



City of Arts & Innovation

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Gyms, Fitness Centers and Places of Worship Permitted in Parks Without Fees

Unanimous vote by City Council adds more options to outdoor flex-space permit program

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Gyms, fitness centers and places of worship can use city parks for free following a vote Tuesday (9/1) to include them in Riverside’s outdoor flex-space permit program that enables businesses to operate outside in accordance with state restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unanimous vote is designed to help gyms and fitness centers that were not initially included in the city’s outdoor flex-space permit program that was started in late May to assist restaurants and amended in mid-July to include retail and service businesses. At the urging of Mayor Rusty Bailey, the latest addition brought forth Tuesday also includes places of worship.

“We know that maintaining our physical and spiritual well-being are essential to staying healthy during the pandemic, and this addition to the outdoor flex-space permit program can help with both,” Bailey said. “People have been doing their best, but we know that parking lots are not ideal for a worship service.”

All 58 city parks will be available for use by providers who were operating in a building and can no longer provide services in that building because of state rules.

The Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department will review applications and ensure that participants have adequate liability insurance and that their operations will align with federal, state, county and city regulations. They also will ensure that the additional activities do not conflict with other activities that already are underway in parks.

Some gyms already were providing outdoor classes and instruction on their own property. Others were providing services in parks, but the previous regulations called for them to register with the city as private contractors and pay fees to use the parks. The change approved Tuesday streamlines permitting and removes the fees.

“It was quite clear that our flex space permitting did not meet the needs of gym owners,” said Councilmember Ronaldo Fierro, who proposed the change along with Councilmember Erin Edwards. “Nobody wants to do yoga on a sidewalk or do push-ups in an asphalt parking lot.”

The City already was in the process of finalizing agreements with private contractors to provide fitness classes in the parks. Those agreements are expected to be completed in the next week, with the gyms and fitness centers expected to be in place in the next week or two.

“During COVID-19, there is so much that we cannot control,” Edwards said. “When we have an opportunity to make small changes to an existing program to support those who are hurting in an unprecedented moment, we should.”

City parks have been open for several weeks, but playgrounds, splash pads and basketball courts are not open in accordance with state regulations that generally bar any activities that bring people in close proximity to one another. Cooling centers are open during periods of extreme heat, with more information at: <https://riversideca.gov/press/cool-center-information>

City officials plan to eventually expand the outdoor flex-space permit program to enable any business to operate in a park if they submit an application and a safe re-opening plan.

For the latest information and resources regarding COVID-19 -- www.RiversideCA.gov/COVID-19