

**Aquatics Master Plan
Clippers Focus Group
Notes from August 30, 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.

This focus group brought together a small group of residents involved with parents whose children are involved with Clippers. The facilitated session lasted approximately 60 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?

Answers 1:

Facilities

- I like that the pools are everywhere in Columbia.
- If one pool is closed due to maintenance, we can still go to another pool because there are many in the community.
- When Clippers are practicing, there is always space for me to swim as well. This creates a family-friendly atmosphere.
- I like the geographic diversity for aquatics facilities and the varied amenities at each pool.
- Supreme Sports Club and Columbia Gym is more of a fitness pool, while Swim Center is more family-friendly.
- I like that the children are taught how to use the equipment at Supreme Sports Club.

Programs

- The programs are family oriented – all four of my children are on a team and have different swimming abilities, but ALL are welcomed on the team.
- If my child choses to do another sport in high school, most other swim teams require swimming to be the only sport, but the Clippers program is flexible and allows kids to be involved in other sports.
- The Clippers program accepts kids that have other things to do, which creates the family oriented atmosphere. If they miss a meet or practice that is okay. Not all teams (outside CA) have this atmosphere.
- All of my kids can be on the same team.
- Kids love the coaches.
- Coaches build personal relationships.
- I like that the team is located here in Columbia, which is more convenient than our previous team in Laurel.
- My child is ten years old and he's not sure if he's into competitive swimming long term but I still feel like he has a spot here on the Clippers team.
- I considered leaving because I didn't like the way Clippers were reorganized recently, but my children refused to leave because they like the coaches.
- Clippers coaches don't "push" the kids to swim, a lot of other teams sign the kids up for meets and participation is required; CA respects other obligations.
- Clippers recognize the whole child rather than just the swimmer.
- There is an elite group in the Clippers. My children's group had a swimmer that is now swimming at Yale University, so you can do it in the Clippers program. The swimmer was well rounded with academic and other extracurricular accolades, but he could only do this with Clippers because they provide the flexibility to balance other important activities in life.
- MBAC is too competitive for many kids.

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

Answers 2:

Facilities

- The water at Supreme Sports Club is too cold for the kids
- I have complained about water temperature before.
- Air quality is horrid – kids are usually gasping for air in Supreme Sports and also the program pool at the Swim Center.

- My kids have developed asthma. I am not sure if it is related to the facility.
- It's very slippery in Supreme Sports Club and easily to slip. They have improved this by putting mats down in the hallways, but it hasn't been done on the steps – my kid has slipped and been hurt. It is way too slippery. This needs immediate attention.
- Also slippery at Swim Center. Need better decking material. Need better near term solution to ensure safety.
- Build a 50 meter pool – maybe we can partner with another government entity to be more cost effective.
- Put a bubble over the outdoor pools.
- Kids want to swim in high school but there is no swim facility for high schools – this is my only main complaint about living in Howard County.
- It's surprising that there is no 50 meter pool, despite being one of the richest counties in the nation.
- Lose CNSL kids at around 13 years old because they go to teams that have a 50 meter pool and more advanced swimming.
- Having all of Clippers activities in one location.
- Older adults are upset about having a bunch of kids in the pools – create an age appropriate facility.
- In the locker rooms at Supreme Sports Club they asked youth and adults to stay in separate areas. That's helpful in keeping the peace but in that “one space” for the youth it gets crowded.
- Isn't there potential for a Stephens Forest pool bubble? This could be a dedicated facility.

Programs

- I like how they divide the kids who want to be competitive and recreational.
- The older kids have the smaller groups, but the younger kids have much larger swim teams and it's very packed! I don't think enough individual time is spent on the kids in this environment. Kids say they don't get enough personal attention from the coaches.
- Why is it good to have the largest program in the state?
- Clippers services the community but it doesn't help the kids progress competitively
- We still have state champions, but we're not the club where competition is everything. This is both a positive and negative.
- If kids want more from the program they will move, but otherwise they will stay with Clippers.
- I feel that we can't attract good coaches because we don't have the budget to pay top dollar for coaches.
- It sounds like Clippers purposefully positioned itself in the middle ground for recreational and competitive swimming.

- If someone leaves Clippers, there is always someone that will fill the space.

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

Answers 3:

- Fairlands of course – it is bigger with a 50 meter pool and it can accommodate both swim meets and family in one location.
- A pool in Virginia had a 50 meter pool, weight room, water park etc. It was like a Lifetime Fitness on steroids.
- I like the pool decks in other places.
- Lifetime has two slides.

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?

Answers 4:

- The only 50 meter pool available in summer is Fairland. It would be nice to have this in Columbia so we aren't giving thousands of dollars to Fairland to rent the space.
- Our kids don't start until June because pool access is limited, while the Eagles team meets for months before summer and are therefore more prepared.
- Tri-athletes, masters would use a 50 meter pool.

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:

- Cover the outdoor pools.
- Seniors are complaining about not having enough space in the pool and covering an outdoor pool would provide more space for indoor swimming
- I don't see benefit to covering the pool. It seems like a budget decision. All the facilities at the pool would also have to be upgraded, can't just cover the pool.

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:

- Friday night at Bryant Woods attracts people and we need more events like that. It builds community and you can't put a price on that.
- How about opening the wading pools at these pools in the morning so parents and little kids can get in water time before mid-day naptime. This would really be great. Now most pools open at noon.

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:

- I think there is a need for activities that attract teenagers such as a basketball court.
- River Hill shut down their volleyball court because it attracted bees and since it's been closed; teenagers no longer hang out there. This is too bad. It was a good place for them.
- Stuff for teens and pre-teens are needed.
- Fairland has somewhere around 50 acres for an ice skating rink, pool etc.
- Combining multiple types of facilities would be good if in one place for cross-training, for example.
- It costs a lot to rent Fairland for the weekend, and we could capture that revenue if we built our own 50 meter pool instead.
- Could Hopewell pool be a place for a multi-use park?
- There will be a big backlash when considering closing a pool since there is too much community investment and interest in ensuring they stay open
- I personally bought my house because it's near a pool.

Other Comments

- There is a new competitive team starting called HoCo Aquatics – going to use HCC facility. Offering smaller teams and are going to offer a long course season. During winter they will go to UMBC, and Clippers don't go there. Have hired an experienced coach.
- Lack of pool space makes Clippers pool time limited and therefore cannot be competitive because of scheduling difficulties when they get out of school and what's actually open for swimming.
- Why can't practice be at 4:30 instead of 4:15? Middle schoolers have trouble getting to practices.

- CA Clippers management isn't reacting to this HoCo Aquatics competition of their use of UMBC. Shrugging off these comments.
- CA turns kids away every year – we don't have room for them.
- There may be a business case for more competitive Clippers.
- Is Fairland done in a tri-county partnership?
- Maybe we could build a 50 meter pool in Western Howard County.