

**Aquatics Master Plan
Masters Focus Group
Notes from June 22, 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.

Masters Focus Group

This focus group brought together a small group of Masters 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

- Outdoor pools
Amount of different pools; lots of options/choices

Answers 1: Programs

- The Swim Center is convenient and well maintained
- The Masters Program has outstanding coaching
- CA provides a wide variety of programs that meet the needs of all age groups and levels of swimmers. Even have Aqua Zumba.
- Appeal to diverse groups.
- Program scheduling is flexible, allow all to participate, scheduled times work for a wide range of lifestyles
- The flexibility is present in Masters scheduling as well as Aqua Fitness classes
- The staff at the Swim Center is good. They are helpful, "bend over backwards" for swimmers of all kinds and swimmers have developed a close relationship with the CA Team.

- Programs reflect a sense of community. People who work at the outdoor pools live in the community and grow up with the pools.
- At the Swim Center, sometimes classes are held in some of the lanes while other lanes are open for laps.

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

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Answers 2: Facilities

- Build a 50 meter pool
- Indoor pool time is at a premium because so many groups use the pools, plus they need to maintain time for lap swimming.
- The pools have various temperatures. Balancing everyone's needs is difficult – faster swimmers need it cooler; others need it warmer
- For a training environment, Masters need more lanes and cooler pools with more consistency. The 5:30am Masters program has 25 people using 5 lanes so it is a very full program. There is no room to expand the program to more people.
- Pool temperatures are difficult to balance to provide a correct temperature for all of the diverse people and activities.
- Some pool temperatures are too warm for lap swimmers/masters/triathletes
- The Columbia Gym pool is too warm for lap swimmers and the way it is designed, kids can pee in the pool making it undesirable for me as a masters swimmer
- Balance is needed: would be great to dedicate one pool to Masters/lap swimmers/triathletes
- The location of the pools determines where people go to swim. They like to go to a location convenient to them. This results in all kinds of swimmers with different needs using each pool.
- The Swim Center Program Pool needs to be open more hours. If people could always swim laps there, the pool could be kept at a certain temperature needed for lap swimming.
- Keep outdoor pools open longer in the season if guards are available

Answers 2: Programs

- Add another time slot for Masters on weekends.
- Have a Masters program at 7am. At this time, a 7am Masters program would interfere with lap swimmers.
- More options for Masters swimmers would be better and would allow the program to expand.
- In the winter, the Masters program has 11 practices each week.
- Add swim lessons for adults

- Add stroke clinics for adults. This would apply to people who were not at the Masters level but want to learn to swim better. A program like this could be a tune up for joining the Masters program and could be held two days each week.
- Provide an additional lane or two at the Masters swim times for those who are not up to speed of the Masters. This would be a way to grow the program. People may not be ready in their minds to move into the Masters program. This would be a way for them to try it.
- Triathletes need a swimming program like “Stroke Mechanics for Adults” to build their confidence. This could be an intermediate step for potential Masters swimmers and for Triathletes.

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

Answers 3:

- Olympic pool in Barcelona
- Masters group outside of Rehobeth Beach has a good pool but more time availability issues than CA.
- 50 meter pool that is 9 feet deep all across it; this could also at times be divided into two 25 meter pools and have a kids section and a diving pool. A pool like this would answer some of the questions about lap time because more lanes could be made available by dividing the pool.
- Fairland Aquatic Center, Montgomery Aquatic Center
- Outdoor pools would need backstroke flags and time clocks to use for Masters program

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:

- A 50 meter pool that can be divided into two 25 meter pools as described above would make more lanes available
- A 50 meter pool could be a revenue producer for Columbia. CA could use it to host meets for which they don't have a facility to do so now. National meets, meets for Masters could take place here and the swimmers would not need to go to other locations. The meets would bring people to Columbia. The teams that came would pay to enter the meet and use the pool. It would help to grow the program which would increase revenue. Revenue increases would be offset by increased costs to operate the pool and the investment in the construction of the pool.

- Pool dedication: dedicate a pool for lap swimming, Masters and Clippers. This would please some people and make enemies of others.
- Not much coordination and communication between CA programs and swim facilities. For example, the Columbia Gym does not know what the Swim Center does. They are not thinking about each other. We have islands within the CA Aquatics system.

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:

- Would support this. Converted to new indoor facility that would be usable twelve months of the year.
- Adding another indoor pool would increase lanes and time availability
- 50 meter pool is the first choice. Enclosing an outdoor pool would be an OK second choice.
- This option could get the Clippers out of the Supreme Sports Club. It would allow more Masters swimmers and the pre-Masters program discussed earlier.
- Swansfield is a suggested option for enclosing an outdoor pool.
- Could also modify a pool to make it 50 meters and enclose it.
- Use a pool that is currently underutilized
- Cost is a big issue

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:

- Have a dedicated outdoor lap pool in each village. Now the outdoor pools allow lap swimming for 15 minutes each hour (adult swim)
- Theme pools for pools which are underutilized. Adults only? Teens only?
- Grid the city. Determine one pool in each area that would be dedicated to residents 55 and older. Work with Howard County Transit to get people there. Special pricing for 55 and older. Howard County Transit would stop at the pool. Could do this two to three days each week if not all week. Open the pool to the entire community on weekends
- Stroke Clinic for adults at an underutilized outdoor pool
- Outside groups want to rent pools and are not able to do so. Let outside groups rent underutilized pools. Rent for functions on weekends, e.g. business employee outings. Would need to adapt bathhouses and lighting at most pools for rentals.
- Currently rent to camps when pools are not used.

- Have earlier hours at outdoor pools. Only Locust Park is open early. Could do a Masters program on Tuesday and Thursday at 8am at an outdoor pool.
- Triathlons are a huge program in Columbia/Howard County. Could use the pools for Kid's Triathlon programs focused on swimming.

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:

- Don't do anything to it. Keep neighborhood pools intact. Kids walk to the their neighborhood pools
- Make underutilized pools "Resident Card" pools
- If pool is not important to a neighborhood based on low utilization, could it be used for other purposes?
- Need to determine why the pools are underutilized. Neighborhoods have changed
- Maybe mini golf
- Expectation in the community that there would be neighborhood pools
- Some neighborhoods have not turned over yet and have not yet added new families. Older adults – aging in place - live in them.
- There are not enough lanes to meet current demands of pool users. Determine how to get underutilized pools to be more utilized rather than convert to another use.
- Have other activities to make more outdoor pools more attractive: grills, picnics, babysitting (Kidspace is not available at outdoor pools), beach volleyball which could be open to the public, larger concession stands with more options.
- Tallbot Springs has terrible bathrooms, no snackbar, is not handicapped accessible, no other activities. It needs an upgrade.