

Talking Points for BG Aquatic Facility Ballot Issue With Park Board Review

Existing Conditions

The existing outdoor pool at City Park has reached the end of its useful life and must be replaced. Some current issues with the facility include:

- The 1960's tank was designed for competitive and instructional swimming and underserves recreational swimmers.
- The concrete tank is cracked and leaking, so a liner was installed in 2003; this liner has a 10-year guarantee/lifespan.
- The pool gutter system was retrofitted in the 1980's and covered with fiberglass composite in 2003 to extend its life; it is deteriorating.
- The main pool surge tank had to be welded to extend its life; its capacity of 1,300 gallons is not sufficient for the 350,000 gallon pool.
- The water slide is deteriorating and should be replaced in the next 3 years
- The pool deck is cracked and heaved; it is patched in many places but continues to deteriorate and pose trip hazards.
- The site of the old wading pool was filled in and covered with pavers which have shifted; the wood trellis structure on top the old pool needs to be replaced.
- Concrete curbing around the facility is cracked and patched; it poses a trip hazard.
- The 3,000 sq ft Bath House has open showers and few toilets; its roof is falling into the interior, the mortar in the concrete block structure is powdering and falling out and the walls have sustained quite a bit of cracking. The concession stand is in poor condition. A structural engineer will examine the structure in early 2011 to address public safety issues from continued use of this building.
- The 400 sq ft Main Pool Filter Building also has a concrete roof which is suspect, block walls which have shifted over time, and soffits which have rotted; it is too small in size to hold the filters, pumps, disinfection equipment and chemicals needed to operate the main pool. A shed was added to the structure in increase its capacity.
- The 600 sq ft Guard House has a suspect concrete roof, no windows, poor ventilation, and rotted soffits.
- The Waterworks Pool and Filter Building are in relatively good shape above-ground. However, the piping below-ground needs to be replaced as it cannot be adequately winterized, which results in burst plumbing and late season openings.
- The existing Parks and Recreation budget does not allow for major repairs or replacement of the aquatic center.

Deteriorating Community Support

Community surveys in 2005 and 2010 show the increasingly negative view our residents are taking toward the Family Aquatic Facility: dissatisfaction rate with the outdoor pool grew from 11% to 16% and registered as the highest dissatisfaction rate of all park facilities in 2010. Yet our residents continue to rank swimming in the top 3 recreational activities their families participate in annually. When asked what the top priorities for the Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Department should be over the next 5 years, 55% of the survey respondents said an indoor aquatic facility was important and 68% ranked the outdoor facility as important (2010 Recreational Need Survey). These percentages have increased since the 2005 survey, especially the need to renovate the outdoor aquatic facility— which jumped from 25% of respondents to 68% in five years.

Findings From Consultant

Brandstetter Carrol, Inc., a professional firm specializing in aquatic and government facilities, was hired in 2009 to evaluate the existing pool facility, recreational needs of the community and present a rough plan and costs for an outdoor facility at City Park and an indoor aquatic addition to the BG Community Center. Over a year of public meetings, focus groups and analysis went into the final report and plans. Their findings further strengthen the picture of a rapidly deteriorating facility with increasing consumer dissatisfaction:

- Pool attendance should be 56,000 based on proven participation rates for similarly sized communities which have aquatic facilities that meet the needs of recreational swimmers; attendance at the BG Family Aquatic Facility dropped from 31,497 visits in 1997 to 17,649 visits during the 2007 swim season.
- Decreasing attendance, static operating costs around \$104,000, and increasing repair costs means the pool has lost nearly \$107,000 from 1997 to 2007.
- Concession revenue is directly linked to pool attendance; the BG Parks and Recreation Department has been unable to generate a profit at the pool concession stand despite drastic cuts to operations. The stand has been turned over to a vendor to reduce losses.

Proposed Solution

If the needs expressed by the community for an indoor and an outdoor aquatic facility are to be met, the City of Bowling Green will need to engage the public in a decision at the polls. The estimated cost for a rebuilt outdoor facility at City Park is \$4.8 million and the indoor addition to the Community Center could run

\$10.8 million. The City does not have enough funds in Capital Improvements to address these facilities and is still paying on the bond used to build the Community Center in 2005.

A funding package for the projects could include private donations, State of Ohio construction funds/grants and local tax funding. Partnerships with a health care provider might provide construction and operating income at the Community Center if the second story of the addition contains cardiac rehabilitation and wellness resources. But realistically, the major share of construction costs will need to come from local tax dollars.

Operating costs for the outdoor aquatic facility can be covered by the Parks and Recreation Fund. A new facility will generate a profit for several years as a new and exciting recreational outlet. The indoor facility presents an operating fund deficit if it follows other indoor facilities around the state. Brandstetter Carroll calculated that a majority of that deficit will be covered by increased overall memberships at the Community Center, aquatic programming and pool parties. If their projects hold up, a deficit of \$27,500 would need to be covered by the Park Fund each year.

Timeline

A critical, but currently missing, piece of information is the lifespan of the outdoor pool buildings. A consulting engineer will assess the site in early 2011 and provide their estimate. It is thought that the pool buildings will fail before the liner, which has a guarantee that lasts till 2013. The water slide is also likely to fail in the next two years. If the balance tank collapses, the pool will need to be closed as the Park Fund cannot replace the tank with current funds. A "best guess" is that the pool will need major maintenance or closure by 2013.

A ballot issue is never popular, but we should allow the community to decide whether they wish to pay for an outdoor and indoor aquatic facility. There are community non-profit levies that come up for renewal or replacement at a predictable time. There is one possible levy issue (Wood Lane) in 2012 and the renewal of the Parks and Recreation operating levy in 2013.

The Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Board has recommended that both the indoor and outdoor facilities proceed on to City Council's Parks and Recreation Committee with a recommendation to proceed with the outdoor facility and examine whether the indoor facility should also be placed before the public. City Council and the City Administration need to weigh in on this option. The community has had public discussions, surveys and focus groups on the topic since 2008 and frequent comments focus on when the City will actually take action on that input. There is an expectation that something should occur in the

near future, before the existing pool needs to be closed permanently. City Council will ultimately decide the timeline for this effort.

A bond for \$15 million would be required to complete both indoor and outdoor facilities. The payment schedule over 15 -20 years, including interest, is needed in order to calculate the millage necessary. The Finance Director will calculate this amount and respond after the first of the year so the information can be included in the talking points.

Park Board addressed the issue at their January meeting. City Council's Parks and Recreation Committee has schedule a review of the issue for March 7, 2011 at 6:30 p.m.; their support is critical to move the project forward. The City Administration has already been approached about the aquatic facility and provided input into these talking points.

A Citizen Advisory Group might also provide a balanced view of how best to move this issue forward. If created, this group would meet in Spring and make a recommendation back to the Mayor and Council by Fall 2011.

To place an issue on the ballot for May 2012, Council will need to approve the action by late-2011. Adequate time to provide information to the voting public is also needed, as it is our primary responsibility to give voters the best information possible in order for them to make a good decision on their tax dollars and recreational needs.