

Leslie Community Pools Information

The Leslie Community Pool has been closed permanently. While there is a tremendous amount of support for the pools, the expenses and costs to renovate the pool have outpaced the City's ability to support the pool despite the generous donations, grants, and fees collected over the years.

Recently, there have been questions raised about the City's decision to close the pool. There was a long process behind this decision spanning several years. Ultimately, there was nobody who wanted to close the pool, however it was a reality based on the costs of the project and the costs of operations and maintenance. The pool was no longer a sustainable asset for the community.

The following is a list of questions that have been asked regarding the pool and some background into explaining the decision.

Why would the City Close the pool?

There is nobody who wanted to close the pool. It was a matter of finances and there is simply not the financial ability to renovate, maintain, or operate the pool in a sustainable way that would be fiscally responsible to city residents.

I thought we received a grant to save the pool? What about applying for other grants?

The City did receive a \$100,000 (\$67,000 but was raised to \$100,000) land and water grant, the main grant available from the State of Michigan and Federal government for pools. It was the highest amount available. Unfortunately, the City received bids in the amount of \$279,851, \$306,000, \$322,789 to renovate the pools meaning the City would need to raise at least \$180,000 at a minimum just for the minimum amount of renovations needed.

These bids were for the minimum work needed to renovate the pool. It did not cover everything. The City made efforts to revise the project in ways in which the work could be done less expensively but could not find a way to substantially alter the project costs.

The City invested nearly \$25,000 in engineering in order to receive the DNR grant and develop engineered plans for the renovation of the pool. Given the inability to afford the project, the City has since returned the funds to the DNR.

What about a fundraiser?

Over the last 5-6 years the City has held several fundraisers, including an annual softball tournament and street dance that Mayor Zamora generously donates all proceeds to the pool. Unfortunately these fundraisers do not generate enough money to renovate the pool much less operate it each year.

Other efforts have been made to raise funds, but have never been able to raise the substantial funds necessary for the pool renovation.

What about other grants?

We have been successful with other grants for the pool (Ronald McDonald House, Capital Region Community Foundation). However, we have not been able to raise the substantial funds necessary. In addition, many funds require that funds are spent in a short time.

I thought our fees and taxes went toward the pool?

They do, however, the City does not bring in enough revenue to operate or renovate the pools. The costs simply exceed the city's financial ability.

What about a millage?

A millage to renovate the pools is not realistic due to the amount of money that would need to be raised. A millage would need to be regional and include Leslie Township, Onondaga, and Bunker Hill in order to bring in enough money to renovate and operate the pool.

What will our kids do?

This remains a concern for everyone. Clearly everyone understands what a benefit the pool is and how many kids used it over the years. The Council will be looking at the site and what the next use will be.

How did we get to this point?

The pools are 40 years old. Most of the main piping and controls are original and it simply is in disrepair given its age. In addition, the city needs to replace many of the smaller parts such as pumps and motors often given the corrosiveness of chlorine. This is evident throughout the pool building also as many of the steel doors are rotted out due to the chlorine exposure over the years.

The investment needed to renovate the pools has just been too large over the years. In addition, there are many pool regulations that need to be met in any new renovation of older pools. The costs to operate the pool for approximately 12 weeks a year range from \$40,000 to \$50,000. This includes opening and closing the pool, DPW time, pool licenses and inspections, chemicals, water usage, salaries for pool staff, insurance and liability, general repairs, etc. It does not include larger repairs that may be needed. Typically the City collects approximately \$10,000 in donations each year and \$10,000 in memberships and daily pass fees.

The City's ability to afford the pool has been dramatically reduced given the cutbacks made during the poor economic times. One major reason is since 2001, the State of Michigan has taken away approximately \$1.1 million in revenue sharing that could have been used for the pool and other city services. The City has worked hard to absorb those cuts and avoid impacting services to our residents, however, this is the first time these cuts are finally affecting the services provided by the City.

What will the City do with the pools?

Eventually the pools will be demolished and another use will be determined. The City will take feedback and examine many options through its parks and recreational planning efforts.

Why can't we just run the pool as is for as long as it can go?

We have been doing this for the last 6-7 years. There becomes a point when the City begins to throw good money after bad. The pool has been a valuable resource, but continually putting money into an asset that is not going to be replaced is not a fiscally responsible use of tax dollars. In addition, there are health and safety concerns that we need to be aware of and it was becoming more challenging to continue to keep the pool clean and safe.

In addition, the City has to fully staff the pool each year. That is also a challenge when you cannot guarantee that the pool will be open all year long.

Why can't we look for other grants?

We have tried for other grants. Given the timeline and the inability to raise the sheer amount of funds, it is a logistical challenge. We have had to return two grants already for not being able to move forward on this project in a timely manner. There is simply not a way to raise enough funds through smaller grants.

The pool project seems awfully expensive, why can't we use volunteers?

The City needs to meet certain regulations. You must have licensed contractors to do the work. You must have engineered plans and designs to ensure that the safety and health of the public is in mind. In addition, the regulations for public pools have grown since our pool was constructed. All of these regulations must be met. This cannot be done with volunteer labor.

What if funds are raised now, what would happen?

The decision to close the pool is final. It is important to note, that the City had to return its \$100,000 grant to the State of Michigan. In addition, the \$300,000 costs to renovate the pool are now out of date. The project would need updated engineering and would need to be rebid. The City has not budgeted for the operations of the pool into the future. The City will move forward with determining the best use for the pool site in the future.