

**Aquatics Master Plan
Lap Swimmers Focus Group
Notes from August 24, 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 Therapeutic swimmers. 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?

Answers 1:

Facilities

- Temperature at the Swim Center since this spring
- The number of choices. Love the main pool at the Swim Center.
- Talbott Springs is the best outdoor pool.
- Dedicated guards at the Swim Center at 5:30am.
- Short walk from the lockerroom to the pool at the Swim Center.
- Hard to match what we have here (lockers, cleanliness, temperatures).
- Swim Center is the best indoor facility.
- Hobbit's Glen outdoor pool has shade, good water temperature and natural light.
- Clarity and quality of water is high.
- Having shower facilities at the outdoor pools is a plus.
- Pool system is great and convenient. Three pools in walking distance in some neighborhoods.
- Love Talbott Springs because it is not used much.

Programs

- Availability of times to swim at Supreme Sports Club – there are lap lanes all the time.
- Early bird outdoor swim at the outdoor pools in the summer.
- Lifeguards have more training and drills.
- Water aerobics classes are good.
- Senior swim is a great idea.
- Some people like quieter pools and CA provides a mix of what is available for all.
- Friday night adult night/hot tub.
- Adult Swims.
- Swim Teams practice in pools that are closed for the day.
- Staff is nice. Guards are better trained today than they were in earlier years.

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

Answers 2:

Facilities

- Supreme Sports Club is closed the same week that they close outdoor pools. Close at different times.
- Used to be 4 lap lanes at Steven's Forest. Now there are only 3. Would like another lane added back in.
- Need a bathroom downstairs at the Swim Center main pool.
- Program pool at Swim Center– when is it used? From 11:30am-2:30pm it is not used much.
- Program pool is not a deep water pool and therefore gets really dirty.
- There are complaints about the cleanliness of some of the pools: Supreme Sports Club and program pool in particular. Not all the time. Need to vacuum them more often.
- Upgrade furniture at the outdoor pools. Add more trees and hot tubs.
- At Supreme Sports Club, there are sometimes no lanes at prime times because of the Clippers and other programs.
- It is confusing to know which pools are closed on which days.
- Clean the Main Pool at the Swim Center after Splashdown is open. Clean all pools on Sunday nights.
- Showers: Hobbits Glen has no indoor showers. It would be nice to have some.
- Need shade at some some pools, such as Talbott Springs.

- Locker rooms at some pools need upgrades. Some need small things, like clothes hooks at Locust Park and benches or raising the height of the mirrors so adults can easily use them.
- In the men's locker room at Phelps Luck pool, there is a sharp edged ledge as you step into the showers. Swimmers have cut their feet on this edge.
- Swim Center: The floor gets slippery. They used to have mats but these are gone.
- Some outdoor pools do not have any snack or drink machines.
- Bathrooms at the outdoor pools are not always cleaned well. If the guards clean the bathrooms, they need to do a better job or CA should have someone else do it.
- Outdoor pools have lots of bugs. They should do more skimming.
- At Supreme Sports Club, the actual entrance to the pool from the locker rooms is inconvenient. Swimmers must walk down a long hallway and go down steps. The hallway is sometimes VERY cold.
- Extend the outdoor pool season.

Programs

- 20% of guards don't check IDs at Talbott Springs
- Extend hours at the outdoor pools; open earlier (before noon).
- Senior swim hours at Swim Center are too short. Add more.

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

Answers 3:

- Howard Community College has a pool but it is not as nice as the CA pools.
- 50 meter pool.
- May need a partnership (e.g., with the County) to get a 50 meter pool built.
- The University of South Carolina has a beautiful facility with a 50 meter pool and a 10 meter diving pool.

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:

- During prime lap swimming times, have more programs outside when possible.
- Open the indoor pools at 5am.
- Have another indoor pool.

- Some programs have six kids in a lane. It is good that they are swimming and that CA is trying to accommodate their needs.

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 has been talked about at Steven's Forest.
- Make one a 50 meter pool.
- If this is done, open it 12 months a year. Don't just cover it, upgrade the whole thing.
- This would be a great idea.
- Bubble one of the pools in Long Reach (Kendall Ridge or Locust Park).
- Definitely need to add indoor space.

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:

- Declare Talbott Springs a lap swimmers pool.
- Advertise more.
- Have rotating theme pools. Make one a lap pool everyday.
- Too expensive for some people to join the pools or CA. Make it cheaper.
- Party nights sponsored by the Village Centers draw people so the demand is there.
- Address aging demographics and try to get seniors into the pools. Work through Senior Centers to give price breaks. Pools can provide a needed social outlet for seniors.
- Some of the pools are in high crime area that scares some people away.
- Direct kids to the pools and away from street corners.
- Partner with the schools.
- Tie in with school PTAs. Need partnerships.
- Work with apartment managers; pilot studies for usage.
- Join the least used pools for a lower fee.
- Have a teen pool, keep pools open later, initiate programs for teens who might like to come and just hang out if they don't want to swim.
- Schools could help to get kids to the pools.
- Get people to learn how to swim. This would promote swimming in the community.
- Publicize lesson programs more.

- Take out a 2 page ad in the Flier. Feature “pearls of Columbia” (under utilized pools) on one page and “hot pools of Columbia” (highly utilized pools) on the other. The two classifications would attract different groups.
- Increase awareness of what is available. Use TV spots instead of print media.
- Run a contest to have kids make ads.
- Use “AdSense” on Google to advertise.

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:

- Additions like volleyball, 4 Square. Could have Volleyball tournaments and other athletic activities.
- Young people in their 20s don’t have places to go.
- Basketball courts, tennis courts, etc. Light at night. Have tournaments.
- Use pools more during the year through partnerships with schools. Would need to heat the outdoor pools to do this.
- Heat popular pools so they could open earlier in the season and close later.
- Cover pools so you could use them as different purpose the rest of the year. E.g. make splash pads.
- Need creative thinking to bring lesser used pools “back to life”. Use business models to do smart things and get a dividend from your capital investment. May have to take a loss on some to obtain a gain overall. The gain may not be in the form of profit but in the form of good will and building a stronger community.

Other comments

- Use the ACT tool as advertising. It allows people to comment and see comments immediately.
- Swimmers want a consistent water temperature.