



NEWS

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For Immediate Release
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City Pool Will Remain Closed; Focus Turns Towards Decommissioning

Decision Motivated by a United Desire to Focus Community's Efforts on New Pool Construction

WHITE SALMON, WA (May 10, 2019) – In a special meeting that spanned 2 hours and 45 minutes, members of the White Salmon City Council and the White Salmon Valley Pool Metropolitan Park District conducted a thorough review of the available options for the existing City Pool.

The council had previously voted at their April 17 meeting to close the pool this season, after receiving a detailed list of health and safety issues that would need to be addressed to pass inspection; at the time, city staff estimated the repairs to be in the range of \$50,000 and cautioned the work and approval process would reduce the swimming season.

After an outpouring of public comment in support of keeping the pool open at the May 1 council meeting, along with new information about possible ways to address the repairs at a reduced cost, the city council requested the special meeting with the White Salmon Valley Pool Metropolitan Park District (MPD) to address what seemed to be the available paths forward:

- Option 1: The city entering into an agreement with a local nonprofit (Community Partners) to address many of the needed repairs (with the ability to reimburse cost up to a third of total in-kind valuation) and open for a reduced season.
- Option 2: The city giving the MPD the originally approved \$60,000 cost for running the pool this year (which was the result of earlier efforts to address the newly formed MPD's lack of available property tax funding until 2020) and give MPD the authority to repair and operate the pool this season.
- Option 3: Keep the pool closed, moving forward with city-funded efforts to provide aquatic and community activities in the pool's absence, while the MPD focuses fully on construction of the new pool.

Option 2 was quickly removed from consideration after consensus by the MPD that they did not yet have the operational infrastructure in place to take on such a role while still keeping the timeline for the new pool moving forward. The majority of the time was instead spent on a meticulous review of the implications around Option 1.



Community Partners President Lloyd DeKay updated the meeting that they had 33 volunteers with the necessary specialty skills signed up and ready to begin work.

Councilor Marla Keethler began by saying, “The question isn’t whether we can open the pool. I think we have all seen that our community can mobilize around issues they care about; that was evident last year during the MPD petition drive and again now. But we also owe them a responsibility to make decisions that are not rooted in emotion. The question is should we open the pool – is it a responsible path forward to allocate taxpayer dollars, community manpower, and the focus of our two entities to this effort? In pursuing that path, are we staying focused on the overall goal of getting a new pool underway and in construction?”

MPD Commissioner Troy Witherrite addressed the emotional undercurrent with the issue, acknowledging that keeping the pool closed might not be well received, which was affirmed by all in attendance.

City Administrator Pat Munyan said, “We’ve been band-aiding the pool for years in an effort to try and keep it open, promising ‘one more year’ to the inspectors and shortchanging thorough improvements in the interest of lower costs”.

This pattern was one that the city council expressed a desire to change, encouraging instead an approach towards the pool that fully addressed any and all items that would be an issue, assuming the longest possible operation span, which would be two more seasons. The existing land swap agreement between the City and the school district stipulates decommissioning the pool in 2021.

The council also said that in order to make a decision responsibly about the cost the city could be incurring in 2019 for the pool repairs, they needed to be able to also assess potential future costs connected to the current pool, and whether that total anticipated amount was a responsible fiscal move for the city.

There was much discussion around what entity had the authority for running the pool in 2020, with Councilor Jason Hartmann referencing language from the Explanatory Statement in the November ballot. “The expectation was that the MPD would be operating and maintaining the pool in 2019 and 2020. That was not something the city was anticipating continuing,” Councilor Jason Hartmann clarified.

The MPD confirmed that their intent would be to contract the city to run the pool in 2020, with payment for those services coming from the levy amount in 2020. “We do not have the knowledge and resources in place to effectively run the pool next year, but would expect to work with the city to reach an agreement where we pay for the cost of running the pool,” said MPD Commissioner Karen Skiles.

Ultimately the desire for additional information to make an informed decision about pursuing Option 1 involved a protracted timeline and significant uncertainty that other insurmountable problems might still be found. Something that neither entity, nor Community Partners, seemed comfortable with.



In addition Mayor David Poucher pointed out, “The city staff is backlogged on other items, including some land-use issues that have a determined timeline we cannot ignore. Finding time for staff to estimate 2020 operating costs and administrative support needs, along with a date for a follow up special meeting, is asking a lot.”

City Clerk Jan Brending also noted, “We’re not sure we can find and train sufficient pool staff at this late date, especially if the pool would be open only half the season.”

“If we are looking at not being able to reach an agreement to begin work until the end of May or later, we have to start asking ourselves if this makes sense for such a shortened season. I am also not comfortable asking all those who have volunteered their time to remain in limbo about the plan too much longer,” said Lloyd DeKay, speaking on behalf of Community Partners.

MPD volunteer Jane Palmer spoke up with an impassioned plea for honoring the old pool but also working together towards a new pool. “I love the pool – I have been an aquatics instructor there for years, but we need to come together as a community for the new pool and be united in moving that effort forward.”

“While I want the pool to be open,” said Councilor Ashley Post, “if it won’t likely open until mid-July, with an optimistic schedule, I question if it’s worth the huge community effort and fundraising – especially since we’ll likely be in a similar position next year. And then the following year the pool has to be decommissioned. With the amount of effort and pooling funds from the community, only to open for a month and a half with potential staffing issues, wouldn’t it be more efficient to put that energy toward the new pool?”

As the meeting neared three hours, the council and MPD reached a consensus that the best way forward for the new pool was to not continue pursuing the operation of the existing pool. The council proposed no new action, instead letting their original April 17 decision stand. Further meetings are expected to jointly address decommissioning the pool, and the city is moving forward with pursuing pool passes to a neighboring facility this summer, as well as seasonal community activities, including a send-off for the pool facility itself.

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