

Dormont keeps pool operator

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Dormont council renewed the contract for Florida-based Jeff Ellis Management to operate the borough's swimming pool for a second summer, now that some of the controversy over changes the company brought has faded.

Council voted, 6-1, Monday to award the one-year, \$107,647 contract to the Ocoee, Fla.-based company, which trains lifeguards for the Sandcastle and Idlewild water parks and has obtained contracts to run municipal pools in Baldwin Borough and Brentwood. Councilman John Maggio was opposed.

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About 28,600 people visited Dormont's pool last year, said Council President Willard McCartney, though it was difficult to measure that against previous years because exact counts weren't kept.

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"For some reason, we stopped counting the number of patrons at the pool from '08 to '14," he said. "My guess is, it's been fairly consistent ... we've been getting 25,000 to 30,000 per year."

McCartney pointed to high ratings on guest satisfaction surveys and an unanimous recommendation from the borough's recreation committee as support for renewing the contract, which will cost slightly more this year because Labor Day — the end of the pool season — falls a week later than last year.

Maggio said he remained opposed to using the company because it cut the number of lifeguard jobs and changed procedures for allowing swimmers into the deep end of the pool with its popular water slide.

Previously, patrons had to demonstrate their swimming ability to a lifeguard before they could go in the deep end; the Ellis company's policy let anyone into the deep end and the slide but required anyone under 4 feet, 4 inches tall to wear a flotation vest while swimming.

"I'm not opposed to Jeff Ellis Management, per se, I'm just opposed to the fact that they've eliminated jobs and eliminated the deep-water swimming test," Maggio said.

Ellis, who grew up in Allentown, said he hired about 50 local lifeguards last season, though they rotated between pools in Dormont, Baldwin Borough and private facilities such as clubs and apartment complexes. With the addition of Brentwood this summer, he'll hire 12 to 15 more, he said.

Despite council's hopes that hiring Ellis would cut costs at the pool, expenses increased last summer from \$178,718 to \$187,770, for an operating loss of about \$56,000. The borough has lost an average of \$57,000 on the pool every year for the past six years, from a high of nearly \$94,000 in 2009 to a low of \$38,000 in 2012.

But Ellis and the borough hope to boost the borough's revenues this year by scheduling more activities at the pool, including swimming lessons, exercise classes and "paddleboard yoga," Ellis said.

Recreation Director Kristin Hullihan said interest in swimming lessons increased as last summer went on instead of the usual decrease. Ellis' lifeguards taught 160 swimmers in 2014 compared to 96 the year before; the Pool Paddle Fitness and Yoga program brought in about \$1,000 in revenues in one month and will be expanded to the full summer this year, she said.

Sections of the pool will be roped off for those activities and classes as needed, but the 1.85-acre