



Executive Overview

Mission

SPLASH is a nonprofit organization that exists for the long-range development of aquatics facilities to meet the needs of the region.

The Need

Development of community swimming pools was once considered a very high quality of life priority in the Greater Seattle area. *SPLASH believes it still is.*

The visionary Forward Thrust capital improvement bond was passed in 1968 by Seattle and King County voters and emphasized recreation, leading to the acquisition of park sites and construction of public recreation facilities, particularly swimming pools. The understanding, at the time, was that usage of the pools would be prioritized for use by schoolchildren.

Local neighborhoods also developed small private pools to meet the needs of their particular area—these were all built between 1959 and 1970. Children growing up in Bellevue have made it a lifelong activity.

The high school teams have regularly placed at State Championships, and Bellevue swimmers have competed on a national level for the past 40 years. This is an amazing feat, given that these teams have regularly scrambled for pool space, and the majority swim outdoors throughout the inclement months of the school year due to lack of pool capacity.

Bellevue's only public pool, the Bellevue Aquatic Pool, was built with Forward Thrust money in 1970 on the Odle Middle School campus. In 1995, the City of Bellevue acquired the pool from King County.

Unfortunately, this indoor pool is too shallow for use by high school sports teams, and Bellevue School District has never conducted an educational water safety program or fitness program. Though this award-winning facility was improved to serve the needs of senior and disabled residents in 1997, the growing needs of the remainder of the population were not addressed at the same time.

There is still no public aquatics venue in Bellevue suitable for aquatic competitions of any kind. The Eastside is now home to more than 500,000 residents, and the number of swimmers has grown with the population.

The King County Aquatics Facility was constructed for the 1990 Goodwill Games in Federal Way, and is currently the only major indoor aquatics facility in the Puget Sound region that is able to host quality diving, synchronized swimming, water polo and major swimming competitions. Originally, the Bellevue Community College campus was the preferred choice for its location, but red tape prevented this.

Given the distance to the Federal Way facility and the growing inability of the facility to accommodate the many competing aquatics activities and events, there is a need for several major pool complexes in the region, including one on the Eastside.

The Bellevue Promise

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Bellevue voters approved a series of quality of life initiatives to acquire open space and park sites to serve the future environmental and recreational needs of the community. The promise was that a full range of recreational facilities was included in that vision, and that their investment would eventually provide healthy, family-oriented activities—to make Bellevue a great place to live, to work, and to visit. Although much open space was preserved, the next part of the grand plan has been just that—only a plan.

It is true that a variety of sports fields, some performance venues, two community centers, and a senior center have been developed. However, the recreational needs of many other residents, many who do not have access to private facilities, have not been addressed at all. Accommodating aquatic sports, fitness, and recreational activities is a critical unmet need.

National park standards are that there should be one public pool for every 20,000 people. Given Bellevue's population today, Bellevue should have five additional public swimming pools.

Bellevue has also become a major economic hub. To ensure Bellevue's quality of life, it is essential that the City of Bellevue take the next steps to actually build the community infrastructure for our families and residents.

The demand for a regional aquatics facility is particularly high on the Eastside because no Eastside community has sufficient pool capacity for its growing population. Bellevue is an ideal, accessible, and central location for an aquatics facility that can accommodate some of the unmet regional need.

Quality of Life

Community—Public Access and Family

Swimming pools have traditionally served as vital community gathering places. As the population continues to grow and age, as the population becomes more diverse, and the socio-economic makeup of our communities continues to change, public swimming pools will become increasingly important.

Perhaps more than any other recreational activity, swimming is an activity accessible to all ages and abilities—to individuals and to extended families. Swimming, water play, and sports don't take a lot of expensive equipment beyond development of the facility, so its presence makes it a readily accessible activity to people of all incomes.

The wide appeal of swimming makes an aquatics center a key component of any vibrant community that wants to be a great place for families. The public can benefit from a larger multi-purpose facility that is open to all, year round, for a full range of activities and interests. There are many examples of aquatics facilities nationwide where recreational, fitness, and sports activities can take place simultaneously. (Link to model swimming facilities page)

Issues of Health and Safety

In a community where year-round outdoor recreation is only for souls hardy enough to brave the elements nine months each year, there are far too few indoor options available.

Swimming is a lifelong activity, and particularly important for an aging population. It can provide an aerobic workout that is easier on the body than running or other land-based activities. Pool therapy is also an asset for those citizens in need of physical rehabilitation.

Furthermore, in a water-rich community, water safety programs are essential. All too often, it is the child or young person who has not had access to swimming lessons or an indoor water experience that drowns at our public beaches or in unsupervised water activities.

A Civic and Economic Asset

Bellevue can take the lead in addressing this regional problem. A major aquatics complex would attract both leisure activities and competitive events.

Without a competition facility within the City of Bellevue, residents must endure the inconvenience of driving long distances to competition and practice venues elsewhere. In doing so, they also take with them their dollars to pay for lodging, restaurants, shopping, and evening activities elsewhere. High-level or regional events typically take place over three to five days. Bringing events to Bellevue would bring visitors who would contribute to our economy.

USA Swimming estimates that a major competitive event can bring more than \$500,000 in indirect economic benefit to the surrounding community. A 2002 Economic Impact Study done for the King County Aquatic Center illustrates actual benefits for that facility and supports the supposition that this type of facility could produce a significant return on investment for our community.

Bellevue school sports programs would rent the complex regularly for daily practice and league and district-level swim meets. Additional rentals would come from private schools as well as area colleges and universities. In addition to the many public and private high school teams in the region, teams who are members of USA Swimming, U.S. Masters, USA Diving, USA Synchro, and USA Water Polo will want to rent the facility for their events.

Community Support

Building an aquatics complex has been in the Bellevue Parks and Open Systems Plan for many years. The need is tremendous; the priority should be high; and the time is right.

SPLASH is a community-based nonprofit group focused on generating broad-based support for the aquatics facility that is envisioned to meet the area needs. The group will bring together community partners with the drive, expertise, and financial support to make a major aquatics project a priority in Bellevue. To build a multi-use aquatics facility that accommodates leisure, fitness, and competition needs, SPLASH proposes a partnership with the City of Bellevue and the Bellevue School District.

Furthermore, SPLASH will seek major funding from constituents of the aquatics communities, the general and philanthropic community, as well as other government resources to:

- Help pay for construction.
- (Based on a negotiated matching formula with community partners)
- Fund a significant operating endowment to help keep the project viable in the future.

The Project

To serve the needs of the community and to make the operation of the complex as viable as possible, the project should incorporate a “necessary mix of uses”:

- Community-friendly features—party rooms and picnic areas, classrooms, ample parking, quality locker rooms, concessions, and a spectator area for revenue-generating meets
- A 25-yard instructional, fitness, and lap pool
- A warm water area for therapy and young children
- Leisure areas—open areas for unstructured use and water play, including slides, foundations and water playgrounds

- A 50-meter by 25-yard deep water training and competition pool, with features to support swimming, water polo, diving, synchronized swimming, and dry land training

Timeline

The timeline is being developed. The process will incorporate the following steps:

1. Feasibility study and public process
2. Concept design and project planning
3. Partnership agreement
4. Sitting, final design, and budgeting
5. Construction
6. Operations

Budget

The budget has not been prepared yet. Many case studies have been examined. Given the cost of inflation relative to construction costs, the estimate is that a major aquatics project will require \$25 to \$30 million to build.