

Supporters not giving up on pool

Written by Carol Pomeday
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Community committee continues to weigh options for 40-year-old facility as new problems surface

The Cedar Grove-Belgium School District swimming pool, which has been closed since a boiler problem was detected in January, was filled last week but a new leak was found. That is expected to be repaired this week and the pool should open soon, much to the relief of those who use it for therapy and recreation.

But what to do with the 40-year-old pool that cost taxpayers \$18,000 in repairs last year and could cost more this year is a question being debated by a committee of employees and people who use the facility.

The committee, which has 26 members and is growing, met for the first time April 22. The short-term goal is to suggest ways to increase revenues, but the committee will also recommend a long-range plan when it reports to the School Board in July.

"I believe it's a good asset for the community, and I want to make sure we do everything we can to keep it," said Fred Nicora, a technical education teacher who co-chairs the committee with Maintenance Supr. Phil Burns.

"We basically have a mission, given the cost for the pool as it ages, to look at what we can do to take the burden off taxpayers. We found there are separate cores of people who use it quite a bit. How can we take all those people who use it now and make it more visible to the community."

Business Manager Julie Birschbach said current fees pay for maintenance, lifeguards and pool supervisor Patti Hinze's salary, but is not sufficient to cover major repairs.

The pool does not meet state codes — it's too deep at the shallow end and too shallow at the deep end — but it would be required to if it's substantially renovated.

A 2009 referendum to spend \$4.5 million to build a new competitive pool complex was soundly defeated.

With that mandate, the School Board decided to operate the pool until it can no longer be used, but that will have a major impact on the community, Nicora said.

Even he was amazed at how much it is used beyond community gym-and-swim sessions held twice a week and summer swim lessons that draw hundreds of kids.

The pool is used for therapy by special-education students, physical education classes for middle and high-school students, a district-based swim club, winter swim lessons for district students, pool parties to reward students, private swim lessons and by the community for lap

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swimming, water exercise classes, therapy and recreation, Hinze said.

To increase revenue, the committee members suggested offering winter group swimming lessons and year-round private lessons to district and out-of-district residents and holding movie nights when water-themed films, such as “The Little Mermaid” and “Jaws,” are shown on a large screen while children and adults float on inner-tubes or other flotation devices in the pool.

Another suggestion is to offer the pool to physical therapists for working with clients during the day when it’s not used by teachers, Nicora said.

The committee will also review fees charged by surrounding school districts and YMCAs for swim lessons and pool rentals.

If a new pool is the long-range goal, the committee suggested offering naming rights and exploring the creation of a regional pool complex with Oostburg, Random Lake and other districts. Swim meets could be held to offset the cost.

In addition, grants and other revenue sources will be explored, Nicora said.

“Being so close to Lake Michigan, we believe it’s important that all children learn basic water safety,” Nicora said, adding there may be grants to do that.

The committee’s next meeting will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 18, in the high school library. New members are welcome.