

**Aquatics Master Plan
CNSL Focus Group
Notes from July 21, 2011 Focus Group Meeting**

Overview

The Columbia Association is developing an Aquatics Master Plan, a comprehensive plan that documents existing conditions of Columbia's aquatics facilities and programs; assesses the future needs of residents and other users; and makes recommendations for future investments in aquatics venues and associated programs. This 10- to 20-year plan will set the frame for how CA invests in our aquatics facilities for years to come. The process began earlier this year and is anticipated to be completed by year's end.

How do Focus Groups Fit into the Master Planning Process

There are many opportunities to be involved in the planning process and many ways to stay informed as the plan is developed. There will be community-wide workshops during the plan's development. The first set of these were held in March. Focus groups are small group discussions that will complement the larger community meetings and focus on the needs and ideas of specific aquatics user groups. Each focus group is anticipated to meet once.

CNSL Focus Group

This focus group brought together a small group of residents involved with the Columbia Neighborhood Swim League (CNSL). The facilitated session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Participants were asked a series of open ended questions. The discussion points are noted here.

Question 1: What do you like best about CA aquatics facilities/programs?

Answers1:

- All facilities have something different to offer
- All can share responsibility and occasionally host a meet and make money
- The neighborhoods allow kids to walk to the pool; they are neighborhood oriented
- Locations are good
- Pools are set up so they are meeting points for families.
- CNSL provides opportunities for kids in the neighborhood to come together on the same team. Not all go to the same schools. They can build relationships and camaraderie through the swim teams and get to know kids from various schools. This is a tangible example of the *Columbia Experience*.
- Teens and younger children are connected through swimming
- The leagues are inclusive. They don't target just high level swimmers. All can participate
- There is a feeling of team and participating in a team.

- Timing of the meets is good. They are short so the entire family can go together.
- Promotes swimming for all levels; coaches work with all kids to improve; award “best time” ribbons
- No pool is more than 15 minutes away. They are convenient to each other. Can meet people and see them again and develop close relationships.

Question 2: What are your thoughts on improving facilities/programs for older swimmers?

Answers2:

- Bathrooms at all pools are small and provide limited facilities for over 400 people who may be attending a swim meet.
- Bathrooms could use updating.
- There are no lockerrooms in most pools.
- The concessions need to have the electrical updated.
- Some teams don't have concession stands. Sales from the concession stands are how the teams make money.
- Some pools cannot accommodate meets with larger teams
- Storage facilities are not generally available. The teams have a lot of gear to “drag around”. Some teams have purchased sheds for their equipment and supplies. There are concerns that the pools are not secure.
- Parking is not adequate for the “home” team, much less for another team. Street parking is not available
- Practices are often in a 25 yard pool. Some teams have a 25 meter pool. It is difficult for the kids who practice in a 25 yard pool when they swim meets in a 25 meter pool because of the added distance.
- Cleanliness during events is a problem.
- Chairs and shade are not available. Those who attend the meets bring their own chairs. The pools have opportunities to improve in this area.
- Additional staff is needed for cleanliness. The staff should take care of pool cleanliness (emptying trash, stocking bathrooms, picking up debris) when they are not on duty in the chair.
- Communication about the CNSL is not available. The focus group wanted to see more kids participate in a fun, unstressful activity. The community often does not know about meets.
- Assistant Managers must be aware that people are coming to their pools for a meet and have supplies available for a large crowd.
- Staff needs to be a mix of guys and girls so both bathrooms can have attention.
- Registration for CNSL is not on-line. It is done on paper forms which most families mail in. The paperwork and registration

information is often not accurate when it is inputted so data provided to the team coaches and managers is not up to date. This affects who can swim at the meets and is particularly bad at the first meet of the year. Paper registration to on line input is not bridging well. No receipts are given out. This seems to be a systemic problem.

- If CNSL is trying to recruit new people, an on line registration system would provide more accuracy and a better database.
- One family did not know about CNSL for years after they moved to Columbia. There is no or little information at some of the pools about the leagues and the Clippers.
- Some rezoning of program parameters may be needed. A new look at boundaries may prevent having some large teams and some small teams.

Question 3: Have you observed other aquatics programs that you think CA should emulate to enhance the aquatics program for CNSL swimmers?

Answers 3:

- Use "Meet Manager". It is an electronic league scoring system. It can do a lot including printing ribbons. The league has problems with scoring and this is a way to get meet data completed more accurately.
- Except for the need for technical scoring methods, CNSL is better than most leagues
- The Roger Carter Center has starting blocks at the deep end of the pool. CNSL doesn't have starting blocks. (There are two removable starting blocks at the Supreme Sports Club pool). The availability of starting blocks would improve the quality of the CNSL program and be a good introduction to competitive swimming. Most leagues do have starting blocks.

Question 4: As you know, our indoor facilities are in high demand for a number of user groups. What solutions do you have for addressing the demand for indoor pool/aquatics time?

This question was not addressed separately.

Question 5: One idea is to cover/enclose one of our outdoor pools to expand our indoor capacity. What are your thoughts on this?

Answers 5:

- This idea is irrelevant to CNSL.
- Bathrooms are not big enough for an enclosed all weather pool. If a pool was enclosed, all of the pool's facilities would have to be upgraded.

- Clippers would love it. The enclosed pool could be dedicated to the Clippers.
- Want to do it only to a pool that is not highly used in the summer
- A place to get information out earlier for CNSL; could use an enclosed pool to get the CNSL kids in the water earlier in the year.
- It would alleviate problems with usage.

Question 6: There are a number of outdoor pools throughout the community that are sparsely attended. What are your ideas to increase community participation at these facilities?

Answers 6:

- Jeffers Hill and some of the other sparsely attended pools have no amenities; nothing to drive people to them.
- Talbott Springs has only the pool and a ½ basketball court
- Could add another swim team at one of the sparsely used pools
- Lap only pool during the day
- Adult only pool
- Pool just for camps
- Add more hot tubs, snack options, freezer with ice cream, have Coho Grill bring in food to sell.

Question 7: Pools are community gathering places. If some of the sparsely attended pools were to be repurposed over time to other types of community facilities, what ideas do you have on what would garner community interest and participation?

Answers 7:

- Keep the pools
- Make one of them a 50 meter pool
- Repurpose for swimming in some way
- Neighborhood environment: not embraced as much as it should be. Outparcels don't feel as much a part of this neighborhood environment. Some neighborhoods don't feel connected to their villages.
- Need to improve camaraderie. The Aquatics program doesn't necessarily help it.

Other comments

- Teams are growing. They have lots of small children. Lifeguards don't stay through the full pre-season practices
- Have had to fish some kids out of the water after lifeguards leave. Some older kids will stay to help younger ones.

- Closed some pools during the day in the early season for practices. Now the swim teams practice when the pool is closed. Other kids cannot see what is going on so don't know how much fun the leagues are and don't join.
- Get more out of having practices after pools close. Before, there was too much competition for lanes.
- Columbia will get new people coming in to the area with BRAC. CA needs to see programs to military families at a price they can afford. Military families will want the sense of community that Columbia provides.
- Getting coaches assigned to teams in a timely manner is a problem. They get assigned close to the time they are needed, often at the last minute. The teams don't get the coaches they deserve. There should be more attention paid to selection and placement of coaches.
- Sometimes swimmers are lost to other teams.
- Scheduling a small team (113 swimmers) against a large team (200+ swimmers) psychologically impacts the smaller team so they don't think they can win before the meet even starts.
- A lot of swimmers are from outside of Columbia. People don't want to come to teams at Bryant Woods and Faulkner Ridge. Non-residents pay \$400 for their kids to swim on the CNSL teams. The kids cannot use the pools for recreation, just for the team. The fee should be lower to attract more swimmers.