



CITY OF KIRKLAND
Parks and Community Services
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MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: Kurt Triplett, City Manager
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Date: March 13, 2024

Subject: Community Pool Next Steps and Resolution R-5624

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council approves Resolution R-5624 suspending further consideration of a 2024 community pool ballot measure based on community feedback. That feedback highlighted that while there is majority support for a community pool in Kirkland, there is not majority support to fund a pool facility with a property tax measure in 2024. To formally respond to this feedback, the Council requested this resolution at the March 5 Council meeting.

In addition to suspending consideration of a 2024 community pool ballot measure, the resolution also authorizes staff to evaluate investments in the Peter Kirk pool to provide year-round swim lessons and explore other potential uses for the City-owned Houghton Park and Ride property.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

Following the failure of the Parks Proposition 1 ballot measure in the November 2023 election, both the Council and staff received stakeholder feedback to explore a smaller, less-costly community pool proposal in 2024. At the December 12, 2023, Council meeting, those who led the “no” campaign against Proposition 1 encouraged Council to explore a focused pool proposal funded by a voter-approved bond and run by a non-profit organization. Based on these various points of community input, Council directed staff to complete a community survey to learn why the November 2023 measure did not pass and understand the community’s priorities for the future.

After receiving this direction at the December 12 meeting, staff contracted with EMC Research to conduct the survey after the questions were reviewed and approved by the Council. Once the representative sample survey was completed, the City also posted the same survey online for any community member to complete. The results of both the EMC survey and the online

survey, as well as focus group and stakeholder feedback, were presented to the Council at the Council's March 1, 2023 retreat.

Representative Sample Community Survey Results

EMC Research conducted a representative sample community survey from February 8 to February 15, 2024. This survey was conducted using a random sample of 600 participants from a list of adults 18 and older in Kirkland and results are projectable to the entire population of the city. Of the 600 participants, 510 indicated that they are registered voters. Of the 600 participants, 79% reported having voted in the November 2023 election. Select highlights from the results are included below.

Result highlights with reference to page number in report or topline results:

- 55% of registered voters and 55% of all respondents generally support a new measure (report pages 14 & 16)
- 52% of registered voters and 52% of all respondents support a 9-year levy lid lift (report page 17, topline page 5)
- 55% of registered voters and 56% of all respondents support a bond measure (report page 17, topline page 5)
- When considering location preference and whether support is contingent on the location preference, estimated maximum support for a measure falls below a majority with either location selection. 7% say they would not support the measure if the pool were located at Houghton. 3% say they would not support the measure if the pool were located at NKCC. The resulting "support" percentages for a 9-year levy lid lift: 49% at NKCC and 45% at Houghton (report pages 18 – 21)
- 64% of registered voters and 47% of all respondents said "my family can't afford any more property tax increases right now" (report page 14, topline page 4)
- 49% of registered voters and 49% of all respondents said they would not support a tax measure to fund a new indoor community pool in the final agreement scale (report pages 22 - 23)
- 46% of registered voters and 45% of all respondents said that building an indoor community pool should be a priority of the City to meet the water recreation and exercise needs of community members of all ages and abilities (report pages 22 - 23)

Open-Link Community Survey Results

The representative sample community survey was followed by an open-link version of the same survey hosted on the City's website from February 15 to February 26, 2024. The open-link version of the survey was circulated to community members via the City's website, the *This Week in Kirkland* email and podcast, the City's social media accounts, a Press Release, the 2023 ballot newsletter, an email to the City's Recreation email list, and direct emails to interest groups including, but not limited to, the Parks Funding Exploratory Committee, Kirkland Youth Council, Park Board, Human Services Commission, Senior Council, each neighborhood association, the Kirkland Parks and Community Foundation, and elementary school PTAs.

The open-link community survey included three open-ended comment boxes for people to share additional thoughts. All comments, and both sets of survey results may be found on the park ballot measure webpage¹.

¹ <https://www.kirklandwa.gov/parksballot>

ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK EFFORTS:

Youth Council Feedback

Staff met with 32 members of the Kirkland Youth Council (KYC) on Monday, February 12, 2024. City Manager Kurt Triplett provided a brief overview of Proposition 1 and facilitated a discussion. Youth Council members overwhelmingly agreed that Kirkland does need a community pool for many reasons. Youth Council members were excited and shared several ideas for programming a community pool. One KYC member shared that a community pool would provide employment opportunities for youth.

Senior Council Feedback

Staff met with 15 members of the Kirkland Senior Council on Tuesday, February 13, 2024. Senior Council members shared that they had strong concerns about any new property tax increase at this time, especially as many seniors are on fixed incomes. They also felt that the benefits of a new community pool to seniors was not clear. The Senior Council also had questions about the programming and operating costs of a community pool.

Community Feedback Sessions – Limit Taxes, Public/Private Partnerships

Three additional community feedback sessions were held the last week of February with each night focusing on a different perspective: people who opposed Parks Prop 1, people who supported Parks Prop 1, and people who were neutral on Parks Prop 1. Participants were primarily recruited using some of the outreach methods as the open-link community survey. Staff also invited people who indicated in the community survey that they would be interested in participating in the focus groups.

Throughout the sessions there was a common theme that the perceived complexity of the Parks Prop 1 measure was a significant concern. Issues around complexity were compounded by the proposal's characterization by some as a "forever tax" raising the stakes of a difficult decision. Generally, feedback favored a clearly defined end point to the tax structure. Participants also expressed concerns about the overall cost of the measure, relating to both capital and operating expenditures. There was also feedback that the additional components of the City's proposal had merit, such as bathrooms in parks, but that those additional programs should be included in a stand-alone measure, not associated with the aquatic center. While there was no consensus on location, there was a reasonable amount of feedback favoring a location to the north, closer to where folks perceived there to be more families with small children.

Finally, there were two consistent themes across all the focus groups. There was near consensus that a pool is needed in the City across all groups, but that a major property tax supporting a pool should not be a top priority of the City at this time. The second recurrent theme across all groups underscored a desire that the City collaborate with external partners and identify private sector funding and grant opportunities to mitigate against the public tax burden of both construction and operating expenses.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND RESOLUTION R-5624

Throughout the entire development of the parks ballot measure that occurred in November of 2023, the Council has been guided by extensive community feedback. Each element of the ballot measure was identified in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) plan that was

adopted in 2022 following two years of community outreach that included more than 3,000 community members. The decision to explore a ballot measure was made after hearing from the community that the Council should expedite critical PROS plan investments. The ballot measure itself was developed by the Parks Funding Exploratory Committee (PFEC) that was composed of 45 community members from all walks of life including neighborhood associations, non-profits, service organizations, business organizations and the school district. The PFEC met multiple times from 2022 to 2023 and the PFEC majority recommendations were the foundation of the proposal that was reviewed by the Park Board, other stakeholders and vetted through a community survey. With only minor additions for public safety investments suggested by the Park Board, the PFEC recommendations were the basis of the measure Council placed on the ballot.

Following the defeat of Proposition 1 in November of 2023, Council received contradictory stakeholder advice. Some wanted the City to try again, and others felt the voters were clear in saying no. The Council determined that the decision of whether to try again in 2024 should also be based on community feedback through the surveys and additional outreach.

After receiving all the survey and outreach results at the retreat, the Council concluded that while the community does support a public pool, the majority does not support a property tax proposal for such a pool in 2024. Based on this, Council directed staff to bring back a resolution suspending further consideration of a community pool measure in 2024 and outlining next steps.

The Council direction is captured in Resolution R-5624. R-5624 does three things. First, it suspends further exploration of a community pool ballot measure for 2024 and directs that Parks and Community Services package all materials related to the community pool for consideration in the future. Second, it authorizes the City Manager to develop options for utilizing the Peter Kirk pool as a year-round facility with a priority focus on swimming lessons for young children, and to include those options as part of the 2025-2026 budget and 2025-2030 Capital Improvement Plan discussions. And finally, it authorizes the City Manager to explore alternative uses for the City-owned Houghton Park and Ride property beyond a community pool or an aquatic and recreation center.

NEXT STEPS

If the Council approves the resolution, staff will begin developing options for Peter Kirk pool for the 2025-2026 budget process. Staff will also explore options for the Houghton Park and Ride property. Staff will regularly report back to the Council on progress related to both the pool and the property.