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Bellevue considering another aquatic facility

Mar 25 2009

The Bellevue City Council is considering adding another aquatic center and is looking for partners to pay for the facility.

After looking at a preliminary feasibility study at its Monday, March 23 meeting, council members asked staff to find potential partners, including other cities, to help fund the construction and maintenance costs that would be involved.

"There is interest in pursuing this further," said Mayor Grant Degginger. "We have a long way to go in terms of identifying what partners may be out there, what kinds of structure and governance might work and what the optimum program is here so that we can develop something that will be used and loved and a great asset to the community and the region."



People enjoy the warm-water pool at the Bellevue Aquatic Center near Odle Middle School in Bellevue on Wednesday. Chad Coleman/Bellevue Reporter

Bellevue now has a pool and aquatic center at Odle Middle School on Northeast Eighth Street.

The council commissioned the feasibility study in 2007, after a group of area swimmers asked the city to consider building a multi-purpose aquatic complex that could accommodate a wide range of aquatic needs, including competitive swimming events. About 25 members of the group, Swimming Pools for Leisure, Active Sports and Health (SPLASH), attended Monday's meeting and several spoke in support of the competitive aquatic facility options identified in the study. The group has sought such a facility for several years.

The Bellevue Aquatic Center near Odle meets the needs of lap swimmers and children taking lessons. It also provides a warm water therapy pool, but the current facility does not meet length or depth requirements for more serious competitive swimming.

The draft study confirmed great demand for new or expanded swimming facilities throughout the region. However, swimming pools are very expensive to build and maintain, the study noted. According to the study, the more expensive the facility, the less fees cover the cost of maintenance.

The study was conducted to assist the council in identifying current needs and reach a decision if, or to what extent, it supports the development of an aquatic center. The draft feasibility study: 1) explored a range of facility options with estimated financial performance; 2) analyzed the current aquatic market; 3) conducted some preliminary site analysis; and 4) explored a range of potential financing options.

Five kinds of swimming facilities were contemplated, from a locally-focused \$19 million outdoor leisure pool to an \$80 million national indoor natatorium with an Olympic-sized pool and a diving well.

As part of the study, city staff met with nearby cities, school districts, Bellevue Community College and King County, as well as the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce and the Bellevue Downtown Association. There were focus group meetings with aquatics interest groups and a public interest survey of Bellevue residents.

Significant findings included: All groups and organizations identified the need for additional aquatics facilities to serve the Eastside;

The local competitive swimming community is very active, with 4,277 families being members of private outdoor pools in Bellevue, and 3,640 swimmers participating in 26 Eastside swim clubs;

Most aquatic facilities are 30 to 40 years old and in need of significant renovation or replacement within the next 5 to 10 years. Some local facilities have already closed or may close in the near future;

Most area high schools, including all Bellevue schools, do not have their own pools, and rely on other aquatic facilities to serve their competitive swim programs; and

Growth in many local aquatics organizations/programs is constrained due to a lack of pool time and space.

The public interest survey indicated that nearly half of Bellevue households use swimming facilities and/or programs, with the most popular swimming types being recreational swimming, fitness/lap swimming and swim lessons.

The council reviewed each of the options and asked for more information about facilities that could accommodate local and regional competitions.

The council directed staff to return at a later date to further define program needs, site considerations and potential city involvement in this major undertaking, and to seek alternative funding sources, including both capital and operating partners.

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