

Recently I was asked to write an article for the Courier describing the City's process in selecting an Aquatic Center location. The following was published on December 2, 2015.

For decades Woodland Park community members have wanted a swimming pool. The challenge over the years had nothing to do with community desire but had everything to do with how to pay for and manage it. In the mid 90's our citizens were asked if they would accept a property tax increase to build the facility. The answer was "no". In 2010 our citizens were asked if they would accept a sales tax increase to build the facility. The answer was "no". The City of Woodland Park has been saving its "pennies and nickels" by being great stewards of hard-earned tax dollars and in 2014 our citizens allowed us to go into debt for \$10.1 Million to add to our savings to build the facility.

Determining the location of the Aquatic Center has been very intentional and thoughtful. The City staff analyzed over 13 sites using such criteria as land cost, development cost, accessibility, view, economic impact, ability to expand, architectural requirements, and community input. After much discussion and analysis, I recommended to the City Council that we pursue the downtown location in the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) property known as Woodland Station as the first alternative and a location near the High School as the second alternative. There was serious consideration given to two other sites that seem to be in the news lately, i.e., Meadow Wood Sports Complex and land to be donated for the project near State Highway 67 in the Stone Ridge subdivision.

The downtown Woodland Station site was selected for a multitude of reasons:

1. The location is centrally located in our town.
2. Access is relatively easy.
3. It would be a huge economic catalyst for our downtown.
4. The City was willing to make that investment in the significant infrastructure costs for the benefit of our business community.
5. There is space for expansion.
6. The view from the site is pleasant enough.

The land was not going to be free. The City was to pay the DDA \$100,000 in cash and reduce DDA debt to the City by \$390,000 for a total land cost of \$490,000. The City staff did some preliminary construction estimates for the site and infrastructure and determined that we should move forward with more detailed engineering. This step is absolutely key in determining more refined cost estimates. After the detailed engineering was completed, more accurate construction costs were determined. The Woodland Station site has numerous construction challenges both for the placement of the facility itself and for the necessary infrastructure improvements, e.g., extension of Saddle Club Drive and drainage/detention requirements. After the more accurate cost estimates came in that were much higher than expected, I recommended to Council that we move the Aquatic Center out of Woodland Station to the High School site.

The High School site as proposed is the area that is between the bus turnaround at the east end of Midland Avenue and the High School Student parking lot. The area is about 76,000 square feet. The cost estimate to rebuild Fountain Creek in Woodland Station to provide a buildable site for the Aquatic Center is \$1,390,397. There is no Fountain Creek to move at the school site

thus saving \$1,390,397. The estimate to build detention in Woodland Station is \$271,113 and at the school site about \$125,638 saving \$145,475. The estimate to install utilities in Woodland Station is \$288,305 and at the school site about \$169,280 saving \$119,025. The estimate to extend Saddle Club Drive is \$2,926,855 and road improvements in the vicinity of the school site will be about \$109,768 saving \$2,817,087. These infrastructure savings equate to about \$4.4 million. Most of these infrastructure cost savings can't be applied directly to the Aquatic Center facility itself because of limitations on use of these specific tax dollars; some can but certainly not all. Regardless, this is still a huge savings in our hard-earned tax dollars that will allow us to make other improvements in our City.

The facility cost savings contributed to my recommendation. The site development savings will be at least \$497,232 based on the amount of earthwork that would need to be done at Woodland Station and would not have to be done at the High School site. These savings can absolutely be put into the facility itself helping to insure that we have the facility that the community desires.

The proposed major components of the Aquatic Center are: 1. A six-lane competitive lap pool with diving well. It has always been the vision regardless of the Aquatic Center location that this pool would serve as the home pool for a Woodland Park High School Swim Team. 2. A leisure pool in a separate area that will have two warm water lap lanes for swim lessons, water aerobics, etc., lazy river, vortex, zero entry area, spray toys, and other interactive areas. 3. A large slide that has a separate rundown area. 4. An aqua-therapy pool for folks to use while recovering from accident/injury/surgery. This area can be isolated for privacy while therapy is ongoing. 5. A spa on the outdoor deck. Please note that during public meetings after the bond issue passed, the community requested that the two warm water lap lanes and the aqua-therapy pool be added. These are reasonable and appropriate components of the facility and should receive great use. My challenge is to insure that we have the best chance to include them and other amenities once final costs are determined.

Another component that impacted the recommendation that the Aquatic Center move had to do with construction costs. The entire front range is coming out of the recession. This means that there's lots of private and public construction going on which means that construction costs have really gone up. After the more refined cost estimates were received for building in Woodland Station and realizing that construction costs had gone up, the only responsible thing to do was to recommend relocating the Aquatic Center out of Woodland Station.

Recall that the school site had been the second choice before our engineers did the more detailed work in Woodland Station. The District was approached about revisiting placing the Aquatic Center on that site and it was agreed by both the City Council and the School Board that the Superintendent and I, as well as our attorneys, could discuss an arrangement. A preliminary agreement has been reached on how the City can procure and own the school land in exchange for some limited and well-defined school use of the facility. This agreement will be presented to the Council on December 3 and will be going to Public Hearing and a vote on

either December 17 or January 7. The date of the Public Hearing will be decided at the December 3 meeting. Watch the Courier for the agenda.

Why does the school site make sense? Many reasons. 1. Cost savings have already been discussed; that is huge! Savings in hard-earned tax dollars will be realized in all aspects of infrastructure and with site development. 2. The location is not in a residential area so there won't be added traffic in neighborhoods. Will there be more cars on Baldwin? Yes. Will it create significantly more traffic? No, our staff does not think so. The study completed by the Woodland Aquatic Project (WAP) revealed that on average about 120 people will use the pool each day. If the pool is open for 15 hours each day, that's only 8 people per hour and if each person comes in their own car, that's about one car every 7 1/2 minutes. While true that there will be surges of use, we don't think that the surges will have a huge impact on traffic flow. The configuration of the 4-way stop signs in that area help regulate the traffic and other road improvements are being considered to minimize impact. 3. The site is probably the safest site for our children. The school has its own Security Officer and the City supplements that with two uniformed School Resource Police Officers. 4. There's room to expand should the community want to add other components later. 5. There is space for sufficient parking. 6. The view is amazing!

It's been stated by some that the City staff nor Council gave serious consideration to possible donated land near Stone Ridge or to Meadow Wood Sports Complex. That's simply not true. The owner/developer of Stone Ridge has been and will continue to be a great supporter of Woodland Park and of an Aquatic Center. The land that has been generously offered would be easier to develop than Woodland Station but not nearly as easy or cost effective as the school site. Infrastructure costs and site development costs would be significant. Roadways would have to be created. A signal light would probably be required on Highway 67. And while the view is pleasant, it's not the phenomenal view that exists at the school.

Meadow Wood Sports Complex has many of the same issues as the Stone Ridge land. Additionally, traffic would be increased through a residential area. Infrastructure and site development costs would be less than at Woodland Station but would still be more than the school site. Again, the setting and views are pleasant but not as amazing as the school site. The primary reason that Meadow Wood shouldn't be the site for the Aquatic Center is that a master plan exists for fully developing the Sports Complex. The community has long wanted additional baseball fields for Little League type play and additional soccer fields. Those components are included in the community developed master plan. If we build the Aquatic Center at Meadow Wood, those components could not be built and that opportunity would be lost.

The City staff did not do cost estimates on these two sites; we didn't believe that spending additional effort to do that would reveal any greater understanding about building on these sites than what we could ascertain from understanding the terrain, location of utilities, and existing roadway networks.

As you can see this issue is quite complex with many, many variables. It's our responsibility as your City government to analyze all input, weigh all variables, and make what we think is the best decision for our community. We believe we have done that. Will we make 100% of our citizens happy? No! Have we been honest, forthright, and responsible in the process? We certainly think we have been. Please contact me and I'll do my best to answer any and all questions that you may have. My direct line is 687-5200, my e-mail is dbuttery@city-woodlandpark.org, and folks are always welcome at our City Council meetings. I am excited about the Aquatic Center and the future of our community. I look forward to seeing you at the pool!