

Proposed William Griffin pool size too small: NS Aquatics Society

The aquatic stakeholder group says, while modern, the new facility is not suited to meet the demands of all user groups

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The push for a 50-metre pool in North Vancouver doesn't appear to be drying up anytime soon.

A year ago the North Shore Aquatics Society formed with a goal of securing an Olympic-sized (in length) swimming pool for the area.

Comprised of stakeholders and user groups — including members of Chena and North Van Cruisers swim clubs, as well as the Masters program — the NSAS serves as a collective voice for the state of local aquatic facilities and programming.

Modern but not practical is how NSAS member Bruce Tout describes draft designs for a new William Griffin pool which will be presented at an open house next week. The plans call for the replacement of the present 37-metre, six-lane pool with a 25-metre, six-lane pool and a separate leisure swimming area.

"The design which has been approved is very appealing and modern and includes leisure/kids element which the present pool does not have, but the actual swimming pool which most aquatic users would use for their swimming activities, lessons and fitness is actually smaller than the present pool," said Tout.

NSAS president and longtime North Van resident Linda Sullivan raised two competitive swimmers and water polo players. Her son, who she describes as someone who didn't swim very well, is now a goalie for the national water polo team.

Sullivan figures plans for the new William Griffin pool are short-sighted and don't accommodate the needs of all user groups.

"It caters to someone who enjoys lap swimming," says Sullivan, who adds there has been an increase in the variety of activities going on in the pool.

Sullivan herself tried to start a recreational water polo team at Griffin a few years ago. She says the heavy demand for pool time left the team restricted to practising on Sunday night and in the shallow end of

the pool which is not conducive for the sport.

Tout was also critical of the public process for the new Delbrook-area community centre. He said, while the District of North Vancouver did invite the various aquatic user groups for input prior to the design stage, very little of the suggestions and input was incorporated into the final iteration.

"The District was very secretive on the William Griffin pool project and when the North Shore Aquatic Society requested to present a delegation before council on this subject, the request was rejected," claims Tout.

In an email to *The Outlook* on Tuesday, DNV spokesperson Jeanine Bratina said:

"The North Shore Aquatic Society did ask to appear as a delegation at a March 2013 council meeting to request a 50 metre pool at the new William Griffin Community Recreation Centre. However, their request to appear was denied as it came too late in the process. Council had already made a decision about the size of the pool at William Griffin after an extensive public consultation process."

In 2006 and 2007, the North Vancouver Recreation Commission conducted a needs assessment that took an comprehensive look at all of the facilities. Later on, there were numerous public open houses for the William Griffin project. The initial plans for a new William Griffin centre didn't include a pool at all, according to Heather Turner, recreation director with the North Vancouver Recreation Commission. She said the NVRC, looking to ensure they wouldn't be an "oversupply situation," planned to spread out the user groups among the remaining North Van pools.

"Based on strong public voices to district council, the decision was made to put a pool in the [William Griffin] facility," said Turner.

As for the size of the pool itself, Turner said capital and operating costs are the biggest factors in that decision.

The NVRC has researched other facilities and found a rough estimate puts the operating cost of a 50-metre pool at double the cost of a 25-metre one.

Turner says the NVRC is confident the new facility will be able to accommodate the community's needs.

"Griffin served a valid need in the community and the new facility is going to be better," added Turner.

At approximately 98,000 square feet in size, the new William Griffin facility will be larger than the old centre. In addition to the pool area, the three-level shimmering glass structure will house a full-sized gymnasium, fitness and activity studios, racquet courts, multi-use spaces and a new NVRC office.

Project architect Mark Hentze with Vancouver-based CEI Architecture describes the building's aesthetic as having a modern flavour.

"The exterior is a combination of architectural concrete, metal panel and curtain wall, while in the interior we have been able to warm up spaces with the strategic use of wood," said Hentze.

The district has approved a budget of \$49 million for the project and set a target of 95 per cent waste diversion rate for the demolition, which is scheduled to start by the spring. The new facility is anticipated to open in fall 2016.

Meanwhile, the focus of the NSAS will now be to petition North Van City council for that 50-metre pool at a redeveloped Harry Jerome rec centre.

"Some of the aquatic organizations will have to drop some of their programs unless the city comes through and builds a larger pool," says Tout, who works with the Cruisers club and manages a large, annual swimming competition at UBC.

A William Griffin public information meeting will be held at district hall, 355 West Queens Rd. on Jan. 22 at 7 p.m. More information is available on the district's website: dnv.org/newwgcrc.