



Charles County Government

CHARLES COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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December 12, 2023

Sen. Arthur C. Ellis (D), District 28
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Sen. Michael A. Jackson (D), District 27
Del. Debra Davis (D), District 28
Del. Edith J. Patterson (D), District 28
Del. C. T. Wilson (D), District 28

Re: College of Southern Maryland Pool

To the Charles County Delegation:

The Board of Charles County Commissioners (BOCC) recently had an informative briefing from the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism (DRPT) on November 28, 2023, on the state of aquatics in the county. The presentation included an overview of the requirements to reopen and operate the swimming pool at the La Plata campus of the College of Southern Maryland (CSM), an overview of future plans by the DRPT to expand aquatics in the county, and a recommendation to expedite their plan to address the needs of Charles County residents. As a result, we the BOCC, wish to share what we learned with the Delegation and wish to express our gratitude for the current funding to support aquatics at CSM and for any future funding that may be used towards expanding aquatics opportunities for residents and visitors in the county.

Currently, the DRPT operates three shared-use indoor swimming pools with Charles County Public Schools (CCPS). These pools are available year-round but public hours are only available after school finishes daily and even less during the high school swim season with high school practices and meets taking priority. DRPT also operates three shared-use outdoor pools with CCPS in the summer only. The pools include the following with the year constructed:

- Lackey Indoor Pool (2003)
- North Point Indoor Pool (2005)
- Donald M. Wade Indoor Aquatic Center (2015)
- McDonough Outdoor Pool (1976)

- La Plata Outdoor Pool (1979)
- Thomas Stone Outdoor Pool (1969)

In the past county residents also had limited use of the CSM swimming pool at the La Plata campus through CSM classes which included swim lessons, water aerobics, lap swimming, and swim team. This provided an additional option for residents until the pool closed during the pandemic in early 2021. When the college returned to campus in person, members of the Charles County community requested that the pool reopen as well. CSM leadership has shared with us that the repair and continued operation of the pool requires a multi-million-dollar investment – and is a venture that CSM cannot afford nor sustain.

We, the BOCC, and the DRPT are aware that there are not sufficient resources to meet the needs of residents currently and have heard from residents that they would like more access to swimming pools and have repeatedly requested CSM to reopen the pool. The 2022 Land Preservation and Parks and Recreation Plan for Charles County identifies swimming in the top three interests for outdoor recreation and in the top five for indoor recreation.

In response to residents and the DRPT, we approved a request to add \$50 million, during the FY23 budget cycle, for a competitive level multigenerational facility with a natatorium to the county's capital improvement program in FY28 and FY29. Our goal is to provide adequate aquatic opportunities for all residents. In addition, members of the BOCC, the Delegation and the DRPT have met with Dr. Wilson from CSM along with her administration this year to discuss the reopening of the swimming pool. County staff previously met with CSM staff prior to Dr. Wilson's administration in prior years to explore this request as well. During those discussions we learned several things, including that CSM no longer has an aquatics graduation requirement by the State of Maryland. Thus, there are no tuition dollars to support the pool's repair and maintenance.

We believe that the DRPT is the appropriate county agency to provide guidance and recommendations on how to expand aquatics in Charles County. In the briefing on November 28, 2023, they shared with us the results of the feasibility study completed in December 2022 and recently updated in October 2023 by CSM of their swimming pool which included one quote for repairs only and two additional quotes for repairs and expansion, all three of which exceed the \$1 million secured by Senator Ellis.

- Option 1: Repair existing six lane, 25-yard pool, current configuration \$3,036,995
- Option 2: Reconfigure for two smaller separate bodies of water \$9,984,005
- Option 3: Demolish existing pool, build two separate, and expanded pools to create a multi-use, community aquatics center \$21,926,581

The estimates listed include A&E, FFE, and 10% contingency however do not include operational expenses or cost for separate entrance to allow the DRPT to operate the pool outside of CSM hours. All options above keep the pool within the PE Building at La Plata campus of CSM, built in 1974, and would extend the limited life of the aquatic facility by an estimated 3-5 years. Any of these options would create another shared use facility for Charles County. Additional expenditures would be needed for CSM to extend staffing, security, and accommodations to reopen the building

for the pool. Additional expenses would also be needed for the operation of the pool. Below are the estimated operational costs for the DRPT or their selected contractor to operate and manage the facility based upon option 1:

- Estimated annual General Fund expenses: (\$602,109)
Includes full time and part time staffing, fringe and full-time staff benefits, general supplies, pool chemicals, contract services, maintenance, repairs, employee education and training, uniforms, and IT/technology
- Estimated annual Enterprise Fund expenses: (\$68,500)
Includes part time staffing (instructors), general supplies, and contract services
- Estimated annual revenues: \$195,000
Pool admission fees, swim lessons, lane rentals, water aerobics
- Net operating (loss): (\$475,609) and additional funding would be needed for future capital repairs

There would be a significant expense to repair and operate a 50-year-old swimming pool with limited amenities, limited operational life, and shared within the PE building of the CSM La Plata Campus. Additional alternatives were explored and shared by DRPT to expand aquatics within Charles County by other means including an air structure over an existing CCPS outdoor pool but with the pool age, configuration and shared usage, those options would be cost prohibitive. Discussions were also had about the arrangement of CSM and St. Mary's County Recreation and Parks, but the agreement was not comparable as that facility on the Leonardtown Campus was a newer, standalone facility in much better condition that had multiple bodies of water and additional facility amenities.

DRPT recommends that the county needs larger facilities with expanded amenities and access, increased staffing and increased capacity, updated facilities with multiple bodies and water and amenities, and more hours of operation for the public to meet the public demand for swim lessons, water aerobics, therapeutic programs, competitive swim team, etc. These needs track with national trends in aquatics which calls for larger facilities with multiple bodies of water, competition/Lap Pool which generate revenue, warm water therapeutic pool which allows for water aerobics/swim lessons, play elements/splash areas and fully accessible spaces. Data shows that multiple elements in a single facility can reduce operational expenses.

Repairing the pool at CSM is not a viable short-term option due to its age, condition, and restricted use. DRPT recommends that funding be invested in a longer-term solution that will serve more residents and provide more amenities. There are several examples of modern natatoriums within recreation centers locally within the DMV that have become community hubs and our residents have recognized the importance of such amenities. We recognize that aquatics is an expensive service to provide to the public and believe it is worth the investment to expand aquatic opportunities for residents, thus improving the quality of life, in a county that is surrounded by water.

The DRPT has made a sound recommendation to move the \$50 million in the CIP up to FY25 and FY26 to expedite a new competitive level multigenerational facility with a natatorium. They have an RFP out now secure a consultant to complete the feasibility study and plan to use the design-build method to support a more efficient process towards procurement and completion. A new county owned and operated facility will last at least 30 to 40 more years, increase amenities and access.

We share this information with you for your knowledge and consideration of investing any current and future state funds in a longer-term solution to meet the aquatic needs of our residents. We are happy to meet with you for additional briefing and discussion on this matter with us, county leadership and the DRPT.

Sincerely,
**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
CHARLES COUNTY, MARYLAND**



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