



WALNUT CREEK

aquatics needs assessment report

DRAFT



Walnut Creek

Aquatics Needs Assessment Report

Prepared for the

City of Walnut Creek

by

The Sports Management Group

918 Parker Street, Suite A13

Berkeley, California 94710

510.849.3090 | www.sportsmgmt.com

March 3, 2010



WALNUT CREEK
aquatics needs assessment study

Executive Summary

DRAFT





WALNUT CREEK

aquatics needs assessment study

Executive Summary

Providing outstanding community facilities and maintaining a sufficient inventory of facilities to meet the needs of the community is a strategic objective of the City of Walnut Creek Arts, Recreation, and Community Services Department. In August 2009, the City of Walnut Creek engaged The Sports Management Group to perform an Aquatics Needs Assessment. The objective of the study was to: (1) conduct an assessment of the City's existing aquatic facilities and programs, (2) analyze the market conditions for aquatics, (3) assess the interest and demand for aquatics program, (4) identify deficiencies, and (5) recommend improvements necessary for the delivery of a comprehensive and financially sustainable aquatic program. The study was conducted with an extensive public outreach process designed to provide opportunity for public input. This input process will continue as the report from the study is presented to the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Commission and to the City Council.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CITY'S EXISTING AQUATIC FACILITIES & PROGRAMS

The City of Walnut Creek owns and operates two aquatic facilities: the Clarke Swim Center located in Heather Farm Park, and the Larkey Park Pool located in Larkey Park. The Clarke Swim Center was opened to the public in 1969 and houses three swimming pools: a 50-meter x 25-yard lap pool, a 60' x 30' instructional pool, and a 25 meter x 46' diving pool. A 6,900 square foot bathhouse provides access control and reception, locker room and shower facilities, a classroom, fitness room, staff office and support space.

Larkey Swim Center opened in 1967 and houses two pools: a 25-yard by 6 lane lap pool with a 40' x 40' diving well, and a round children's wading pool with a diameter of 20'. A 3,400 square foot bathhouse provides space for access control and reception, locker rooms, front offices, and support space.

In August and September of 2009, a team of architects, engineers, and a pool designer performed an assessment of the physical condition of all swimming pools, pool decks, building structures,

mechanical rooms, and the surrounding amenities. This analysis included site visits, review of construction documents, and interviews with city staff.

Walnut Creek's aquatic facilities are nearing the end of their service life and require renovation or replacement. The Clarke Swim Center is no longer the premier venue for aquatics in the county. The physical conditions and/or design of the existing Clarke Swim Center and Larkey Park Pool facilities have negatively impacted many of the existing programs and limit new programs for which there is a community demand. The summary findings are provided in this report. The detailed reports are located in the Appendix

In conjunction with the assessment of current programming and facility use, The Sports Management Group analyzed the operating costs and revenue generation for the City's aquatic program. Like most city-operated aquatic programs, the Walnut Creek program is heavily reliant on an operating subsidy from the General Fund. The operating subsidy for actual direct costs in fiscal year 2008-2009 was \$767,000, a 49% cost recovery. Clarke Swim Center achieved a 51% cost recovery while Larkey Park Pool achieved a 33% cost recovery. Cost recovery is defined as the percentage of revenue that is generated to offset operating costs. In general, traditional rectangular pools, like those operated by the City, achieve a 40% to 60% cost recovery. Planning objectives presented in the Recommendations chapter include developing new facilities and programs that can improve the cost recovery and decrease the General Fund subsidy.

BASELINE REPLACEMENT COST – CLARKE SWIM CENTER

As identified in the assessment of the existing facilities, the pools at Clarke Swim Center cannot be renovated to meet current standards. The pools must be replaced to support the current community aquatics programs. Prior to presenting the recommendations for the new aquatic facilities, it is useful to understand the baseline cost to replace the existing facilities. The consultant team prepared cost estimates for Clarke Swim Center based on the following assumptions:



Executive Summary

BASELINE REPLACEMENT COST – CLARKE SWIM CENTER - CONTINUED

- The replacement pools would meet the current service levels but would not expand program opportunities or capacity.
- The replacement pools would conform to current state and county health codes and meet the requirements of the various governing bodies that sanction swimming, diving, synchronized swimming, and water polo.
- The 50-meter pool would be replaced with an all-deep pool of the same size.
- The dive pool (25 meter x 46') would be replaced with a 30-meter x 25-yard pool.
- The existing 1,800 sf instructional pool would be replaced with a 2,000 sq. ft. instructional pool. This pool is larger than the existing pool to offset the loss of shallow water (4') in the existing 50-meter pool.
- 6,900 sq. ft. of the bathhouse would be remodeled with a 4,000 sq. ft. addition to modernize to contemporary standards, conform to health code requirements, accommodate the additional pool mechanical required for separate systems, and increase storage capacity.
- The facilities have not been designed and therefore, the costs can only be estimated in general planning numbers. The order-of-magnitude total project cost in 2010 dollars is \$15 million. The baseline does not include improvements to Larkey Park Pool.
- Operating costs are estimated to decrease due to assumed energy efficiencies and reduced maintenance costs. However, those decreases are offset by reduced revenues from the loss of swim lesson and fitness class programming in the all deep 50-meter pool.

It is anticipated that the annual operating subsidy for direct operating costs will remain in the \$700,000 to \$750,000 range, assuming the continuation of the current fee structure and fee policy.

MARKET CONDITIONS FOR AQUATICS

The Sports Management Group conducted a market analysis to assess the market conditions that may have an impact on the demand for aquatic programs and the capacity of the market to respond to that demand. The first step was to (1) examine the demographics of the service area, (2) identify market segments, (3) identify the trends impacting the demand and delivery of aquatic services, and (4) inventory aquatic service providers and venues for competitive aquatics. These elements are described in this report.

The Sports Management Group examined how effectively current aquatic programming and the aquatic facilities at the Clarke Swim Center and Larkey Park Pool are serving the public. This analysis included the identification of potential opportunities to serve any unmet demand. The first step was to analyze the programs and allocation of pool time from data provided by City staff. The second step was to estimate the potential demand, both current and future, for aquatic programs and facilities in which to provide them. This information was derived from interviews with stakeholders, the application of national participation rates in aquatics, and logical comparisons with peer facilities.

The next step was to perform a gap analysis that estimates the difference between the demand for aquatic programs and pool use and the capacity of the City and other service providers to meet that demand.

The last step was to identify improvements or additions to the aquatics facilities that would allow the City to meet its targeted level of service, considering its existing offerings and the current and future demand for aquatics at those facilities.

Details are found with this report section.



Executive Summary

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The consultant team developed facility recommendations based upon the needs assessment findings reported in this document and identified goals and objectives for the development of new or renovated facilities. This chapter reports the recommendations for both the Clarke Swim Center and Larkey Park Pool.

Goals:

1. Support existing programs and allow for program growth. This includes team aquatics, lap swimming, fitness swimming, meets and events, water exercise classes, and recreation.
2. Better serve the demand for family recreation, learn-to-swim classes, and instructional programs.
3. Through the mix of facilities, increase programming flexibility to maximize use, and maintain adaptability to serve the changing needs and interests of the community.
4. Provide aquatic facilities and programs that are financially sustainable with lower operating subsidies.

Objectives:

Provide an inventory of aquatic facilities that:

1. Allows the City to offer the community a comprehensive aquatics program for instructional, competitive, recreational, fitness, and therapeutic aquatic opportunities to serve the diverse aquatic needs and interests of citizens of all ages and abilities;
2. Recognizes the necessity of public and private funding of the capital costs and offers the highest programming value to the greatest number of users for the cost;
3. Supports programming and pool uses that have the capacity to generate significant revenue that will reduce the amount of General Fund subsidy;

4. Respects the value of parkland at Heather Farm Park and Larkey Park and balances the amount of land potentially required for expansion to create new facilities with the desire to preserve parkland;
5. Reuses valuable assets, when feasible, to provide value to the community and reduce the overall capital cost;
6. Contributes to the quality of life in Walnut Creek by providing facilities that serve to connect residents to the community and contribute to the community pride and recognition.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the City of Walnut Creek maintain the two existing outdoor swim centers — Clarke Swim Center located in Heather Farm Park and the Larkey Park Pool located in Larkey Park.

The following describes the recommended improvements and inventory of pools for each of these facilities.

Clarke Swim Center Recommendations

1. Replace the three existing pools at Clarke Swim Center with four new pools—a 50 meter x 25-yard pool, a 35 meter x 25-yard pool with a moveable bulkhead, a 6-lane instruction and lap pool, and a family recreation pool.
2. Renovate and expand the existing bathhouse.
3. Develop new facilities in a manner that allows them to be “zoned” for both competitive and recreational use and physically separated to allow simultaneous use without disruption to any program.
4. Sequence the construction of the pools to allow the continuation of the existing aquatics program to the extent possible.

The order-of-magnitude total project cost is estimated to be \$19.4 million in 2010 dollars



Executive Summary

Clarke Swim Center Recommendations - Continued

The four recommended pools provide a comprehensive aquatic complex that achieves the stated goals and objectives and include the creation of an aquatics complex that will serve the community for the next thirty years. The proposed complex adds substantially more water and provides pools at the various sizes, depths, configuration, and temperatures that serve the users. A key objective is also to expand aquatic opportunity to a larger segment of the community and to deliver a broader range of aquatic services at a lower cost. The recommended program achieves these objectives. A summary of the current capacity, proposed capacity, and net difference is provided in the Recommendations section of this report.

Larkey Park Pool Recommendations

The recommendation for Larkey Park Pool:

1. Increase the area inside the facility by moving the fence out, renovate the existing 6-lane lap pool and diving well, replace the baby wading pool, and add a large and interactive sprayground.

The order-of-magnitude total project cost is estimated to be \$1.6 million in 2010 dollars.

Impact on General Fund

An important objective identified during this study is providing aquatic facilities and programs that are financially sustainable with lower general fund. The aquatics program, like many other

city services, does not generate sufficient revenue to offset 100% of its operating costs. Although recreation and aquatics programming is deemed an important and valued asset to the community, the provision of services must be balanced against the cost of providing those services.

The City's inventory of pools reflects the standard for the time they were constructed, which was over 40 years ago. The pools are rectilinear with "flat water". The biggest trend in aquatics programming over the last several decades has been the family recreation pool. This free form, interactive play pools serve a very different market segment than lap pools and have immense popularity in most aquatic centers. This popularity drives participation and with the high participation comes high revenue. The family recreation pool can generate net revenue to partially fund the operations of the lap pools. The larger the recreation pool the greater the percentage of cost recovery that can be generated. Contributing to the cost recovery is the fact that these facilities are operated seasonally when the demand and participation are high and closed during the off-season.

The proposed sprayground at Larkey Park Pool, if developed inside the fence of the swim center, is also a revenue generator. Spraygrounds require supervision but do not require certified lifeguards. They are operated seasonally, have a low operating cost, and a high use by families with young children. The renovated lap pool, baby pool, and new sprayground operated on a seasonal basis could achieve a 90% to 100% cost recovery rate. This would reduce the Larkey Park Pool operating subsidy by an estimated \$100,000.

The operating subsidy for the four pools recommended for Clarke Swim Center is estimated to range between \$300,000 and \$400,000, in 2010 dollars. This represents a potential reduction in General Fund subsidy of \$250,000 to \$350,000 dollars annually. When combined with the potential \$100,000 reduction in operating subsidy at Larkey Pool, the potential reduction in General Fund subsidy is estimated between \$350,000 to \$450,000 annually. This amount could be further reduced with restructuring of fees. A summary of the operating costs, revenue and cost recovery is in the Appendix.



Executive Summary

Implementation

Phase 2 of the Needs Assessment Study has been funded and the consultant team strongly recommends that the City commence the next of work in the very near term. Given the age and current condition of the pools at both Clarke Swim Center and Larkey Park, it is prudent to proactively continue the planning for their replacement rather than wait for a system failure that demands action.

The recommended Phase 2 tasks for Clarke Swim Center include:

- Develop a plan for the siting of the pools based upon other successful, competitive and recreation multi-pool complexes
- Prepare preliminary state-of-the-art design of the pools and site design
- Based on actual plans, prepare professional cost estimates
- Develop illustrative renderings and other compelling collateral to be used for fundraising and possible community participation

A 1-5 Year Action Plan was developed to address Walnut Creek's aquatic needs and interests through the next 40 years:

- Year 1: Complete Phase 2 of the Aquatics Needs Assessment. (first nine months)

Following the completion of Phase 1 and 2 of the Aquatic Needs Assessment, the City can initiate next steps in the process. The tasks and the estimated time required to complete each task are provided below:

- Year 2: Conduct Environmental Study, Fundraise, Invite Community Participation. The Draft and Final Initial Environment Document should be completed. Other tasks could include a survey of voter opinions regarding public financing, and the final Council approval. These efforts could be following by fundraising and community participation. (minimum 1 year)
- Year 3: Complete Design and Working Drawings. The drawings should allow the project to be built in phases to maintain continuity of programs and to proceed with the first phase in advance of final fundraising. This would also address the most pressing need for the construction of a new deep 50-meter pool. (9 months)
- Year 4: Project Phase 1 – Construct New 50-Meter Pool and Instructional Pool. (1 year)
- Year 5: Project Phase 2 – Construct New All-Deep Pool and Family Recreation Pool. (1 year)



©2010 **The Sports Management Group**

918 Parker Street, Suite A13

Berkeley, California

510.849.3090

fax 510.849.3094

www.sportsmgmt.com