

As your representative for Council District 1, and as an 18-year resident of La Jolla, I have studied the Children's Pool issue carefully and held several forums and meetings to understand the community's feelings and concerns about its future management.

As a result of a court ruling in November 2009 and a new state law, the seals are here to stay, and the City of San Diego can decide how to manage the Children's Pool.

On Monday, May 17, the City Council will hold a meeting at 6 pm at Sherwood Auditorium in the Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, to discuss management options for this beach.

The City's current joint use policy for the Children's Pool was adopted in 2004 and continues today. The policy allows both humans and seals to access the beach year round. The City also obtained a Coastal Development Permit from the Coastal Commission that allows a guideline rope to be placed across the beach each year during pupping season from December 15 to May 15 to discourage people from getting too close to the seals.

The City Attorney says the City is under no legal obligation to modify the existing policy. There has been no request from any City department or from the La Jolla community to take any action to change the current joint use policy. Nor does the Mayor's office support any changes to the policy.

There is no evidence that any seal has ever been harmed at Children's Pool by citizens using the beach under the "joint use" policy. In addition, according to the Police Department, incidents at the Children's Pool have significantly decreased since the new State law took effect on January 1, 2010. The adopted City Council policy of "joint use" protects the seals, ensures public access to the water, and does not cost the City any money.

However, a "people problem" persists at the Children's Pool. Citizens who want to use the pool in a lawful and respectful manner feel they are being wrongly harassed by people who are there to protect the seals. Meanwhile, citizens who are there to protect the seals feel that, without their vigilance, harm could come to the seals.

I propose to address this "people problem" by seeking private funding for a City-sanctioned park ranger whose primary duty would be to patrol Children's Pool. The ranger would be responsible for ensuring the "joint use" policy is followed by all visitors to Children's Pool. In addition, the ranger would train and supervise a City-sanctioned volunteer docent program, which would enlist local residents to inform and instruct the public on the City's "joint use" policy at Children's Pool.

I believe the presence of a City ranger, coupled with the volunteer docent program, involving citizens who are trained and screened by the City, will alleviate the "people problem" at Children's Pool. The program can be implemented quickly upon City Council approval and would come at no cost to taxpayers.

Recently, both the La Jolla Parks and Beaches Committee and the La Jolla Community Planning Association voted to support the implementation of the Ranger program.

In addition to the Ranger plan, other options being considered by the Council include a seasonal beach closure each year during pupping season from December 15 to May 15 and a request for an emergency Coastal Development Permit to keep the rope barrier up year round. Both these options will be costly to taxpayers (with cost estimates of \$30,000 to \$40,000 for each) and take a minimum of 3 to 5 years to pursue.

Before we embark on such a costly and lengthy endeavor, which may ultimately be unsuccessful and could lead to more litigation, I urge my colleagues and the community to support the Ranger program first, and re-evaluate the situation at the Children's Pool in the future after the program has had a chance to succeed.

I have also heard from the community that there are additional issues, such as water quality, sand cleanings, mitigation for traffic and parking impacts, and the need for a policy to prevent seal colonization on other beaches, that need to be addressed in the future, and I will continue to work with the community on these issues.

I encourage all community members to attend the May 17 Council hearing, or contact every City Council member in advance to share your input on the future use of the Children's Pool. It's our duty to speak up and make our voices heard on this issue.

Sherri S. Lightner
Councilmember
City of San Diego, District 1