

## City of Austin Aquatic Master Plan Task Force Report

Task Force Members:

*Jane Rivera, PARB Chair*

*Rich DePalma, PARB Vice Chair*

*Dawn Lewis, Task Force Vice Chair*

*Rick Cofer, Task Force Chair*

### Introduction

As directed by Austin City Council Resolution No. 20170817-052, the City of Austin Aquatic Master Plan Task Force consists of four members of the Parks and Recreation Board appointed by the Parks and Recreation Board. On August 22, 2017, Board Chair Jane Rivera, Board Vice Chair Rich DePalma, Board Member Rick Cofer and Board Member Dawn Lewis were unanimously appointed by the Parks and Recreation Board to serve on the Task Force. The Task Force unanimously voted Board Member Rick Cofer as Task Force Chair and Board Member Dawn Lewis as Task Force Vice Chair.

The City Council formed the Task Force to:

1. Conduct public meetings and solicit additional public feedback on the draft planning tool known as the Draft Aquatic Master Plan (Plan).

The Task Force held six public meetings at five different locations, which included citizen communication and input and one formal Community Public Input event. The Task Force held public meetings on September 10, September 19, September 26, October 16, November 14 and November 29. Additionally, the Parks & Recreation Department organized a community input event to collect information and feedback regarding the Aquatic Master Plan on October 23, 2016 at the Gus Garcia Recreation Center. All Task Force members attended this event.

*Action Taken by Task Force - Information on meetings held and public feedback collected are attached in Appendix A.*

2. Review the Aquatic Master Plan with consideration for the existing criteria related to:
  - Geographic equity and access,
  - Environmental sustainability,
  - Fiscal sustainability,
  - Historical and cultural importance,
  - Popularity,
  - Residential density and future population projections,
  - Access to aquatics, and
  - Creative funding sources and partnership opportunities.

*Action Taken by Task Force -Information was reviewed and considered, additional information reviewed outside of the Draft Aquatic Master Plan is attached in Appendix B.*

3. Provide policy guidance on:
  - A. How to prioritize investments,
  - B. Possible pool closures,
  - C. Building new aquatics facilities, and
  - D. Recommendations for potential system funding level options for the 2018 Bond.

*Action Taken by Task Force - Policy guidance is provided in the subsequent pages.*

The Task Force thanks the professional staff of the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department, the Aquatic Advisory Board, and the Austin public for the breadth and depth of the work detailed in the master plan. We support the recommendations made with the modifications noted in our report. Our recommendations are presented to each of the elements in our charge from the City Council.

#### **A. POLICY GUIDANCE ON HOW TO PRIORITIZE INVESTMENTS**

##### *Investment, Not Disinvestment, in City of Austin Aquatic System*

The Task Force reviewed the proposed Master Plan and the concerns listed therein. The data is clear that decades of inadequate aquatic infrastructure funding and investment led not only to ongoing maintenance problems but also to an inability to carry out regular upgrades, thus leaving the aquatic system in the current crisis situation. At our engagement event focused solely on public input, we heard loud and clear that the public loves their neighborhood and community pools and the public strongly requests that the City of Austin keep those pools open. The public also prefers fewer large Regional Outdoor Aquatic Centers. We believe that city neighborhood and community pools are an important part of what “Keeps Austin Weird” and must be preserved. We do not consider it the right thing to do to continue to live with a plan to take pools out of service year after year until the city pool system has fewer, not more, facilities for an ever-growing population. Rather, we believe that every effort should be made to invest in our comprehensive aquatic system through end-of-life replacement for existing pools and adding new facilities to meet the needs of neglected areas of our city.

Therefore, we recommend the following:

##### *2018 Bond*

1. On the November 2018 general election ballot, include a stand-alone bond proposition exclusively for aquatics facilities in the amount of \$88M.
2. The bond proposition should include all end-of-functional life pool replacements for pools listed in years 0-5.

3. The costs for the pool replacements should be the total cost detailed in the Draft Aquatic Master Plan to bring existing pools up to modern, environmentally sustainable, energy and water efficient, ADA, health, and safety standards.
4. Funding identified by staff to add four additional new pools that would provide public swimming opportunities to populations not currently adequately served by a city pool – SW Austin, NW Austin, Colony Park (NE Austin), and SE Austin.
5. Funding needs to be secured, either as M&O or bond, for maintenance for pools listed in years 6 through 20 within the Aquatics Master Plan.

Table 1 reflects the pools, pool information, and funding recommended in the Draft Aquatic Master Plan and supported by the Task Force.

Table 1. Aquatic Master Plan Projects Years 0-5 and System Expansion Projects

Facilities	Square Feet of Pool	Total Pool Capacity	3 Year Ave Attendance	Water Used per 1,000 Gallon Pool Volume	Estimated Annual M&O Savings w/ Replacement	Amount
<b>End-Of-Life Facility Replacement</b>						
Balcones	4,583	324	14,858	3,873	TBD	\$7,423,000
Big Stacey	4,000	217	20,861	11,046	TBD	\$3,250,650
Brentwood	2,731	182	12,058	8,167	TBD	\$3,653,650
Civitan	3,515	160	2,833	30,097	TBD	\$3,705,650
Garrison	14,486	859	25,150	6,161	TBD	\$9,802,000
Gillis	2,550	143	4,014	21,186	TBD	\$3,575,000
Little Stacy	1,500	100	3,708	8,834	TBD	\$3,034,720
Mabel Davis	11,717	561	11,155	6,832	TBD	\$10,140,000
Martin	4,880	205	12,388	1,975	TBD	\$3,875,150
Montopolis	4,880	205	7,705	5,933	TBD	\$5,258,500
NW	15,642	975	36,643	3,555	TBD	\$8,684,000
Walnut Creek	14,951	626	14,977	6,119	TBD	\$5,440,500
						<b>\$67,842,820</b>
<b>System Expansion</b>						
Central Aquatic Maintenance Facility						\$2,600,000
Colony Park						\$5,000,000
NW Austin to replace Canyon Vista						\$5,000,000
SE Austin						\$5,000,000
SW Austin						\$5,000,000
						<b>\$20,000,000</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>						<b>\$87,842,820</b>

*Public Private Partnerships*

6. A Request for Information (RFI) and subsequent Request for Proposals (RFP) to be released for a public private partnership in the creation of a community indoor aquatic

center and a premier indoor aquatic center on city-owned property as identified by the City Manager's office.

#### *Future Maintenance and Operations Funding*

7. Additionally, in the event maintenance and operations savings resulting from the renovated pools do not entirely offset the expense of the additional new pools, we recommend that the Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) annual operating budget be increased by the amount needed to maintain each new pool plus all the existing pools as each pool is opened to the public.

#### *Public Process on Any Future Decommissioning*

8. Finally, we recommend that no individual pool ever be decommissioned without an affirmative vote of the Austin City Council. If in the future it is ever impossible to repair or renovate an existing facility and closure appears to staff to be the only solution, then staff must present the City Council with a request to hear the pool conditions and public input. Council will then make a decision either to close the pool or will identify and allocate additional funds to keep the pool open.

#### Additional Rationale

- Modernizing the City of Austin Aquatics System will eliminate emergency closures and pool replacements that have come up over the past decade.
- The modernization will reduce maintenance and operations costs while resolving the substantial facility condition issues resulting from long standing unmet maintenance and operational needs of our pools.
- The maintenance savings should be used for operating the new pools.
- A city natatorium is requested by staff to enable staff to train lifeguards year-round so that many pools can be kept open either extended months of operation or year-round. In fact, Aquatics Division staff note that the natatorium is a pre-condition for any extension of pool hours within the system. Such a facility would be indoor, climate-controlled, include public access and open year round.
- To serve the entire system of pools, a centrally located pool maintenance facility is needed to house standard frequently needed parts and supplies, and where maintenance staff has planning and down time space.
- It will take a comprehensive aquatics bond to win enough support of City of Austin voters and therefore new pools included in years 6-10 are brought forward to gain the support of the city.

## **B. POLICY GUIDANCE ON EXISTING CRITERIA FOR POOL RANKING**

We the Task Force as well as members of the public who attended our public input session discussed possible new criteria. We support inclusion of existing criteria:

1. Demographics, including current use, residential density including future population;
2. Site Conditions, including any local impediments to improving some part of the pool;
3. Location, including distance from any other aquatics facility;

4. Accessibility, including anything that prohibits improving accessibility;
5. Infrastructure, such as the type and age of the pump and the filtering device;
6. Environmental, particularly sustainability,
7. Regulatory, such as zoning and ADA requirements, and
8. Operations, the cost and difficulty of maintaining the pool.

These factors added together result in the Site Suitability Rating Score. This score has been applied to every aquatic facility in the city system, and those with the lowest overall score would be, all other things being equal, those expected to have the lowest chance of continued operation should the facility reach the end of operational life.

We also recommend adding historical and cultural factors as additional criteria for the site suitability score. Staff is adding a new chapter on historic and cultural significance. Additional discussions were held regarding protecting pools originally built to segregate City of Austin residents. It was noted that these pools, although originally created under a discriminatory municipal plan and policies, also reinforced a sense of community and ownership.

Staff recommends the following pools be considered of unique historic and cultural importance.

- Barton Springs
- Deep Eddy
- Big Stacy
- Rosewood
- Parque Zaragosa

Every effort should be made to keep the above pools operational, based on historical and cultural importance and the Task Force concurs.

The Task Force recommends that patterns of use and population projections should be reviewed biennially to ensure that planning maintains pace with Austin's rapidly expanding and moving population.

### **C. POLICY GUIDANCE ON ACCESS FOR RESIDENTS WHO DO NOT HAVE ACCESS**

The Task Force agrees that current data indicate the most need for new regional pools exists in the following general areas.

- Colony Park (Northeast Austin)
- Northwest Austin
- Southeast Austin
- Southwest Austin

As Austin continues to grow and expand outwards, additional geographically underserved areas may arise, and at some time in the future the plan may need to be amended to include

additional new regional pools. A new maintenance facility in Far East, Southeast, or Northeast, may be required to increase efficiency as traffic grows with the city's population.

If any future consolidation or moving of a regional pool is being considered, accessibility must be considered. As an example, children close to the St. Johns Pool were expected to transfer to the new Bartholomew Pool, but that would require them to cross 51<sup>st</sup> Street with no protected crossway, so the effect of the closing of St. Johns was that these children have no pool.

#### **D. POLICY GUIDANCE ON CREATIVE FUNDING SOURCES**

Two items the Task Force discussed would increase pool funding and help offset costs.

- 1. Since the public pools clearly serve a public interest (providing exercise and pooling during hot summer months), we recommend that Austin Energy grant "at cost" rates for water and electricity used to run the public pools. PARD currently pays full rate for utilities at all facilities, and this reduction could result in positive savings for pool expenses that could be diverted to maintenance. New facilities should also include solar panels to reduce electricity use. This will be particularly helpful with the natatorium.*
- 2. Rather than automatically turning over all fees for pool usage to the city's General Fund, return all fees for pool usage to PARD for use on pool maintenance or operations.*

Through the Task Force's public engagement session and those held during the planning and preparation of the Aquatics Master Plan, some members of the public often said they would prefer to pay a small fee to swim in a public pool than to lose the pools. Others want to keep public pool use free. We clearly heard that Austinites want public pools where their children can learn to swim, and all ages can swim together, rather than swim parks. There is tension between central city and suburban areas, but we believe that overall there is support for a one-time-only bond. And although most would prefer to pay a small fee than to lose pools altogether, we believe that the bond is a better idea, and we further believe there is support for a special aquatics bond to keep the neighborhood and community pools running, as well as to expand the number of regional pools.

#### **D. POLICY GUIDANCE ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS**

We the Task Force also support the development of an indoor natatorium to be jointly funded by and shared with some partner(s) such as Dell/Seton Hospital, the University of Texas, Austin Independent School District, or even some private partner(s). Additional City of Austin departments that may share a need for water safety instruction include Austin Police, Emergency Medical Services, and Fire, all of which might be partners. This pool would be open to the public those hours when it is not in use for lifeguard and water safety instruction or the public uses required by the public partner(s).

Finally, we also discussed such funding sources as working with companies or entities that may be interested in helping to build a new pool in an underserved area in exchange for naming rights. We hope this would not result in naming of facilities by brand names but rather by names of foundations and/or key individuals in such organizations.