

**Aquatics Master Plan
Therapeutic Swimmers Focus Group
Notes from July 25, 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.

Therapeutic Swimmers Focus Group

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:

- The variety of facilities (types of pools and geographical locations)
- The therapy pool is helpful
- Hot water pool—Love it!
- Salt water instead of chlorine is a plus
- Guards make it fun; they listen well
- Good relationship with Chesapeake Physical Therapy
- The outdoor pools are accessible and spread out
- Lessons are wonderful; classes are enjoyable and beneficial
- The classes have super instructors
- Classes are held everyday except Sunday for all people. The one Sunday class is for only certain members
- There is a good variety of classes
- Deepwater fitness is good for variety and sets a different pace than the warm water classes
- The aquatics options cover a spectrum for all kinds of exercise and temperature.

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

Answers 2:

- Salt water in therapy pool “eats” bathing suits (but so does chlorine)
- The therapy pool needs to be larger
- Elevator has been a big problem at the therapy pool. Some people have gotten stuck in the elevator more than once. When this happened on one occasion, the staff didn’t know the procedures for getting people out of the elevator or how to help them.
- The handicapped parking specifically and therapy pool parking in general is inadequate. Non-handicapped people have been seen using the handicapped spaces and non-therapy pool users park in the therapy pool spaces. The designated spots need to be saved for the seniors and handicapped. Perhaps the police could come by occasionally and check.
- The class schedule at the therapy pool has only a few classes outside of working hours. Some people have a hard time getting to the classes at 6:30pm because of their jobs. Would like to see more evening and weekend classes and classes later in the evening.
- The locker rooms have tight space. There are too many classes scheduled at one time. Perhaps the long lockers could be replaced with shorter lockers to increase the number of lockers.
- Many pools were closed on the day that school got out.
- Some pools don’t have amenities; others have “bells and whistles”.
- Aqua yoga was cancelled in the therapy pool
- Confusing when it is necessary or not to sign in and register for particular classes.
- Schedules are hard to decipher; hard to keep track of changing schedules.
- Schedule changes not well communicated. Should be able to go on the website to find changes.
- Would be nice to have more variety of classes and to add a class focusing on balance.
- Classes are so popular that they are crowded. Short people cannot move around to some spots in the pool because of the depth of the pool. On the other side of the issue, taller people cannot use all parts of the pool because they need DEEPER water.
- The physical therapy clients are sometimes a distraction. When they are in the pool at the same time as the classes, the class members cannot always hear the instructor. It would be much better if the physical therapists were scheduled at non-class times.
- Keep the pools open past 5pm on weekends

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

Answers 3:

- August and September: Keep one or two outdoor pools open during the day; keep some outdoor classes going, either in the afternoon/evening or in the morning.
- Other places have evening classes later than 6:30pm

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:

- Make the therapy pool bigger
- Classes are so popular that they are crowded. Have more classes and limit the number of people who can attend each class.

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:

- Enclosing a pool sounds great! CA already has “a hole in the ground” so building on this makes sense.
- Maybe enclose one without the “bells and whistles”
- Make another therapy pool out of one of them
- Need locker rooms and parking if you enclose one.

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:

- Need more amenities at some of the pools
- Enclose one to make it an indoor facility
- Market the pools through the schools; the neighborhood of Talbott Springs has lots of kids but low pool usage.
- Target marketing to the Hispanic population.
- Adults only lap pool

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:

- Make another therapy pool
- Put a therapy pool on the east side of Columbia for geographic balance.
- If a second therapy pool is created, stagger the hours with the one at the Athletic Club.
- Roller skating
- Playground/picnic area with the pool for group activities like at some of the parks

Other comments

- Alternate class times with free swim time in the therapy pool
- Any new pools (or renovated pools) should have more than ladder access; they should have a beach entrance or stairs.
- Members don't know if they need to register for classes.
- Supreme Sports Club has "freezing" temperature.