

IV. Trends in Municipal Pool Design and Business Management

Our group has concluded that the situation of Madison geographically, economically, and demographically gives reason for public discussion on the building of one or several public pools. In the current era of public pools, size, design, and management need to be planned even in the infancy of the project. What pool features Madison chooses to include and build and how it markets and maintains these pools will determine the success of the project. Understanding the present day function of public pools and public pool success stories will guide city planners and city government to building and managing popular public recreation sites.

The logistics of public pool funding in the US has changed significantly since the 1970's and 1980's. Local governments have fewer financial resources to allocate for the delivery of services (McCarville, 223). The federal government continues to reduce aid and the public continues to want tax cuts putting local governments in a type of fiscal squeeze. Therefore, cities have to place the bill on the people for new services and public amenities such as swimming pools. Many locales even expect to make a profit on aquatic ventures. Take the example of Raytown, MO Parks & Recreation Department and the makeover of its city pool in 1988. After the department invested \$900,000 in the upgrade and expansion of its pool, revenue increased to \$305,000 in 1989 from \$105,000 in 1988 (Turner, 49). Assuming the weather and population is controlled, the Raytown example proves that providing a better, larger, and more attractive pool will draw greater crowds and is often worth the investment. What kind of features does the public want and what should a pool have to offer? These are 2 main question when proposing pool projects. Understanding consumer behavior is also important when designing proposals.

There are 2 main consumer behavior facts that pool developers and the city government need to take into account when building a new pool facility or adding on to an existing pool. The first fact is that people spend more time on the deck than in the water and they want to come to a pleasant environment (Turner, 47). Therefore, the whole atmosphere is just as important as the pool and its features. Greenspace, lounge furniture, shaded chairs/tables, along with quality concessions adds to the ambience and experience of patrons (Turner, 47). In fact these items are not only add to the pool experience but are often expected by customers in order to assure future attendance. The second fact is that the overwhelming majority enjoys participatory aquatic entertainment for the entire family (Turner, 48). To accommodate the whole family and provide entertainment, many new popular pool features have been added. 0 depth children's pools are extremely popular as are jungle gyms, mini-waterslides, and fountains (Turner, 48). Two public pools in the Upper-Midwest, Eau Claire, WI and Apple Valley, MN, have 0 depth children's pools. These shallow areas are in fact the most crowded sections in each respective facility. Apple Valley also had fountains and a mini-waterslide, 2 special attractions for kids. Attractions for older kids and adults include special waterslides (speed, intertube), log walks, and diving boards (Turner, 48). Families want these extra features and do not just want a common pool with lap swim. The young and old want entertainment equipment at the pool and this is what draws people on a weekly or daily basis.

Once the pool is built, management and marketing are important in making the public pool a profitable and worth while project. Since the public demands quality and sophisticated recreation and community budgets are limited, the pool needs to be run as

an entrepreneur (Turner, 49). The entrepreneur does not have to run the pool as a private business but needs to use business tools to ensure an efficient venture. Marketing is especially crucial as contextual variables such as knowledge of pool location and services offered determine whether people come to the pool or not (McCarville, 224). In order to get this information out the managerial staff can use avenues such as community media, promotional events, swimming competitions, and group parties (Turner, 48). These avenues not only are used as marketing ploys but also to provide additional revenue. Management responsibilities include not only marketing but also providing the right attractions, effective safety, a pleasant environment, and keeping up with changing needs (Turner, 49). For most cities, public pools need to be run as a business. Madison can choose whether they want to subsidize the pools substantially, break even, or make a profit. However, business and marketing tools are essential to providing and informing the public of these recreational opportunities.

Bibliography

1. McCarville, Crompton. An Empirical Investigation of the Influence of Information on Reference Prices for Public Swimming Pools. *Journal of Leisure Research* v.19 no.3 1987 p. 223-35
2. Turner, Al. Public Pool 2000. *Parks + Recreation* Vol. 26 Iss 11 Nov. 1991 p.46-9