

Appendix J: A Regional Strategy



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Within this report, five different possible options for the development of an aquatic center in the City of Bellevue have been explored. Among these options, there is a great deal of difference not only in the type of facility (indoor vs. outdoor), but in the market focus as well. Ultimately, the City of Bellevue will need to determine what role, if any, the City will have in the development of a new aquatic center.

City of Bellevue Needs

The City itself certainly has needs as has already been noted in the market analysis portion of the report but are summarized again below:

- The City of Bellevue with a population base of over 110,000, only has one public indoor pool and no public outdoor aquatic facilities.
- The existing Bellevue Aquatic Center is an older facility that has been renovated and expanded. The therapy pool is a very strong aspect of the facility and serves the therapy and other instructional uses well. However, the 6 lane conventional pool is no longer state of the art and does not meet minimum requirements for swim meets. This pool also has very little appeal to the recreational swimmer.
- None of the four high schools in Bellevue have pools, and those swimmers must leave the city for their swim meets.
- In a statistically valid survey, the residents of Bellevue indicated that they would be strong users of a new aquatic center and that such a facility is a medium priority in the community. There was a strong interest in a combination indoor/outdoor aquatic center.

As a result of this information, several of the options that were developed would focus on serving City of Bellevue aquatic needs:

Option A – This option would provide an outdoor aquatic facility to serve primarily the seasonal recreational swimming interests in the community. It would not provide an additional indoor space, and as a result, would not be a replacement or even an enhancement to the indoor aquatic needs of the community.

Option B – With this option, an indoor leisure pool and a large competitive pool are provided, in addition to, a small outdoor pool. This amenity will add the opportunity for year-round recreational and instructional swimming along with a venue for competitive swim meets and practice. This option would serve the Bellevue market, but would not have the capacity to provide much additional use time for other communities on the Eastside. It is anticipated that the existing Bellevue Aquatic Center would need to stay open to support the therapy interests of the area.

Option C – This option takes Option B, expands the competitive pool, and adds a program pool and a wellness pool. With this size of facility, it would not be necessary to continue to operate the existing Bellevue Aquatic Center. This center would be large

enough to not only service the aquatic needs of Bellevue proper, but also a portion of the immediate surrounding area.

If Options A-C are going to be developed, then it should be expected that the financial responsibility for building and operating the center will primarily be with the City of Bellevue. While some partnerships and outside funding might be possible (see previous sections), the vast majority of the task of making a new aquatic center a reality will remain with the city.

Eastside Regional Needs

A major aspect of the study has been to analyze the need and market for a regional aquatic center. The analysis of the Eastside market indicated the following:

- The secondary service area has a population of nearly 500,000.
- While there are a number of indoor public and non-profit pools in this area (12), many of these facilities, especially the Forward Thrust pools, are older and reaching the end of their lifespans (estimated to be up to 7 of the total).
- Several indoor pools are facing possible closure in the next year or so (Juanita, Northshore, and Sammamish YMCA).
- It is anticipated that during the course of the next 5 years, that there will be a net loss of at least two indoor aquatic centers and it could be as high as five.
- Most school districts do not have their own pools and must use other indoor and outdoor pools in the area.
- The only true indoor competitive pool that is able to host regional events is the King County Aquatic Center, and it is not located on the Eastside.
- All of the existing Eastside pools are conventional facilities with no leisure amenities. The recreational swimming market is only being served by the private swim club providers.
- Interviews with Eastside aquatic teams indicated that they have to limit team size and practice time due to the lack of facilities. Many teams have to use multiple facilities to serve their needs.
- With the lack of pool times, many aquatic teams are using outdoor pools for practices even during the winter. This is highly unusual.

With an understanding of the current aquatic facilities, their program and capacity limitations, and realizing that the situation will only get worse in the coming years, Options D & E were developed to serve the Eastside market and beyond. However with the focus of these options on serving a regional market, the role of the City of Bellevue in developing and operating such a facility would need to be determined.

Option D – This option includes a 50-meter pool, large program pool, a larger leisure pool, and a wellness/therapeutic pool. The competitive and leisure aspects of the facility are sized large enough to serve the Eastside.

Option E – With this option, the focus of the facility goes beyond a regional market to include the ability to serve some national aquatic needs as well. Not only does the

aquatic center have a 50-meter pool, but it also has a larger program pool, separate diving pool with a tower, and the ability to seat 3,000.

However, it must be realized that with either of these two options, it is presumed that the existing Bellevue Aquatic Center will be closed and much of the new water surface area could simply be replacing water lost through the closure of other facilities in the area.

Regional Approach

With the large capital cost of building a regionally focused aquatic center and the high anticipated high level of operational subsidy, it is highly likely that there will need to be a regional approach to the task of developing and operating such a facility. Key issues will be:

- Identifying other equity partners with an interest in such a project (see previous sections). This could involve other cities, school districts and non-profit agencies.
- Finding a site that is large enough to support such a facility and the necessary parking, that is centrally located for the Eastside and the partners in the project and one that has relatively easy access from I-405 and I-90. This will be a significant challenge for the project.
- Establishing a development agreement that is satisfactory to all partners as well as formulating an operations plan that is equitable to all partners.
- Explore other taxing options such as the formation of a Parks and Recreation Service Area or a Special Facilities District as a way to broaden the tax base for a regional facility.