



Columbia Association  
**Aquatics** master plan  
 Expanding and Enhancing Aquatic Opportunities  
**Executive Summary**

### Planning for the Future

Columbia, Maryland is one of the nation's most well-known planned communities. It is located within one of the most well-educated and prosperous counties in the country. Columbia has abundant open and natural areas, extensive recreational facilities including an unparalleled aquatics system, highly livable neighborhoods, and a vibrant and job-rich economy.

As a planned city, Columbia bears the imprints of past planning efforts. The influence of planning is all around us – it affects the way we live and work, the way we travel on roads and pathways, and the design of our community. Planning is part of our heritage. It has shaped Columbia's identity for more than 40 years and has made Columbia the place it is today.

The fact that we are a mature community does not mean it is time to stop planning and just let the future happen. In fact, the need for planning has never been greater than it is today.

### Change Provides Opportunities and Challenges

Columbia is changing. At this juncture, Columbia is approaching a population of 100,000 with more diversity than ever before in terms of race, national origin, family composition, and age. Redevelopment is occurring downtown and in other areas of the community. Our transportation infrastructure is being examined to better meet new goals for enhanced mobility beyond the automobile. Our community continues to grow as new residents move here and put down roots. These changes generate excitement and tension at the same time.

As we plan for the future of Columbia Aquatics, we know that many of our older community facilities are in need of replacement or rehabilitation. This includes our aquatics facilities. We are also aware of other changes – rising energy costs, increased time pressures on daily living, and uncertain economic realities.

We plan ahead with the hopes of addressing these issues in a way that enhances the quality of life for people living or working in Columbia and ensures that Columbia remains an open, integrated, and caring community.

### Three Plan Challenges

The Columbia Aquatics Master Plan addresses three major challenges, profiled below.

**Challenge 1: Enhancing and Expanding Opportunities and Access.** While Columbia has more community pools than any other place in the United States of its size and arguably more active swimmers than other communities of its size, there are still many segments of our community that do not yet enjoy the joys of swimming or for whom there are barriers to using Columbia's pools. **This plan seeks to enhance and expand opportunities and access for the widest possible array of residents and members through enhanced outreach, learn to swim lessons, pool activities and programming, and by providing a wide variety of aquatic experiences and venues.**

**Challenge 2: Providing Facilities for All.** Even though our aquatics resources are plentiful, there are improvements that can be made and should be made to improve their use, appeal, and the “fun quotient.” There is also a need to balance the competing interests among the wide range of pool users by providing suitable facilities and meeting the needs of the widest possible number of members. There are new amenities and features to be added such as slides and climbing walls. There are enhanced pool – side amenities to be added including technology improvements – WiFi and music. There are enhancements in bathhouses and landscaping. **And there are new proposals to expand our indoor pool space and provide new unique features such as water playgrounds. This plan seeks to provide aquatics facilities that will serve all Columbia residents and aquatic user groups with a wide variety of facility types, features and locations to serve the community as a whole.**

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**Challenge 3: Applying Sustainable Management Practices.** While the focus of the Aquatics Master Plan is on physical facilities, it is also important to emphasize management practices. CA aquatic facilities must be operated and maintained using sound and sustainable management practices, that are in alignment with organization goals and provide for prudent management of CA's economic assets. **This plan identifies a number of management principles and recommended management strategies that will raise the level of service and operation of our aquatic facilities for the enjoyment of the community.**

### **Role and Use of the Aquatics Master Plan**

This Columbia Aquatics Master Plan includes system wide principles, strategies, and priorities for the continued development and management of CA aquatics. It seeks to meet the needs of a very diverse group of pool users and residents and to look ahead and plan for the future. The Aquatics Master Plan will be used by the Columbia Association to balance the wide array of current pool user needs with future community needs. The plan will also be used to establish implementation priorities and develop capital budgets for future aquatic facilities.

### **Quick Guide to the Master Plan**

The draft Aquatics Master Plan's first four chapters include information that provides the framework for the plan's recommendation and address existing conditions, trends, and challenges and civic engagement in the planning process. **The plan's recommendations are presented in Chapter 5, 6, and 7 and these provide the core of the plan.** Chapter 5 includes the **system-wide principles** and these are followed by 17 **key plan issues**. Each issue is discussed and is supplemented with **recommended implementation strategies** to address the issue. Chapter 6 includes **pool-specific recommendations** related to major pool changes or investments and includes a table with related estimated capital costs. Chapter 7 identifies the recommended near term priority projects and investments.

### **System Wide Principles**

The plan's system wide principles and associated recommended strategies are discussed in Chapter 5. These principles represent a set of values that will be used to guide the implementation of the Aquatics Master Plan. The principles are organized by the three major challenges the plan seeks to address.

### **Challenge 1: Enhancing and Expanding Opportunities and Access**

**A. Expand Access to Columbia Aquatics.** The Columbia Association will strive to provide pool access to the greatest number of participants.

**B. Learn to Swim.** Providing the opportunity for all Columbia children and adults to learn to swim and be safe in the water is fundamental to the health and well-being of the community.

**C. Competitive Youth Swim Leagues.** The Columbia Association through the Columbia Clippers swim teams and the Columbia Neighborhood Swim League (CNSL) - will promote the sport of competitive swimming for youth. The goals of these programs vary but they both focus on positive motivation, and teaching and encouraging youth to be better and stronger swimmers. Columbia Association will provide opportunities for youngsters of all ages and skill levels to join these programs. These team and league programs together strive to meet the needs of swimmers of all levels from novice to elite, with the focus on providing the experience of competitive swimming to as many youth as possible.

**D. Pool Water Temperature.** The Columbia Association will strive to provide pool temperatures at the various indoor pools that meet the wide range of desired temperatures for diverse groups of pool users. The Columbia Association will also strive to maintain a constant water temperature at each indoor facility.

### **Challenge 2: Providing Facilities for All**

**E. Meeting the Needs of a Diverse and Growing Community.** The Columbia Association will meet the diverse needs of the community through programs and facilities to meet the wide range of existing and anticipated users.

**F. Balanced Facility Mix.** The Columbia Association will strive to have a balance in facilities that provide a range of aquatics opportunities including recreation, lap, competition, health and wellness, therapy/rehabilitation, and instruction.

**G. Clean and Safe Facilities.** The Columbia Association will provide clean and safe facilities.

**H. Gathering Places.** The Columbia Association will provide aquatics venues that serve as vibrant gathering places.

**Challenge 3: Applying Sustainable Management Practices**

**I. Prudent, Directed Investment.** The Columbia Association will carefully assess aquatic investments – both maintenance and upgrades – to ensure that the benefits of expanding and enhancing aquatics opportunities outweigh the financial costs, given CA’s finite capital and operating resources.

**J. Environmental Sustainability and Energy Reduction.** The Columbia Association will strive to operate its aquatics facilities in an environmentally sustainable manner.

**K. Employ Partnerships.** The Columbia Association will employ joint use and financial partnerships to maximize revenue and facility use and other aquatics organizational goals.

**L.** The specific pool recommendations in Chapter 6 will be used as a guide for future planning and investment.

**Issues and Recommended Implementation Strategies**

Chapter 5 also includes recommended implementation strategies for capital investments, programming, and marketing and communication. The 17 main issues that frame the recommended strategies are listed below. Chapter 5 includes associated implementation strategies for each issue.

**Capital Investment Issues**

**Issue 1** – Unmet Need for Indoor Pool Capacity

**Issue 2** – Modernize and Expand Indoor Aquatics Facilities Focused on Youth and Families

**Issue 3** – Enhancing the Pool side Experience is an Important Part of Keeping Columbia Pools Attractive

**Issue 4** – Columbia has Extensive Outdoor Pool Capacity – Which is Both a Strength and a Weakness

**Issue 5** – Meeting the New Americans with Disabilities Act Requirements

**Issue 6** – Interest in Increasing Environmental Sustainability, Enhancing Public Health and Reducing Energy Use Require Changes in CA Practices

Program, Communication and Management Issues

**Issue 7** – Enhance Programming of Columbia Pools to Continue to Meet Changing User Needs, Including Those of Older Adults

**Issue 8** – Changing Community Socio Economic Characteristics and Demographics Provide Opportunities for New Residents and Pool Members

**Issue 9** – There is a Growing Demand for Pool Time and Lap Swimming Capacity

**Issue 10** – Knowing How to Swim is an Essential Part of Community Life in Columbia

**Issue 11** – Therapy Pool Use is High and Growing

**Issue 12** – Providing Aquatics Programming and Recreation Opportunities for Young Adults is Important to Enhancing a Sense of Community Today and for the Future of Columbia

**Issue 13** – Monitoring and Maintaining CA’s Diverse Aquatics Facilities in Good Repair is Complex and Compounded by a Large Proportion of Aging Facilities

**Marketing and Communications Issues**

**Issue 14** – Expand Partnerships to Enhance Pool Resources and Access

**Issue 15** – Providing Ways for Low Income Columbia Residents to Use the Outdoor Pools

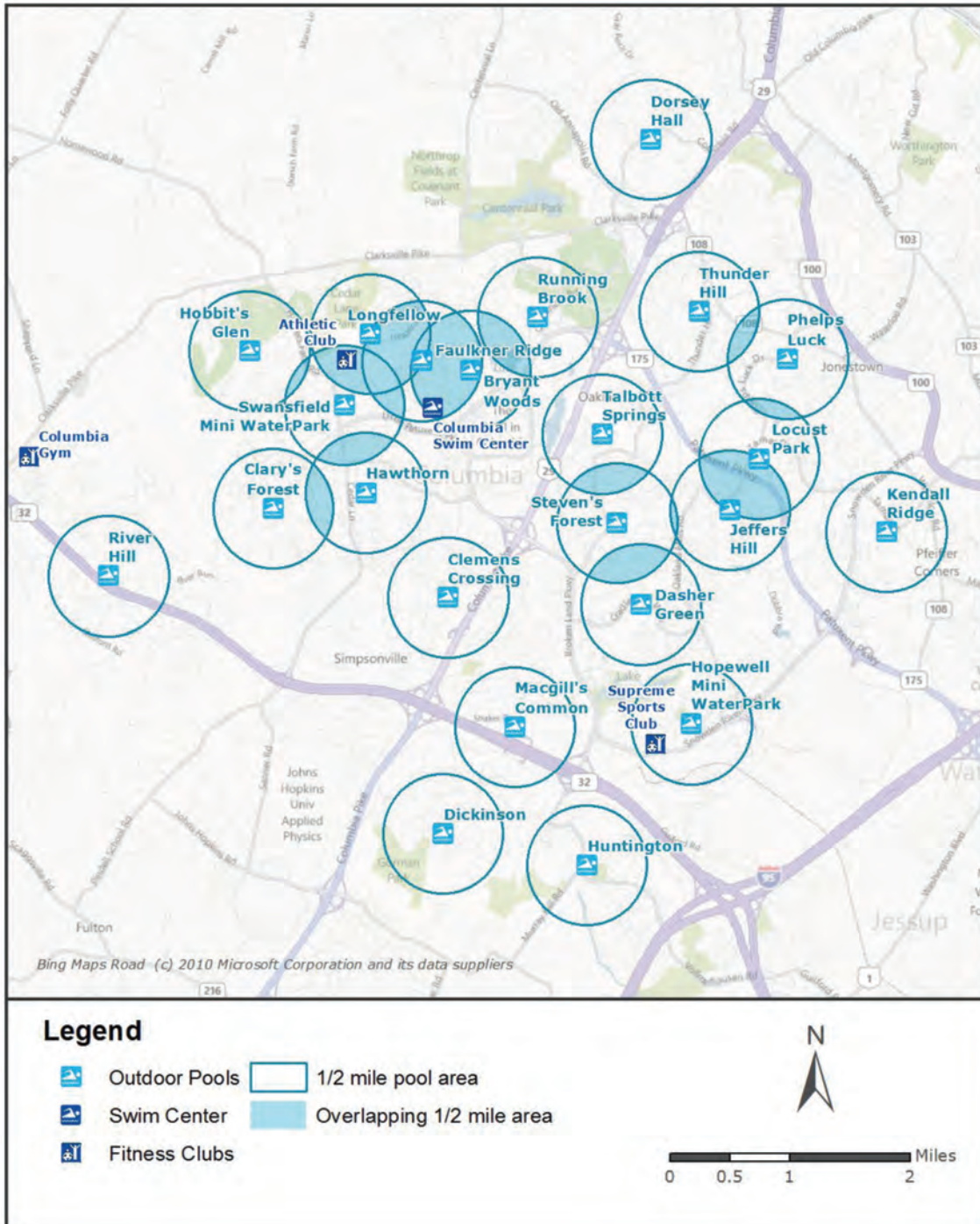
**Issue 16** – Effective Communication and Easy Access to On line Information are Essential to Providing a Positive Customer Experience.

**Issue 17** – Focus Marketing Efforts on Increasing Community Involvement in CA Programs, Especially Pools.

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### Pool History and Distribution

In the early years of Columbia’s development, outdoor pools were constructed in each neighborhood. In the 1980s, CA’s Board of Directors changed this policy to move away from constructing any additional neighborhood pools because of the high cost and the large number of existing pools. The map below shows the location of Columbia’s pools with a ½-mile ring drawn around each outdoor pool showing the proximity of pools to each other and the overlap in service areas.



**Master Plan Process**

The aquatics master planning process was rigorous and harnessed the expertise of an inter-departmental CA work team to address programming, demographic and other trends, facilities, sustainability, financial, and staffing issues related to the future of aquatics. The Columbia Association also used Geographical Information System (GIS) analysis to understand where pool users live and where they choose to swim to better understand use patterns. The planning process also included learning from other experts. The Columbia Association consulted with more than a dozen aquatics management and design experts; consultants; and recreation and aquatics agencies around the United States to learn about recent trends related to pool construction, enhancement features, and programming.

**Civic Engagement**

The Columbia Association provided a wide variety and large number of opportunities for public involvement in the Aquatics Master Plan process including public meetings and workshops, focus groups, a webpage and an on-line commenting tool. As a result, the Columbia Association heard from a broad array of community members during the planning process and learned much from these interactions regarding the various needs and desires of pool users and community members. As a way of making sure that a broad range of ideas and interests informed the master planning process and the plan, CA established an Aquatics Master Plan Task Force. The mission of the task force was to “provide guidance to the Columbia Association as it develops the aquatics master plan, during Fiscal Year 2012.” Composed of volunteers with experience and diverse interests in CA aquatics programs, the task force met monthly to discuss, review and comment on staff prepared working documents, analyses, and draft recommendations. While written by staff, the master plan has been shaped by ideas and suggestions from all of these public involvement inputs.



# Aquatics master plan process

## Goals of the Study

- 1 Engage the Columbia community in an inclusive process to plan for the future of Columbia's aquatic program;
- 2 Provide a framework for Columbia aquatic facilities that balances current & future community needs given changing demographics & resource constraints; &
- 3 Establish implementation priorities for the future of Columbia aquatics.

