

Fate of district swimming pool debated

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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As costly repairs continue to mount, school officials question if it is time to pull the plug, plan new facility

If Cedar Grove-Belgium School District residents value the pool at the middle school, they should use it more and be willing to spend money on it or replace it with a new facility.

That's the message from School Board members and gym-and-swim coordinator Patti Hinze after reviewing recent repair costs and the current condition of the pool on Jan. 9.

"It seems like we keep putting Band-Aids and quick fixes," Board President Jim Lautenschlaeger said. "It's 43 years old. Is there ever a point it's not fiscally responsible to keep fixing it?"

A report from Phil Burns, who maintains the pool, showed most major mechanical items have been replaced in the last few years at a cost of more than \$40,000. The most expensive was rebuilding the air handling unit last year, which cost \$24,000. A new water heater was installed in December at a cost of \$8,100.

New pool filters, which cost \$38,400, and new pool blankets, which cost \$12,000, are needed, Burns said.

But the real unknown is the condition of the original cast iron pipes, which have not been televised, Supt. Steve Shaw said.

"We have been advised not to send a camera down because it could punch a hole if there is a weak spot," he said. "When those go, it's done."

Hinze said people who use the pool are frequent users, but not enough people use it and recent efforts to draw more customers haven't been successful.

"We were open seven nights a week, but there weren't enough people, so we cut back to two nights — Mondays and Wednesdays — and every other Saturday. Sometimes, there is only one person on Saturday," she said.

The pool is also open for lap swimming from 5:45 to 6:45 a.m. Mondays through Fridays and for lap swimming and water aerobics Monday and Wednesday nights before gym and swim.

In addition, the pool is used every afternoon for middle-school gym classes and for swim lessons on Saturday mornings. More than 700 children annually take swim lessons, Hinze said. A swim club also uses the pool.

"There is not a pool anywhere that's in the black," she said. "You hope that you come close to meeting expenses. It's something you do for your community."

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However, she said, the school district will have to decide how important the pool is to the district and residents.

“It’s becoming a money pit,” Hinze said. “As a taxpayer, are you going to keep a pool owned by the school district or should the pool be owned by the community?”

Lautenschlaeger said he hoped the pool could be used for another eight to 10 years when the district is debt free before seeking a referendum for a pool.

“I’ll spend \$12,000 for pool blankets rather than \$4 million to build a new pool,” board member Todd Bucher said. “Everything is all new except the drain pipes. I’ll gladly spend the money to maintain it.

“I think the pool is very important to the district. I think you need to get the community more involved so in 10 years you have a better chance to get it approved.

Acuity in Sheboygan has offered to fund a project in the school district that bears its name, Lautenschlaeger said.

“They have a soft spot for the school district because former board president Brian Obbink (who drowned in 2005) worked for them,” he said. “It’s time for us to get something together. We have a need and now may be the time for an Acuity Aquatic Center.”