



CITY OF MOUNT VERNON
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Recreation Programs Limited but Hopeful to Continue in MV

MOUNT VERNON - With Governor DeWine's recent announcement of the phase-in plan of returning to work, recreational activities this summer are also affected. Large group gatherings are expected to be among the last of the activities to resume as the nation and Ohio continues to keep the COVID-19 virus at bay. In Mount Vernon, city officials have been waiting for information before deciding on the future of the recreation programs through city parks.

As of now, tennis lessons may take place as long as participants are not playing doubles, nor do they have a large group of spectators. Fall soccer is uncertain, but hopeful to happen. The Summer Parks Program for preschool through fifth grade, which generally takes place daily from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. is uncertain as to a start date, but could possibly begin in mid-June or July. Baseball and softball programs are also hopeful to begin around the same time. Spring youth soccer was cancelled because of the restriction of large gatherings and being unable to assure social distancing. All decisions are data-driven based on public health findings coming from Governor DeWine's team and from Knox Public Health.

The city announced earlier this month that Hiawatha Water Park will remain closed for the season. Ariel~Foundation Park Marketing Director Carrie Haver also announced at Monday's City Council meeting that May and June community concerts and events have been cancelled. As of now, it is unknown as to whether or not the Independence Day celebration will be held.

Recreation Board Director, Jerry Clinger, said that his board members have been waiting to hear from the Governor for direction.

"League officials have been informed about the further delay that we all are experiencing in getting games and activities back at the parks. It really wasn't what anyone wished to hear," said Clinger. "We have to wait until groups can get back together safely."

"There really isn't any timetable that lets us know when that will be. In this case, the safety of us all is the most important thing. It looks like we may have a tennis lessons program in July with safety precautions, but all other leagues, tournaments and programs will just have to wait and see." Clinger added.

Mayor Matt Starr also announced that the Memorial Day Parade will be cancelled this year since large gatherings are still restricted. Additionally, only a handful of parade entries have been received in the Mayor's office. A Memorial Day ceremony will continue to happen online for the Monday, May 25th Day of Remembrance.

"Even though we won't be able to gather in person for Memorial Day, we can still come together online to take the time to remember those who served and continue to serve our country," said Starr. "If our churches are able to hold holy services for the community during the time of the pandemic, there's no reason that we can't offer that same kind of service for Memorial Day."

The timing of the announcements for the upcoming programs and events was deliberate. Governor DeWine and his team continue to urge cautious optimism and prudence in following precautions of

wearing face coverings when in public, continuing social distancing, continuing frequent handwashing, and continuing frequent disinfecting. The recent announcement gave Knox County Health Commissioner Julie Miller more information to advise the City on how to proceed with the summer activities.

Mayor Starr explained. “Julie [Miller] told us that large gatherings and spectator sports are likely to be the last of the activities to open up to the public, so we wanted to decide as soon as we could on these particular activities in order to give the public the chance to manage expectations.” said Starr. “The last thing we want to happen is to have a resurgence of the virus later that catches us off guard.”

In spite of the changes, Starr is hopeful that this will spark a different way of pursuing activities for recreation and leisure.

“It’s definitely going to be a different kind of summer, and I think we’re going to have to be creative and look to our past about how our community enjoyed recreation before all of our programs began. Perhaps we can learn from our history,” Starr added.

While organized recreation programs are on hold until further notice, Mount Vernon City Parks Department is looking for ways to allow the restroom facilities to be open while providing an aggressive but necessary disinfection schedule to protect the public. In doing so, the City is making plans and deciding on a date of opening restrooms. A benefit of having access to restroom facilities is that it allows park-goers that opportunity to wash hands.

“People will appreciate being able to use the restrooms when they’re at the parks,” said Mount Vernon Safety Service Director Rick Dzik. “Our challenge is to keep the facilities properly staffed and disinfected to reduce the likelihood of the spread of the disease, so we’re making plans to do just that.”

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