supervision.

1)

Sophie Nenner

Hi,

Veteran's park summer camp registration needs to have an online registration to avoid the long line we had yesterday : 4 hours waiting! Or they need to take our packets and stamp them and enter then later. We are in 2016!

Also, this penalize mostly people that don't have so much money because the ones that have, will just give up and sign up their kid to a pricy summer camp : I had no other choice than waiting in line because I cannot afford a \$300+/week camp.

Thank you for bringing this up on my behalf with the parks & recreation commuter or meeting and/or City Council this week. Next year registration method needs to change.

And thank you for doing this.

Have a good afternoon.

Sophie Nenner

2)

My son last summer was 11 years old and I had it set up that he could check himself in and out of camp, but only between certain time frames. For instance, he had to check in by 9am (which he typically did because I dropped him off before work) and he can only check himself out after 5pm and walk home because I would be home about 6pm. He had already been walking home from school so this was no big deal for him to walk from the teen center, but after 5pm so he was not home alone for very long.

On Friday, they had swim day at the Plunge. One particular Friday, my son says he was watching the camp counselors pick up and toss kids in the water, in fun. My son is tall and the kids asked him to do it as well. Seeing as how the counselors were doing it, he assumed it was okay to do as well. It turned out to not be true and they yelled at him to get out of the pool for time-out. My son said he sat out and a lot of time had passed and he thought his time-out was over so he got back in the pool. One of the counselors told him "I didn't say you could get back in the water." Then told him to just go get dressed, he was done swimming for the day. My son said he didn't think he should stay so he just got dressed and left for home. This was about 2:30 in the afternoon and I only knew this because he texted me when he got home to tell me he was home.

I did not get a call from the teen center to say, hey, we lost your child. I got off work about 5pm and I called and left a message with the one who runs the center. I had to leave a message. She was really nice and did call me back Monday, but I didn't answer and she left me a message. We played phone tag for awhile and I never got to talk to her as the phone tagging just faded away. At this point, I had already decided to cancel the remainder of his weeks.

This situation was the final straw. Before that my son complained how he had bullies there and the counselors wouldn't say a thing to them (or weren't around enough to notice). I just didn't trust they cared about my kid.

As for registration, I do remember waiting in the long line as well. Not sure I waited 4 hours like they did this year, more like an hour and a half.

Patricia Garcia

3)

I have no experience with the camps... yet... but spent FOUR HOURS waiting in line on Saturday to register my 6-year-old in three weeks of their camp this summer. After paying almost \$300/week for most of the rest of the summer, we really need that affordable break. I figured, how bad can it be, if they let her run around the park all day for a few days? So we'll see how it goes.

Anyway, I got there at 10 a.m. and had no idea it would take until 2 p.m. The actual registration process was only 5 minutes, but when I arrived there were people in line sitting in lawn chairs who obviously got there way early. Parks and Rec had only two people doing the registrations! I work for a non-profit, so I get it about not having lots of resources, but could the city really not grab a couple laptops and a few employees, set up a table and have 4 or 5 people processing applications? When I got up front I asked the clerk a question about registering for swimming lessons, and she said that starts in a few weeks but can be done online and the in-person process is nothing like for camp "which is crazy." It seems like if they all know the process is insane they'd do something about it....

Thanks for reaching out about this. It was not a good day yesterday. We did get in, though seeing how badly managed the registration is didn't instill a lot of confidence about the camp.

Sonya Geis



4)

I think there are a few things at play here:

Logistics -- use a lottery system similar to those used by charter schools. Allow people to sign up for camp any time before the lottery is held -- either in person or online at their convenience. Then the lottery picks are numbered. First always go to CC residents who have first right of refusal. Then spots get taken up by other CC folks on the wait list, and finally, to non-CC residents if there is still room once all CC spots have been filled. No waiting in line required and no Internet access required since sign-up could be done in person or via computer.

Program equity -- It is an understatement to say that the income inequality that I see among residents of our small city are appalling to me. All families should have **equitable** access to these programs, and the fees should be sliding scale, according to what families can pay. Wealthier families can and should pay more; less wealthy families should pay less.

Ways to defray costs for low-income families -- could schools or CCEF fund scholarships for low-income kids to after-school programs? Since aftercare is not a school program? I dunno. Again, it's an equity thing -- it seems like all the \$\$ in CC schools ends up at Farragut/LinHowe/El Marino and it leaves La Ballona and El Rincon in the metaphorical dust, which again. I'd love to see our wealthy community be more generous and rally around making ALL schools and aftercare of high quality.

Deborah Glenn



5)

Thank you for compiling our voices to send/present to the commission.

Here are some of my thoughts on the Culver City Summer Camps as well as other camps we have participated in. I am not sure if they are interrelated or separate from each other. I know that one can register online for most of these camps and activities, but the server or program or platform CC Parks and Rec and the CCUSD is using has a lot of glitches in it. The commission should think about reviewing the system to make it less onerous to sign up on-line.

The commission should also have something programmed into the online programs to indicate that a camp is full. Once the program indicates that it is full, it should be able to communicate back to the City or Parks and Rec. It should then send a message to those of us signing up that their name is on a wait list (up to 1 week) while Parks and Rec or CCUSD figures out how to expand to meet the demand. They should have a contingency plan in place so people are not turned away from signing up and having to scramble to look for another camp. That contingency plan should include but not be limited to: expanding the specific camp by adding more counselors, supplies and find work with different locations to accommodate the demand. Or creating a different but similar camp.

Perhaps making sign-up r application like forms for parents to fill out before enrollment begins would help gauge whether a camp will be popular. Sort of like a pre-waiting list. By looking at the request for signing up a child, Parks and Rec and CCUSD can better gauge how many resources can be allocated to the camp or for adding camps when the enrollment begins.

Just 4 Kids Camp (I do not like this camp or the way it is run):

--Camp needs more counselors. Preferably more counselors who have been outside the boundaries of Culver City (yes, there were a few who had only been as far as the Venice Pier) so their experiences need to be broader.

--Counselors SHOULD be interested in children

--Counselors should get more training in dealing with children and how they learn and play. They tend to be bored, lazy, and not too interested in the children's activities.

--Counselors SHOULD take children's complaints of privacy seriously and the camp should have discussions with and reminders to both the counselors and children. Peeping under bathrooms stalls in groups while children go to the toilet is unacceptable. Rules are told to the children once at the beginning of camp with an empty threat of being reprimanded for doing things that harm or hurt other people's feeling or invade their privacy, so kids get away with it.

--This camp is not inexpensive but it feels like the least amount of effort, time, and resources is put into it. Fancy activity names need to live up to what it is or they need to bring the price down. Make it Community Service for CCHS kids perhaps if the City does not want to spend the

resources on paid jobs for counselors. But do not charge the price it is for such a poorly run camp option.

--There should be a fun component to this camp --board games and coloring with unique names such as "fashion design" are not interesting for children and it is misguided.

--Counselors should be trained or the camps should not have gender based names for the different activities. Counselors should accept both boys and girls into any and all activities regardless of whether the activity seems gender based. Lots of boys were ridiculed for choosing the "fashion" based activity and some for the girls were teased by the other girls for choosing the building activities. The counselors did nothing to discourage this behavior.

Camp Sunshine

--This camp is well --run and kids LOVE it!

--More resources should be put into this very active and engaging camp.

--Maybe the camp needs to be split into different groups for the Summer part because it has become very popular.

--This camp is run by a licensed school teacher in the CCUSD system. He is very smart and engaging and seems to KNOW how to guide/teach the kids responsibility, respect, kindness and is big on anti-bullying.

--Counselors for the most part are trained well and are amazingly responsible given their age (same as Just for Kids Counselors and they are not responsible).

--Anything the commission can do to support this camp and Adon should be made to support it, including hiring more staff that undergoes whatever training he gives the counselors.

--The price point on this camp is perfect or even below what you get for the camp, which is quiet a lot. This camp provides so much for children and yet does not cost as much as Just 4 Kids.

Farragut Summer Camp through CC Adult School

---Absolutely add more resources to this camp! At first it was disorganized and now it is run very well.

---Veronica the Principal at the Adult School has overseen this camp and continues to build an amazing experience for the children who attend.

--If there were more resources, perhaps the kids would have more outdoor movement time as a balance to the 3 hours of academics.

---If there were more resources perhaps the lunch time system could be better regarding activities. The kids eat and then run all over the grass 9 at least they are not jumping on the tables anymore while the pre-K kids are eating). Perhaps some of the counselors/MS & HS kids could organize games like Red Light Green Light as activity after kids have eaten, or flag "football" or sack races. But something entertaining to get the remaining energy out before the kids head back into the classrooms to do more fun but academic learning.

Clay and Pottery Camp

---This camp also should perhaps have more resources so that parents who cannot afford to pay the materials fees can attend.

---This is a great and fun camp and for the most part run very well by Sylvia Limon-Barr.

I hope this is helpful.

Cheers,

Lara Embry

