

Minutes from Long-Term Planning Meeting
June 29, 2014
5123 Allan Terrace, Bethesda

Attendees:

Anne Alexander
Doug Alexander
Samantha Bouvier
Laura Edmiston
Liz Edmondson
Susan Higgins
Joey Lampl
Irv Leiberman
Judy Leiberman
Brian Murphy
Bonnie Norman
Jon Slabaugh
Cathy Stocker
Marie-Elise Tanabe
Greg Wang

An update and where we are with pool renovation plans

Now that we have a brief lull between wrapping up business and operations for the last pool season and planning for the next, I wanted to review the really interesting long-term planning meeting we had over the summer and let everyone know what comes next.

First, I want to extend a big thank you to everyone who came out for the long-term planning meeting. We had a hard time finding a date that worked for people and decided to “just do it” and as it happened, I was delighted that so many people were able to attend. We had a chance to hear what LFSC Board members have learned so far and we were particularly grateful to pool member Joey Lampl for her presentation about how proposed projects move through Montgomery County’s planning process. I know that some people worried that we were making monumental and irreversible decisions about the pool renovation at this meeting but it was really a learning and listening gathering which enriched the initial feedback we solicited on the LFSC website. So, if you could not be at the meeting, you did miss some great munchies and margaritas, but you did not miss any secret votes (or handshakes, for that matter).

Below are some notes from the meeting followed by some of my own thoughts and key take-aways as well as plans for next steps.

After introductions in which people shared their names and their personal reasons and interests in attending the meeting, Bonnie Norman started the presentation with some background. Prior to Bonnie’s tenure as president of the LFSC Board, the board distributed a preliminary survey to get some input from the membership. In May of 2013, an engineer assessed the pool and estimated that it had a five to ten year lifespan. The board consulted with Dave Almy, a pool architect who has done a lot of work with areas pools. He created three different sketches as a starting point. (These are the sketches that are currently on the LFSC website). Bonnie and other former board members met with SunTrust to inquire about the feasibility of financing some of the

cost of the renovation. At that meeting, the board learned that there is an opportunity to finance part of the project.

Though the engineer estimated that the pool has a 5-10 year lifespan, the board has grown increasingly worried about the “Robin Hood” scenario. Robin Hood is a local pool that was unable to open this summer due to a collapsed wall. While Bethesda Aquatics, our pool management company, has been *extremely* conscientious about checking and maintaining the pool structure every year (apparently this was not the case at Robin Hood, unfortunately), the prospect of an emergent construction project further reinforced the board’s view that the renovation planning must begin now. Further reinforcing our decision to start the process now is Mohican’s experience. Mohican Pool was unable to open this past summer due to weather and the permitting and zoning delays that impacted its renovation construction.

Jon Slabaugh, the current president of the LFSC Board, shared what the board learned from Bannockburn’s experience with their renovation. About a year ago, LFSC board members heard from John Chadwick, a member of the Bannockburn Pool who acted as the pool’s project manager. Mr. Chadwick reviewed the process at Bannockburn. It was especially useful to hear about the Bannockburn experience because Bannockburn, like our pool, was also built near a stream and faced sensitive environmental constraints.

We were then very fortunate to hear from Joey Lampl, a long-time member of LFSC who has professional expertise in planning. (I want to emphasize that Joey attended the meeting in her capacity as a member of the pool only and was NOT there representing Montgomery County or any other official entity). She reviewed the planning steps that are required to seek permitting approval from Montgomery County and showed us some example planning documents.

We also heard a number of comments that represented a range of concerns from those attending the meeting. One member expressed concern that a renovation would strip LFSC of its cozy neighborhood character. On the other hand, a different member shared his viewpoint that we must make the most of this disruption and the cost and be

thoughtful and ambitious about what kind of pool we are building for the next fifty years of the pool's life.

Some members spoke about their interest in making the pool not just ADA-compliant from a legal point of view but actually accessible and safe for people with disabilities and for older people. Another member mentioned the importance of shade and sun protection as we think about planning.

After reading the online responses to the preliminary drawings and hearing the range of comments at the meeting this past summer, we know that there are a lot of different concerns, ideas and opinions. There is not yet consensus on a particular design bit this is what we do know to date:

1. We know that the pool is currently structurally sound but approaching the end of its life.
2. We have some preliminary drawings that served to get a conversation about the pool renovation started but may not actually resemble what the final plans will be.
3. Based on what we learned from John Chadwick and Joey Lampl's presentations, we know that we have a number of significant planning and permitting tasks ahead of us. Consider just one difficult aspect of construction at the pool: how do we get cement in and out? How do we get construction trucks over our current bridge and into the pool parking lot? Add to the list a requirement for a Forest Conservation Plan, extra reporting for disrupting more than 5000 square feet, and necessary reports from civil engineers. We have a lot to learn and a lot to do before we even get to the "fun stuff" like settling on a design and picking out a new diving board.

We are now at a phase of the project in which we need to bring in a professional who understands the permitting and planning process and can start moving us through the process of contracting with civil engineers and choosing a general contractor. While it would be nice to find a volunteer who can sink a lot of time into this project, the reality is

that this project will be time-intensive and needs to be guided by someone who has professional expertise. We are fortunate that we have a number of pool members who do have expertise in environmental issues and commercial contracting. We will definitely call on those with expertise to help us ask the right questions and explain the process to our members. And of course, we will ask all members to weigh in on the design options when the time comes. But, in the meantime, we need some help with the very basic nuts and bolts of this planning process.

At the winter meeting, we will ask the membership to approve funding for a project manager who will be tasked with helping us understand our initial planning and permitting requirements and constraints, work closely with a pool architect to flesh out some stronger design options, formulate a timeline, draft an RFP for a general contractor and assist us in hiring and vetting.