

Camas looks to make Crown Park a jewel again

City ponders replacing ailing pool with a new one or an interactive water feature



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Zacil Castillo-Stengel, 5, of Camas, foreground, relaxes poolside while watching swimming lessons at the Crown Park pool. City officials are working on a master plan for upgrades to the pool, and one option replaces the pool with a new outdoor leisure pool, while the other replaces it with an interactive water feature with spray jets and bubblers. (Amanda Cowan/The Columbian)



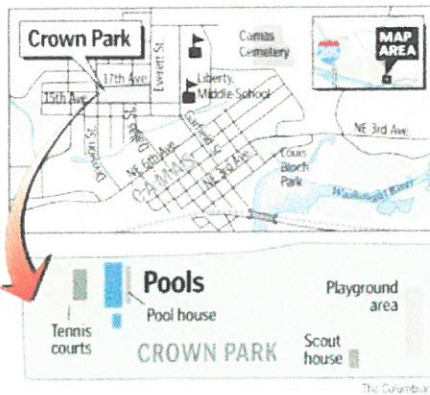
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Ava McDonnell, 11, of Camas, left, takes the swings at Crown Park. City officials are currently looking into creating a new master plan for playground and could include either replacing the pool with a new or Cowan/The Columbian)

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responses.”

Acheson said the survey confirmed feedback he's heard for years: People want restrooms at the park, and they don't want any trees removed.

Answers from the survey were used to come up with two conceptual design options for upgrading Crown Park.

The first option replaces the existing pool with a new outdoor family leisure pool, which would provide swimming options for all ages and would have the ability for lap lanes, shallow water play and deck space for lounging. That option would also include a new destination playground in the middle of the park with a mix of modern equipment and natural play elements for swinging, sliding, climbing, spinning, balancing and social play. There would also be a new picnic shelter adjacent to the playground, an amphitheater nestled in the grove of existing trees near the center of the park and a new multipurpose sports court located along Northeast 15th Avenue that would accommodate half-court basketball, pickle ball, skateboarding and futsal.

CAMAS — When Randy Curtis received a call about a problem at the Crown Park pool, he feared the worst.



“You have to wonder if it's a 24-hour problem, or is this it?” said Curtis, a member of the city's parks and recreation commission. “That is a threat hanging over our heads.”

It ended up being a 24-hour problem, as the pool had to be closed one day because a leak in one of the pool lines dripped onto an electrical panel, which shorted out and caused the main pump to stop working, according to Camas Parks & Recreation Department Director Jerry Acheson.

While closing down a pool in the midst of a string of rainless summer days isn't ideal, Curtis was relieved the closure was only for a day. The Crown Park pool is on its last legs, and city officials are working on a new master plan to update the park, either replacing the pool or removing it from Crown Park, where it's been located since opening in 1954, Acheson said.

“Crown Park tugs at the heartstrings of a lot of citizens, especially those who have lived here their whole life,” Curtis said. “There's a lot of emotion surrounding the park, especially the pool.”

City officials put a survey online this year asking residents about Crown Park, and they received 1,400-plus responses. It was the largest response to a city survey Curtis or Acheson can remember seeing. A different survey sent out by city officials to 3,000 Camas households asking for their satisfaction with various city services received 705 completed responses this spring.

“I haven't seen anything come close to 1,400,” Curtis said. “We did a survey in 2012 about a new community center that also had some questions about building a new pool, and I think we got around 200

The second option would get rid of the swimming pool and replace it with an interactive water play area with spray jets and bubblers. In that option, there would be an amphitheater located in the splash pad, which could be used as a stage for movies or concerts while the water is turned off. The second option also includes the new sports court and picnic shelter. One of the major differences between the two options is that Scout Hall would be relocated inside the park to give it a better connection to the park in the second option. Both options include restrooms and a new pathway system.

City officials are seeking input from residents on the two design options through Aug. 4. Anyone who uses Crown Park is asked to respond at www.surveymonkey.com/ri/CrownParkSurvey.

When faced with replacing the pool or getting rid of it, responders to the first survey wanted the city to replace it. The survey gave four options for the pool: renovate the existing pool, replace the existing pool with a new outdoor pool, replace the pool with a large interactive water feature or replace the pool with a small interactive water feature. Sixty-seven percent of responders wanted to replace the pool with a new pool, which would cost an estimated \$1.9 million to \$2.2 million, according to the survey. Replacing the pool with a large interactive water feature, an estimated \$300,000 to \$500,000, finished second, with 17.8 percent of the vote.

Things evened out, however, on another question, where residents were asked what they'd want to do if the city were to build a new year-round aquatics facility somewhere else in town. On that question, 38.2 percent of responders wanted to see the pool replaced with a large interactive water feature, and 38.1 percent voted to still replace the pool with a new outdoor pool.

Washougal partnership?

Curtis is hoping to see the city pursue an indoor facility that can be used year-round, although that option presents some big challenges, such as finding a location for the facility and funding it. He estimated the project would cost somewhere between \$15 million to \$20 million. Curtis said one way he thinks the project could get done is if Camas and Washougal teamed up to build a community center with a pool. He said there are a variety of ways the two cities could look into this option, and how it could benefit both cities, where residents already share resources like Crown Park or the Washougal River.

As for the Washougal side, City Administrator David Scott wrote in an email that "the notion of some kind of a joint project is at a very early conceptual phase."

Washougal is also looking at its options for a community center, as the city hired a consulting team to perform a "Community Center Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study," which Scott expects to get the results from this fall.

"The study has identified that partnerships will be important for a successful project, for both siting and constructing, and operating and maintaining a facility," Scott wrote. "Certainly, the city of Camas is a potential partner. Washougal and Camas are mutually aware of our respective planning and study efforts, and are in communication to keep each other updated."

Curtis said he wants to promote conversation between the two cities so they can come up with a plan, should they decide to work together. He wants to make sure a plan is in place no matter which direction residents and Camas city officials decided they want to go in, because he could see the city going without a pool for a few years in a worst case scenario, such as a major issue at the Crown Park pool or the city opting to replace the pool with a splash pad without a plan to build a pool somewhere else.

"If there's a major issue that requires a six-figure fix, who knows if the city would want to repair that," Curtis said. "An unexpected closure puts us into panic, but it also pushes us into action. We let the dripping faucet keep going, but when the pipe bursts and we have no water, we all spring into action. We don't want to keep putting this off."



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