



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Arlington Sports Commission

AQUATICS COMMITTEE

Arlington, VA



AQUATICS COMMITTEE

May 24, 2018

MEMBERS

Don Hesse, Chair
 Cynthia Hilton, Vice Chair
 Janet Eichers
 Marilyn Judson
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 Kristi Sawert

Katie Cristol, Chair
 Arlington County Board
 2100 Clarendon Blvd. Suite 300
 Arlington, VA 22201

Dr. Barbara Kanninen, Chair
 Arlington School Board
 2110 Washington Blvd.
 Arlington, VA 22207

RE: Inclusion of Aquatics Facilities at Neighborhood High Schools

Dear Chair Cristol and Chair Kanninen:

On behalf of the Aquatics Committee¹, I am writing to address some of the issues that were raised during your joint April 17th meeting with the Career Center Working Group about the merits of including a pool within the footprint of a new neighborhood high school² (NHS) at that site.

STAFF LIAISONS

Helena Machado
 Arlington Public Schools
 703-228-6264

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 Department of
 Parks & Recreation
 703-228-1809

Please know that the Committee supports the inclusion of an aquatics facility at any new NHS for the following reasons.

- **Educational Value of Aquatics Instruction:** The aquatics curriculum, as currently administered by Arlington Public Schools (APS), serves as an integral and vital component of the County’s health and physical education program. The aquatics instruction teaches safety awareness, develops basic swimming skills, and enhances proficiency at all levels. It also improves personal and community aquatics safety and helps students develop a commitment to lifetime fitness. These life-long educational and safety benefits have justified the inclusion of pools at the County’s other NHSs.
- **High School Population Served:** Mandatory physical education is provided only to 9th and 10th grade students, although interscholastic athletic opportunities are available for all high school students. Students in these lower grades spend three to four weeks of their physical education instruction at the pool within their school. The majority of these students are 14 or 15 years old. Internships and other off-campus learning experiences for this age group with options to

¹ The Aquatics Committee is a joint committee of the Arlington County Sports Commission and the Arlington Public Schools. The Committee is charged with ensuring community engagement in the operation and use of the Arlington indoor swimming pools located within the three high schools and with making recommendations on behalf of users to the County Board, through the Sports Commission, and to the School Board as needed.

² A NHS is one with attendance boundaries. The Aquatics Committee believes students who are assigned a neighborhood school should be provided the same amenities. Students who elect to attend “choice” schools, such as HB-Woodlawn, do so knowing that they may have to forgo various amenities.

obtain aquatics education at non-school pools are limited.³ However, a number of trade-based careers require aquatic skills,⁴ and the aquatics program provides an introduction to swimming as well as elective business development opportunities. The aquatics program at each high school is operated as a business with requirements for management, budget, customer service, maintenance, and other skills valuable in the workplace. Rather than attempt to send students to non-school located pools for aquatics instruction, consideration should be given to leveraging onsite pool operations and instructional capabilities to build internship programs for interested students.

- **Busing not an Option:** While elementary students are bused for their one week of aquatics instruction, busing is not an option at the high school level. In addition to pool instruction, transportation to and from pools at the elementary level averages 1 to 1½ hours. High school students cannot give up this amount of educational time during the days that they receive aquatics instruction due to the lack of sufficient elective periods in 9th and 10th grades. Setting aside the time constraints of transporting students, busing or swapping students also assumes that buses will be available when needed. APS has recently estimated the annual operating cost for one school bus at \$70,000, and has cited lack of bus drivers and lack of land to park school buses as competing for classroom funding.⁵
- **Capacity Constraints:** APS pools are at or near capacity. Each school day, the pools serve high school students, elementary school students, and the community. Taking the Washington-Lee pool as an example, approximately 30 to 35 high school students receive aquatics instruction for 5 to 6 periods daily. Two classes of approximately 40 elementary school students receive instruction from 9:30 am to 10:30 am. The community swims during “early bird” hours (5:30 am –9:30 am), midday hours (11:30 am – 3:00 pm), and evening hours (5:30 pm – 9:30 pm). During community swim hours, each lane of the Washington-Lee pool is at capacity, with 4 or more swimmers sharing one lane. Parks and Recreation classes and programs start at 4:30 pm. On average, 25 or more classes are held each night between at 4:30 pm and 8:30 pm, along with private lessons. Classes are full, and many have waiting lists. Swim teams from each middle and high schools also make use of the pools. Middle schools each practice three times/week from mid-February through April, and high schools swim daily from November to the middle of February. Recently, increased enrollment has begun to and is expected to continue to affect the space available to the public, during simultaneous use, and may potentially reduce the time for public use during the school day. As our student body grows at every level and new elementary schools come online in 2019 and beyond, APS will face new space challenges to provide adequate space for aquatics instruction.⁶

³ At the meeting, there was discussion about extending the school day from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. to provide students work and internship opportunities, including perhaps working in Crystal City and swimming at Long Bridge Park rather than swimming at home schools. However, this accommodation may not be workable for students at these lower grades. By Virginia law, these younger students are prohibited from working from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. during the school year. This age group has fewer options to travel from location to location, including the fact that they are not able to drive, requiring a longer time commitment to satisfy aquatics curriculum requirements at Long Bridge Park. The number of jobs/internships available in Crystal City that would put students in proximity to Long Bridge Park may not be enough to meet all demand. Instructors may not be available to teach the aquatics curriculum when students are able to get to Long Bridge Park. Keeping teachers on stand-by and reserving space for instruction on the off-chance that a student may drop in would be cost-prohibitive.

⁴ For example, trade-based occupations requiring the ability to swim include underwater welders and demolition experts, water rescue professionals, and various armed forces careers.

⁵ See Elementary Location Analysis, April 30, 2018 (<https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Apr-30-Analysis-Final-3.pdf>).

⁶ In addition to new high school seats planned at the Ed Center and Career Center sites, two new elementary schools and a new middle school will open within the next two school years with no planned increase in aquatics capacity. For safety reasons, it is not recommended that more than 10 swimmers be accommodated in a lane.

- **Community Asset:** Arlington has a reputation for superb public schools. This reputation enhances the value of properties in the County, and attendant tax revenue. However, neighborhoods that host high schools incur impacts such as increased traffic, noise, and the like, on a scale much greater than neighborhoods with elementary schools. Those impacts are balanced by amenities such as sports fields, auditoriums, gyms, cafeterias, and aquatics facilities that can be shared with the community when not in use by APS. This shared use adds value for hosting communities whether or not neighborhood families have children in the school system. Shared usage also suggests that the County and APS should share in the costs of building these assets.
- **Equality:** The Career Center community has asked that the new NHS be built with the same amenities that have been included in Arlington’s other NHSs. During the April 17th working group meeting, it was suggested that “equal” does not necessarily mean the “same.” Yet, the facilities we use to educate our children reflect our public commitment to equality. Each of our existing NHSs has the same amenities, including aquatic facilities.⁷ It would be unthinkable to abandon this standard of equity regardless of the location of any new NHS.
- **The Need for an Aquatics Facility at the Career Center Site:** The need for school-based amenities can be influenced by social-economic factors. The Career Center site is surrounded by social-economically diverse neighborhoods.⁸ If an aquatics facility is not provided in the footprint of a new NHS at this site, many in these neighborhoods may not be able to afford other options to learn and practice water safety skills. The consequence, as Dr. Kristi Rupert Sawert, President of the local Arlington Heights Civic Association, reported at the April 17th meeting, is that low-income and/or minority children have significantly higher instances of drowning.⁹

We are excited about the prospect to add a fourth, much needed neighborhood pool to the educational and community use assets to be included in the development of the Career Center site. We thank those Board members who have committed to include an aquatics facility at this site and ask other members join in support. The Career Center offers a rare combination of local support for the redevelopment of possibly the only central-Arlington location large enough to accommodate a new NHS with a high enough concentration of students that will ensure the filling of all new seats on the first day. We owe this community and these students the same facilities that Arlington has provided at our other NHSs.

Respectfully,

Donald E. Hesse

Donald E. Hesse
Chair

cc: Kathleen McSweeney, Chair, Career Center Working Group
Shirley Brothwell, Chair, Sports Commission
County Board Members
School Board Members

⁷ https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/HS-Facilities-Amenities_Updated_2_27_18.pdf.

⁸ The Career Center site is located in the 22204 zip code. This zip code is the most diverse and economically challenged in the County. See, <https://virginia.hometownlocator.com/zip-codes/zipcodes/city/arlington,nd,0.cfm>. It is home to more than 130 nationalities, as well as the historically African-American communities of Green Valley (now Nauck), Johnson’s Hill (now Arlington View), and Butler Holmes (now Penrose). See, G. Stephen Thurston, *Are There Two Arlingtons?*, ARLINGTON MAGAZINE (April 27, 2015).

⁹ Studies show that that poor minority children, specifically African–American and Hispanic/Latino, are at a significant disadvantage concerning swimming ability and at higher risk of drowning. See, Julie Gilchrist & Erin M. Parker, *Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Fatal Unintentional Drowning Among Persons Aged ≤29 Years — United States, 1999–2010*, 63(19) MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY WEEKLY REPORT 421-426 (May 16, 2014); and Carol C. Irwin et al. *Urban minority youth swimming (in)ability in the United States and associated demographic characteristics: toward a drowning prevention plan*, 15 INJURY PREVENTION 234–39 (2009).