Indoor Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study

Executive Summary
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Indoor Aquatic Centre Feasibility Study

Executive Summary

In 2005, Council established an Aquatic Facilities Task Group (AFTG), to identify key issues regarding the future provision of aquatic facilities within the Shire. The AFTG consisted of representatives drawn from a wide range of community organisations and sectors.

The AFTG recommended that Council undertake a feasibility study into the development of an indoor/heated aquatic multi purpose facility. Below are the summary findings from that study, which was conducted throughout 2008 and 2009.

Summary of Previous Studies

Several reports have been conducted over the last 15 years, looking at the provision of aquatic facilities within the Shire. These reports have ranged from investigating the partial enclosure and heating of the Castlemaine Pool, a feasibility study into an indoor aquatic centre and an Aquatic Facilities Strategic Plan. A technical audit of all outdoor pools was undertaken in 2006, which identified that the ageing of public swimming pool assets was an issue not just in the Mount Alexander Shire, but across Victoria.

Aquatic Facility Provision in the Region

For a relatively small Shire, Mount Alexander has an unusually high number of pools. By rationalising the number of older outdoor facilities and constructing a central indoor aquatic complex, it is likely we can better meet the needs of the entire community.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council is developing a new indoor aquatic centre with an anticipated completion date of mid 2010. However consultants do not anticipate that this facility will have any substantial impact on Mount Alexander Shire residents.

There are three private providers within the municipality offering a range of aquatic, gym and group fitness facilities as well as a 'learn to swim' to program.

Community Profile

Based on an assessment of the demographics and future population trends of the region, the Mount Alexander Shire will experience growth in its older age groups and a decline in the proportion of younger people.

Older people are likely to participate in aquatic activities and programs in indoor heated pools. The 65 + age group is currently not attending outdoor pools in great numbers, but value the opportunity for year round exercise and therefore represent a major new market if year round facilities are available.
The data also indicates that the municipality has a stable family aged population. This group are often the largest users of these types of facilities.

The overall population of the municipality is expected to increase from 18,116 in 2008 to 21,400 by 2021.

Community Consultation

The community was consulted to provide input into the study by identifying their issues, needs and aspirations. Stakeholders consulted include:

- The general community through an online survey and public submissions
- Schools and Pre-Schools
- Swimming Pool Committees of Management
- Swimming Pool User Groups
- Health Service Providers
- Recreation Service Providers
- Private Swimming Pool Operators
- Neighbouring Municipalities
- Council Staff

Aquatic Facility Trends

**Warm Water Exercise**

Physiotherapists, General Practitioners, personal trainers and other healthcare professionals are increasingly prescribing water exercise programs due to the significant benefits for rehabilitation, injury prevention, and pain management. As the population ages, aquatic therapies is experiencing explosive growth, and is now the fastest growing form of aquatic activity in this country.

**Reduction of Outdoor Aquatic Facilities**

Local Government Authorities are consolidating resources into larger all-inclusive aquatic facilities in order to lower operating costs. A number of Councils are removing traditional 50m pools and replacing them with two or three pool complexes, as an alternative to building entirely new facilities.

**Water Play Areas**

Water play areas, or Splash Pads are the latest trend in aquatic recreation. Splash Pads incorporate various types of water elements including a relatively flat surface covered with colourful resilient surfacing, interactive water sprays emanating from the ground, and vertical play elements. Splash Pads are commonly located within aquatic facilities and embody the current approach towards accessibility, safety, innovation and affordability.
**Gyms, Spa, Sauna and Cafe Amenities**
The addition of site amenities transforms a swimming pool into a recreation destination, as they increase levels of customer satisfaction, length of stay, attendance and viability. Customer satisfaction is critical to achieving a successful and economically viable aquatic centre and attention to amenities is an important component of that success.

**Universal Access**
Changes in Government legislation in regard to disability access now require modern facilities to have ramp access into pools, hoists, accessible toilets and change facilities.

**Allied Health**
New aquatic facilities are increasingly providing health and therapeutic services such as health consultancies, weight loss and therapeutic services.

**Environmentally Sustainable Design**
The broader community now places high levels of importance on minimising impact on the environment. Sustainable features included in contemporarily designed aquatic centres include:

- Water and power efficient appliances, fixtures and fittings.
- Harvesting of rainwater.
- Re-use of pool backwash water.

**Priority Facility Components**
Consultants have taken into account all aquatic facility trends to form a list of features that will ensure the proposed aquatic centre is viable and sustainable.

Recommended components include:
- Indoor 25m pool with 8 lanes of 2.2m width
- Learn to swim pool
- 300 square metre gym
- 150 square metre group fitness room
- Cafe
- Crèche
- Change rooms
- Office/admin area

If the capital budget allows, the consultants suggest the inclusion of two additional components, being:
- 45 square metres of Water Splash Pads
- Warm water space for therapeutic and exercise programs.
Site Analysis

Seven sites around the Shire were initially identified by the AFTG then later analysed by consultants to determine the most appropriate location for a new indoor aquatic facility.

The criteria used to assess these sites were:

- High visibility
- High profile site
- High volumes of passing traffic
- Site conditions and topography
- Opportunity for orientation
- Availability of services
- Capacity for future expansion
- Traffic accessibility
- Car parking provision
- Proximity to public transport
- Bicycle networks

Following an initial assessment against these criteria, five of the original sites were deemed unsuitable for the location of an aquatic centre. Two sites, the existing Castlemaine Pool and the Western Reserve were identified as ‘preferred’ sites and further analysis of these two sites was undertaken, including preliminary soil testing and planning implications.

Following the analysis of the two ‘preferred’ sites, the consultants offered the following conclusions:

The existing Castlemaine Pool site:

- Will require higher capital costs for development of an indoor leisure facility
- Contains the higher risk of unexpected capital cost increases
- Is more likely to have negative controls/restrictions due to planning overlays
- Will require closure for at least two seasons

The Western Reserve boasts flat topography, strong linkages with the major activity centre of Castlemaine and is highly visible. More favourable soil conditions and car parking, due to its proximity to existing infrastructure, will reduce construction costs.
Facility Concept Designs

Option 1 – Includes all of the recommended components

Option 2 – Includes all of the recommended components plus additional warm water program pool and water play splash pads
Indicative Construction Costs

A Quantity Surveyor was engaged to provide indicative construction costs for the two options. Option 1 is expected to cost between $11,731,000 and $13,939,000 depending on whether a Standard Quality or Premium Quality facility is preferred.

Business Plan

Business plans have been prepared for both design options to better understand the operating costs of the proposed indoor community aquatic facility. The below operating costs are based on information provided by expert consultants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level of subsidy in Year 5* (Realistic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option 1</td>
<td>$436,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 2</td>
<td>$517,607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Year 5 has been used as it provides a realistic ongoing operating figure for the future. Earlier years will require a higher level of subsidy as the new facility establishes its membership.

Facility Management Options

There are a number of different Management Options that consultants have provided. These include outsourcing the management and operations to a professional organisation, manage the facility within Council, or a combination of both outsourcing and Council management.
Project Funding Opportunities

Generally a development of an aquatic facility is funded through a combination of four different funding sources:

- Council Funding
- Other Government Grants
- Commercial Investment
- Community Funding

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following key conclusions can be drawn from the research and consultation undertaken throughout the feasibility study:

- Demand for the development of an indoor community aquatic facility to cater predominantly for community health purposes has previously been identified and reconfirmed via this project.

- Development of an indoor aquatic centre is consistent with Council policies and directions to support local community participation in sport, recreation and community life. Currently Council is able to provide aquatic based services accessible for only 13 weeks of the year achieving 25,000 – 30,000 visits per year. A year round indoor facility would cater for in excess of 130,000 visits per year and offer wider access to aquatic facilities, and substantial health benefits for the community.

- Industry data suggests that the majority of indoor aquatic centres are not financially self sufficient. However, facilities with gym and other multi-purpose facilities have the capacity to generate revenue that can off-set some of the costs of the facility.

- Development of a new facility that supports local community access can be justified from a social equity, health and community building perspective.

- Development of a new indoor community aquatic facility is likely to have an impact on existing facilities within the region. It is recommended that the Chewton, Harcourt and Castlemaine Pools be closed permanently if a new indoor facility is constructed in Castlemaine.

- Rationalisation from 5 seasonal outdoor pools to 2 seasonal pools in Maldon and Newstead and development of a year round indoor aquatic leisure facility in Castlemaine would likely require an addition to the overall existing allocations of approximately $300,000 (in Year 1 of operation). This is taking into account potential savings of $158,000 per year that would be gained by closing the Chewton, Harcourt and Castlemaine seasonal pools. The reallocation of funds that would need to be spent as part of an asset renewal program for these three
facilities over the next 3-5 years, would in our opinion be better invested in a facility that can cater for a larger cross section of the community on a year round basis.

- This project has identified a suitable scope of facilities required to adequately service the current and anticipated future community need. Any new facility should incorporate design flexibility to allow for possible future expansion.

- Trends in indoor aquatic facility design and operation support the development of multi-purpose facilities that can accommodate a range of community activities and uses. Industry trends suggest the majority of local government authorities publicly tender for management services for indoor aquatic facilities and is therefore an option for this facility.

- Option 1 is preferable as it offers the most affordable outcome, in terms of capital and operation cost, whilst still delivering substantial programming opportunities and community benefits.