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Save Warwick Pool

by Gary J. Carr

It is the intention of the City of Alexandria to close the Warwick Pool. According to the proposed 2011 Capital Improvement Budget , “The City anticipates the failure of the pool in the very near future, and in that instance would close the pool”(Proposed FY 2011 CIP, page 6-40). In a city of nearly 150,000 people, that would leave only one full size outdoor pool, the Old Town Pool near the King Street Metro. It would end a recreational program that “enhances the health of its citizens” and “provide youth the opportunity to succeed” (City Council Strategic Goals 2 & 4).

If the Warwick Pool is lost, it can never be replaced. We must save Warwick Pool.

It is ironic in the year that we named a pool as a memorial to the children who have drowned in the Potomac River during Alexandria's segregated past, that we would close a swimming pool that provides a safe opportunity for children to become acclimated to the water. This is not just simply an academic or financial problem. It is a matter of life and death. “Nearly 60 percent of African-American children cannot swim, almost twice the figure for white children” according to a survey by USA Swimming. Blacks are three times as likely to drown as whites. These are statistics from 2008, not 1958. If you don't learn how to swim as a child, you are much less likely to ever learn. We can't allow the closure of one of the prime aquatic assets of this City.

Beijing Olympic medalist Cullen Jones is a supporter of teaching children to swim, especially minorities. “Less than 2% of competitive swimmers are African American”, he has said. Alexandria being an historically seafaring town, has a proud history of sailing, rowing and crew. Most water sport activities you can not even contemplate participating in without the basic ability to swim. One important finding of studies is that if the parents of a family don't swim, their inability, fear and apprehension about the water is transferred to the child. Thereby you have a perpetual problem of parents not swimming, whose children do not learn to swim, becoming non-swimming parents, and the pattern continues. We must break this cycle. It cannot be done by closing one, of the only two, full size outdoor pools in the city.

This lack of swimming ability by African Americans is not accidental. It can be traced to the most pernicious myths of segregation. Not the debunked fallacy of lack of buoyancy or body mass. But, to the most hateful contention of all, that blacks were not good enough to even be in the same water as whites. While simultaneously being excluded from public pools, few swimming pools were ever built to serve the black community. Yet, this is not about just the black community, Hispanics are also at a significantly greater risk of drowning . Most ethnic groups also face a real danger from the lack of swimming ability.

This closure affects the entire community, especially the most vulnerable ones- our children. If you do not learn to swim, and be unafraid of deep water, as a child, it becomes exponentially more difficult as a teen, and nearly impossible as an adult. Warwick Pool has “deep end”, where the depth of the water is over your head, and that is the true challenge of swimming. This can't be safely replicated anywhere else.

What is the City's plan for the Warwick Pool? The current plan is to “re-purpose” the pool as a “spray park”. At the risk of sounding contemptuous, and not meaning to sound funny, you cannot learn how to swim in a shower. Spray Parks are no replacement for a swimming pool. Spray Parks are touted as places where children can play freely and safely, with lower maintenance and staffing cost. What they can't do is teach a child how to swim. At best, they are a modern component of a traditional swimming pool.

Even given these factors, there is no money to convert the Warwick Pool to a Spray Park for at least ten years, with other sites having priority even then. So we will be left with a empty hole in this community, both literally and figuratively. Be not unaware of the difficult economic times the City is facing. It is at just such times, that the simple activities close to home become much more important. Yes, I am referencing swimming and swimming pools. There are somethings you can't afford to do, and there are somethings can't afford not to do. With every child who is taught to swim, you potentially, indeed inevitably, save a life. No child should drown from a lack of basic swimming abilities. And swimming is like walking or riding a bike. Once you learn, you will never forget.

“The City is starting to look at the aquatics business and programming plan for the future and the long-term plan for the Warwick Pool will be intricate in that analysis”, states the 2011 CIP. If this is true, we cannot just idly watch a important community asset collapse, and not attempt to prolong its useful life. The proposed reconstruction of Chiquinpin Pool has been delayed for a least 5 years. While we could debate the merits of concentrating the swimming assets to just two sites, one indoor and one outdoor location, any improvements to either will likely not come to pass before the possible failure of Warwick Pool. In the event of a mechanical or other contingency, this city could be left with no outdoor swimming facility. Immediate remedial action should be undertaken in anticipation of this possibility.

“Funding for the planned renovation of the Warwick Pool is eliminated. This facility will be decommissioned when ordinary repairs are no longer able to keep it useable”, states the City Manager in his message on the budget. There is no plan for Warwick Pool in the event of its failure, but to leave it closed and dysfunctional. The “cost of converting Warwick Pool into a Spray Park would be larger than this CIP can support” (Proposed FY2011 CIP 6-34). There is no plan for Warwick Pool.

A paltry \$52,000 has been allocated for maintenance of public pools, and this number remains static for the next ten years. A study needs to be done to at least explore what options are available to shore up the structure at Warwick Pool. An initial estimate in 2008 placed the cost of reconstruction at 1.5 million. In a 2010 budget work-session the estimate had ballooned to 3.3 million. What is the explanation for this dramatic increase? If it is the cost of upgrading the Pool House and surrounding area, they should be treated as separate items. To give you some perspective, one artificial turf field cost about the same as replacing the Warwick Pool. The immediate priority should be on what steps can be taken prolong the useful life of just the pool shell and deck. This is the asset that is irreplaceable.

What are the options? Does it involves higher user fees or a perhaps private management company? Before we sit on our hands and let the pool fail, there needs to be a open discussion on what recourse are available. At the same time we must guard against excessive cost, both in repairs and in admission. Cost has always been an obstacle for giving children, especially disadvantaged ones, the opportunity to swim. The current cost of admission to Warwick Pool is \$1 per child, \$2 for adults. It could be said that this admission is too low. At the same time the cost for admission to City Resident to Chinquapin Pool is \$4 per child, \$6 for adults, which is unattainable to many families. The soci-economics dimensions of this decision should not be underestimated. The private apartments, gated communities, or those with the wherewithal to afford membership at a private pool will enjoy the refreshing dip in the water on the notoriously hot and humid Washington summers. The poor will be let hot and unhappy.

Location is also problematic. Four elementary schools are within a mile distance of Warwick Pool. There are none within a mile of Chinquapin. The Old Town Pool is also too far for the thousands, that's correct, thousands of children within walking distance of the Warwick Pool. At the same time we will be closing most of the smaller neighborhood pools throughout the City. This fact contradicts the official estimates of little increase in the usage of Warwick Pool. It stands to reason that if you close other opportunities for swimming, the ones left will receive greater usage.

It always seems that we target the things people turn to in times of economic stress for reductions or closure. We must tread this metaphorical water carefully. But to do nothing, and allow the Warwick Pool disappear would be a travesty. We must save the Warwick Pool.

<http://cbs4.com/video/?id=51081@wfor.dayport.com>

<http://cbs4.com/blackhistory/Black.History.Month.2.659707.html?detectflash=false>

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Fw: COA Contact Us: Warwick Pool
Jackie Henderson to: Gloria Sitton

04/20/2010 09:19 AM

----- Forwarded by Jackie Henderson/Alex on 04/20/2010 09:18 AM -----

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Date: 04/20/2010 05:15 AM
Subject: COA Contact Us: Warwick Pool

COA Contact Us: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members

Time: [Tue Apr 20, 2010 05:15:05] Message ID: [20927]

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April 20, 2010

Councilman Krupicka,

Many thanks for your comments at

the April 17, 2010 Public Hearing regarding Warwick Pool. I am mindful of the difficult economic times, but I feel that the pool issue has not fully publicly vetted. Few people that I talk to seems to know of the City's intention to close the pool (even in Warwick Village). It may have been discussed at a Work Session, but I am unaware of any widely publicized forum.

Couple of ideas and questions that I have:

1. It a search of

the City website, I was unable to find the Budget Memo 58 regarding the pools you referenced in your response to my comments. Perhaps you could assist me locating it?

2. Estimates to replace the Warwick Pool have ranged in budget documents from 1.5 to 3.3 million, What is represented by these dollars, can they be itemized and prioritized?

3. Has any study been done recently on to how to prolong the useful life of the current pool, particularly the most important parts, the pool shell and deck? Has there been an appraisal of what modern technologies might be used, and at what cost and benefit?

4. Is it the Council's collective wisdom the \$52,000 annually (\$520,000 over ten years) is a sufficient amount for pool maintenance? I believe this is a city wide figure. The amount is not even adjusted for inflation.

Comments:

5. It appears that there is no plan for the future of Warwick Pool. "Funding for the planned renovation of the Warwick Pool is eliminated. This facility will be decommissioned when ordinary repairs are no longer able to keep it usable", states the City Manager in his message on the budget. "Ordinary repairs" may not be enough to maintain the pool. There is no plan for Warwick Pool in the event of its failure, but to leave it closed and dysfunctional. Aside from the merits of "Spray Parks" that seems to be the current direction, the "cost of converting Warwick Pool into a Spray Park would be larger than this CIP can support" (Proposed FY2011 CIP 6-34).

Many are open to any ideas (public-private partnership, increase fees, consolidation). What are the options, specifically for the deep-water Warwick Pool, which is irreplaceable. Arlington County for comparison has four deep-water pools (3 indoor and 1 outdoor), and average of 1 per 50,000 residents. The same as currently in Alexandria, and it is a ratio Arlington will maintain.

(Arlington County's fee structure is different, and is notably run by the

school system under a MOU.)

Every effort should be made to save the

Warwick Pool, either by prolonging what is currently there for all long as possible, and as soon as feasible, enter a broad discussion on the options.

If it can't be done, so be it. But a forum on the Warwick Pool can't wait another year, then it might be too late to act.

Respectfully, Gary

Carr

cc Mayor and Members of Council

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PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND GIVE IT TO THE CITY CLERK
BEFORE YOU SPEAK ON A DOCKET ITEM.

PLEASE ANNOUNCE THE INFORMATION SPECIFIED BELOW PRIOR TO SPEAKING.

- 1. **NAME:** Gary Carr
- 2. **ADDRESS:** 216 Aspen Street
TELEPHONE NO. 703-518-8999 **E-MAIL:** gary@garyphoto.com
- 3. **WHOM DO YOU REPRESENT, IF OTHER THAN YOURSELF?**
Self
- 4. **WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON THE ITEM?**
Other
- 5. **NATURE OF YOUR INTEREST IN ITEM (PROPERTY OWNER, ATTORNEY, LOBBYIST, CIVIC INTEREST, ETC.):**
Civic Interest
- 6. **ARE YOU RECEIVING COMPENSATION FOR THIS APPEARANCE BEFORE COUNCIL?**
No

This form shall be kept as a part of the permanent record in those instances where financial interest or compensation is indicated by the speaker.

A maximum of three minutes will be allowed for your presentation, except that one officer or other designated member speaking on behalf of each *bona fide* neighborhood civic association or unit owners' association desiring to be heard on a docket item shall be allowed five minutes. In order to obtain five minutes, you must identify yourself as a designated speaker, and identify the neighborhood civic association or unit owners' association you represent, at the start of your presentation. If you have a prepared statement, please leave a copy with the Clerk.

Additional time not to exceed 15 minutes may be obtained with the consent of the majority of the council present; provided notice requesting additional time with reasons stated is filed with the City Clerk in writing before 5:00 p.m. of the day preceding the meeting.

The public normally may speak on docket items only at public hearing meetings, and not at regular legislative meetings. Public hearing meetings are usually held on the Saturday following the second Tuesday in each month; regular legislative meetings on the second and fourth Tuesdays in each month. The rule with respect to when a person may speak to a docket item at a legislative meeting can be waived by a majority vote of council members present but such a waiver is not normal practice. When a speaker is recognized, the rules of procedures for speakers at public hearing meetings shall apply. If an item is docketed *for public hearing* at a regular legislative meeting, the public may speak to that item, and the rules of procedures for speakers at public hearing meetings shall apply.