

No to a Public Pool, Beacon Star, Fri. April 24,09 by Evan French

The WPS Recreation Complex Committee is absolutely dumbfounded that the Municipalities have rejected the idea of a pool without doing a detailed Business Plan. As a result of this decision, they have lost the window for receiving \$6 - 7 million dollars in grants for this project. After the recent meeting of the YMCA, Fed Nor, the Provincial Recreation Consultant, three Mayors and three CAO's and our Committee, we strongly urged REDAC to hire a Consultant - AT NO COST TO EACH MUNICIPALITY - to complete a detailed financial plan before A DECISION WAS MADE. The funding for the Business Plan was to come from the YMCA and the balance from a special pool fund which had been set aside years ago. It is in everyone's interest to know what the real capital and operating costs are before making a final decision, that goes for the Municipalities, the YMCA and our Committee. To make a major decision based on fiction not fact is alarming, very misleading and certainly not with ones " eyes wide open".

At the recent REDAC meeting the YMCA, the Provincial Recreation Consultant and our Committee (after three years of investigating similar facilities) felt that the \$12 million dollars the Municipalities were throwing about - without any facts - were very high and not supported by anyone in the field of recreation. If one uses the recent Wasaga Beach YMCA as an example, then the Municipalities were away off base. It is often a ploy of some to use bogus and inflated figures to discourage a project when there is another more major issue at stake.

To set things straight, in 2006, our Committee developed a five year strategic plan to create a full - service YMCA in WPS - not just a "pool". This would include a state of the art fitness centre, five change rooms, an Aquatic Centre with FOUR pools - a kiddies pool, a four lane 25 metre fitness and teaching pool, a fully accessible family pool and a large spa. Hopefully a walking / running track could be afforded along with saunas, meeting rooms, office space etc. We have talked with many people and organizations and they all agreed that we need this facility for many reasons. Our Committee spent three years looking at similar facilities that would be affordable both in capital and operational costs. The Wasaga YMCA was the best example of a facility that was affordable, professionally managed and met the needs of the surrounding community. Our proposal incorporated many cost reduction and affordable concepts. The new YMCA would be a " green Y". A \$1 million dollar operating endowment fund would be incorporated into the total cost.. Our affordable figures stated that \$8,000,000 would be needed for capital and \$750,000 for operating. With capital grants at an all time high of 75% of the cost of the project (\$6.75 million), less than \$2.25 million is needed to be raised by the Municipalities and the community to build the facility. Operationally, we had projected that with a minimum of 2000 members (about 10%) of the surrounding municipalities, plus fees from special programs, plus saving from the " greening" of the facility, plus the interest income from the operating endowment fund, the full service YMCA would be operationally affordable in five years and not be reliant on any Municipal funds. Even if there was a deficit of \$100,000 in the first few years, that is only \$5 per 20,000 permanent residents and even less if all taxable properties were included. We believe the \$5 is well worth it.

The YMCA have been professional managers for over 100 years and pride themselves on community involvement and affordable and fully accessible facilities for all ages. They never turn anyone away. A complete Business Plan would endorse or deny the affordability factor. What an asset for our Community if it was a positive result!

The article did NOT mention the success of the Wasaga Y. In less than three years the YMCA no longer needs a Municipal subsidy to operate - two years earlier than expected. The article also did NOT mention many affordable and cost saving measures that were in our proposal. The former Optimist facility and site already exist with much of the needed infrastructure like parking already in place. The existing gym, day care, etc. greatly reduce the cost of a completely new facility thus less capital costs. The article did not even mention making the Y "green" by introducing many environmental green concepts to reduce operating costs. There are more special grants and rebates on new "green" facilities again reducing the operating and capital costs making the facility even more affordable. The creation and implementation of an \$1 million operating endowment is a new concept in which the annual interest is used to defray the operating costs ad infinitum. We were willing to work with the YMCA and community to help fund raise this money.

This recent decision also negated several major recommendations from the previous 2008 Consultants report - Cultural and Recreation Master Plan - tabled last July which the three Municipalities had funded. Why fund this study and then ignore its Recommendations when it called for a detailed feasibility study to be done? This is a mystery to us. (Eyes half closed?)

A "pool" - or Aquatic Centre with four pools as we envisage it - has been ranked the # 1 needed facility in every study since 1988 and more recently on our unofficial web poll (www.pscomplex.com) and in the DMA's Consultants report of 2008. No other recreational facility came close to the need for an "Aquatic facility". It is only some politicians that do not support it.

This recent decision is not about a "pool". This decision is really about the complete lack of cooperation and collaboration among the seven municipalities and the unwillingness to reach an agreement on how to collectively help each other with Regional projects that will benefit the health and wellness of the entire WPS community. We realise that no one Municipality can build a new YMCA on its own. Only Parry Sound has been fully supportive. Sequin doesn't like the location but uses other reasons to negate the project. McDougall felt that the operating costs were going to be too high and they can't afford it but they have no basis for that assumption. The other four Municipalities - Archipelago, Carling, McKellar and Whitestone would not even support the latest Consultant's Recreation and Cultural Study of 2008, although Whitestone showed some interest in the project.

The one excellent example of a successful collaborative project by all seven Municipalities is our wonderful West Parry Sound Health Centre. Why not do the collaboration for a full service YMCA in WPS that will benefit the entire community? The new CEO of WPSHC is 100% supportive of a full service YMCA in WPS as it would help attract medical staff and enhance hospital cardiac programs..

We need to do several things if we are ever to move WPS into the 21st century and create a new and revitalized sense of community for the greater good and build a much needed full - service YMCA in WPS.

1. Do a detailed Business Plan ASAP (to really open our eyes) 3-6 months
2. After a detailed and supportive Business Plan is produced, a representative Committee would hold a series of " Town Hall" meetings in each Municipality. 3-6 months
3. In the 2010 Municipal elections, all seven Municipalities would hold a similar referendum / plebiscite on whether they would financially support the concept of a full service YMCA in WPS. This is a very open, community development process and would inform us if the tax payers in all seven areas support the plan. Let the people decide. (2010)

A new full - service YMCA would be a valuable asset to our Community. It would enhance our health and wellness, help bring medical and professionals to our community, create employment, provide a much needed aquatic facility and may even make us the number 1 small community in Canada.

To make this decision based of fiction, not fact is extremely disheartening. To lose over \$6 million in grants is wasteful at best. To lose the professionalism and expertise of a YMCA is absurd. We urge each Municipality to reconsider and endorse the development of a detailed Business Plan at no cost to you as soon as possible. We recommended that a representative from the YMCA, a representative from REDAC and a representative from our WPS Recreation Complex Committee work collaboratively with the Consultant to develop the Business Plan ASAP.

If the Municipalities cannot cooperate, maybe they should be taken to task in the next election. The seven Municipalities appear to protect themselves and do not want to give up any authority or power. They appear to have limited vision beyond their own boundaries. If they won't cooperate on Regional projects then the following needs to be done to improve the quality of life in WPS.

1. Hire a independent Consultant to recommend how the seven Municipalities can reach an economic formula for Regional projects and make it mandatory.

Then, maybe we can finally build a first class, full - service YMCA and Aquatic Centre in WPS that will benefit everyone.

Respectfully submitted by the West Parry Sound Recreation Complex Committee
Peter Hopkins, Maxine Davidson, CO-Chairs