

From: Anna Christensen <annachristensen259@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, October 10, 2023 1:38 PM

To: CityClerk <CityClerk@longbeach.gov>; Mayor <Mayor@longbeach.gov>; Council District 1 <District1@longbeach.gov>; Council District 3 <District3@longbeach.gov>; Council District 2 <District2@longbeach.gov>; Council District 5 <District5@longbeach.gov>; Council District 4 <District4@longbeach.gov>; Council District 6 <District6@longbeach.gov>; Council District 7 <District7@longbeach.gov>; Council District 8 <District8@longbeach.gov>; Council District 9 <District9@longbeach.gov>

Subject: Agenda Item 28. 23-1163, City Council Meeting 10/10/23 - Comment

-EXTERNAL-

October 10, 2023

To: Long Beach City Council

From: Long Beach Area Peace Network (LBAPN)

Re: Agenda Item 28. 23-1163, City Council Meeting 10/10/23

The Long Beach Area Peace Network requests a no vote on this item which includes additional public funding for “design services” by HED Corporation, under contract to build the Belmont Beach and Aquatic Center Project. Public Works is requesting “to increase the contract amount by \$6,000,000, for a revised contract amount not to exceed \$18,664,576.”

It would seem that the existing design contract is sufficient. As reported in the request (R-28), under FISCAL IMPACT, “While sufficient funds are budgeted to support the contract amendment for project design services, additional funding will be required for project completion.” This is not the time to throw more money at a project which is clearly becoming less inviting, less practical, and less sustainable.

LBAPN's concerns are not merely financial, we must challenge the City's fairy tale version of history. Their *Never-ending Story of the BBAC*, has victims (future Olympians, members of private swim clubs and competitive sports teams), Heroes (former 3rd District Councilmember Susie Price, former Mayor Garcia, former “Olympians, City Planners), and Villains (Surfrider, CARP, LBAPN, and SB 1137).

In 2015, when oil prices hit a low of \$50 a barrel, the City drafted a list of priorities for Tidelands monies, #1 being Public Safety. That same year the City "set aside" \$61,000,000 in Tidelands funds for a \$103,000,000 BBAC with a bubble top, two new olympic-sized pools, a professional high dive, spas, stadium seating and a restaurant. This immediately derailed or postponed previously budgeted tidelands area projects like upgrading the pier. Private funding did not materialize, instead, costs rose due to inflation and to Coastal Commission demands that the BBAC favor community recreation over competitive sports. We then got the second “topless” evolution of the BBAC, at a cost of @ \$85,000,000 (today this version would also cost more than \$100,000,000).

The City is right to be concerned about funding, but wrong to propose that the BBAC is entitled to limited Tidelands monies. If SB 1137 stands, revenues from oil drilling will fall, but so will cases of asthma and other respiratory diseases, cancer, and poor infant health, illnesses which also have a financial impact. Even if SB 1137 is rejected, Tidelands funds will be increasingly in demand to maintain existing infrastructure and to adapt to Sea Level Rise. Storm events and flooding in low lying neighborhoods, salt water intrusion, critical city infrastructure, including water wells - all qualify as public safety issues, prioritized for Tidelands monies since 2015.

LBAPN supports using some of the \$61,000,000 set aside to maintain and staff the existing community pools on site. We do not support the existing design or the proposed Option 1. An indoor pool provides access day and night, all year long. This allows access for working people to recreate and to bring their children to lessons year round, regardless of the weather. Given the location of the Project, in the wealthiest, whitest corner of the City, 2 bus rides and 20 minutes by car from working class neighborhoods, it cannot possibly serve as *“an inspiring facility for all age groups that will engage, instruct, and train our public aquatics users, while providing equitable access to recreational water space for the larger Long Beach community in a fiscally sustainable way.”*

LBAPN's Everybody in the Pool resolution is based on hard truths that due to a history of race and class prejudice, Long Beach residents have never had equal access to public pools, beaches, or even parks. Even though access to community pools is proven to be central to ensuring that children and adults are water safe, in 100 years, Long Beach has only invested in three public pools. A public pool, proposed for the Ninth District, awaits public funding.

As a majority minority city, we must face the fact that, statistically speaking, most youth will not learn how to swim nor will most adults have the opportunity to do so. The ability to swim is a public safety issue, especially in a coastal city. It also determines who will access recreational programs like sailing and jobs like lifeguarding.

The City's position that bussing youth from underserved neighborhoods to the BBAC will satisfy demands for public access, equitable distribution of public recreational funding, and environmental justice is delusional.

The majority of children and none of the adults living in communities deemed eligible will benefit from the proposed plan in which youth will meet up in public parks and ride buses across town to the BBAC. Funding for bussing will be limited as will the days and times of instruction and recreational swimming. The BBAC will have no seating or shade or changing or storage areas, no dining facilities or food service or picnic areas. Parents will not be comfortable bussing children across town to a location where they may or may not be supervised, nor should they be. Supervised groups will demand more staff and add to funding costs.

As for public outreach, LBAPN has had no response from the City to our request that the original Stakeholder Advisory Committee of thirteen be expanded in order that it become more diverse and include those representing districts other than the Third (see letter attached). The June 27, 2023 public meeting described by staff was held in the Third District and attended primarily by City staff, those from local competitive aquatics teams or private aquatics schools, Belmont Shore residents, and those who have commented on the BBAC in the past. There was no expression of support for the reduced design options. Even according to the survey reported by the City, 40% of respondents do not support Option 1, the version you are being requested to approve tonight.

The City's CDP is now expiring, and the Coastal Commission is being asked to extend it for another year. Design changes and other factors will likely result in new special conditions being imposed on the Project.

The Council is forewarned that *"As the Project moves forward, staff will return to the City Council with funding strategies and requests for appropriations as funding is identified."* The BBAC has never been affordable, and throwing good money after bad will not make it so. It was not meant to be equitable, and cannot be made so in this location. We ask that you reject this request and build community not privilege. We stand by the goals outlined in our Everybody in the Pool Resolution.

Long Beach Peace Network, Everybody in the Pool Resolution

Recognizing both the health and safety benefits of swimming instruction and community aquatics facilities, and the need to address ongoing issues of health equity, the Long Beach Area Peace Network recommends that the City of Long Beach:

- 1. Ensure equal access to public pools and swimming instruction for all residents in accordance with the goals of the Healthy Communities Policy of the City of Long Beach.*
- 2. Build and maintain a community pool in every city council district.*
- 3. Raise community awareness as to the health and safety benefits of swimming, water sports, and lifeguard training.*
- 4. Increase diversity and city-wide participation in public aquatics programs for youth including swimming lessons, water sports, sailing and boating, Jr. Lifeguarding, and aquatics day camps*

We take this position because a significant number of children are not learning to swim and, as a consequence, drowning is a leading cause of accidental death among young people. Evidence supports a relationship between fewer opportunities to take swimming lessons and higher minority drowning rates. USA Swimming reports that 70% of African American children and 60%-65% of all other non-white children have low or no swimming ability, compared to 40% of white children. Noting that "swimming skills can be lifesaving," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2010 that black youths ages 10- 12 are ten times more likely to drown in pools than their white peers. American Indian, Asian American, and Latino/Chicano youth are also more at risk. Long Beach, a majority- minority city, has no public pools in six of its nine districts.

From: Anna Christensen <annachristensen259@gmail.com>
To: Joshua Hickman <Joshua.Hickman@longbeach.gov>
Tom Modica <Tom.Modica@longbeach.gov>; Rex Richardson <Rex.Richardson@longbeach.gov>; Council District 3 <District3@longbeach.gov>; CityClerk <CityClerk@longbeach.gov>;
Sent: Fri, Feb 10, 2023 9:17 am
Subject: Re: BBAC Budget Information: "Belmont Plaza Pool Rebuild" project budget (Item #19 Council Agenda)

Dear Mr. Modica and Mr. Hickman,

Next Steps for the BBAC include, "Discuss options with stakeholder group spring 2023." It is critical that membership in this group be expanded from the 2014 Stakeholder Advisory Committee to include input from across the City - including residents, community groups, athletes, and athletic teams. It is also appropriate that additional public meetings be held in multiple locations across the City to allow residents to learn about and comment on what will be the 3rd evolution of the BBAC.

In June of 2014, the City Council held a study session to plan a new structure to replace the Olympic Pool, and suggested, *"that a community stakeholder committee be convened to prioritize optional components of the conceptual plan for the City Council to consider for approval, prior to proceeding with the entitlements process."* In July, *"the Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine, in coordination with Third District Councilmember Suzie Price and the City Manager, formed an ad hoc Belmont Beach & Aquatics Center Stakeholders Advisory Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to make a recommendation to City staff and the Mayor and Members of the City Council regarding the various amenities needed in the new facility within the financial resources available for this project. This ad hoc Advisory Committee represents the various user groups, aquatics disciplines, residents, businesses, recreational users, and all other stakeholders."* This thirteen member Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the Director of Parks, Recreation and Marine held three meetings before introducing the first evolution of the BBAC, a \$103 million structure focused on competitive swimming and diving, to the general public.

When the BBAC came before the Planning Commission, City Council, and Coastal Commission, the Long Beach Area Peace Network, criticized the makeup of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, as not being representative of the City as a whole (see comment below). While input from professional athletes, local swim and dive teams, and Belmont Shore residents and business was appropriate, excluding everyone else was not. Additionally, Stakeholder Committee meetings were not open to the public. The only City Council member to host public meetings on the BBAC was 3rd District Councilmember Price, and those attending were asked to limit comments to the architecture, Period.

Long Beach residents were given the opportunity to vote on the Olympic Pool before it was built in 1968 - this was not the case with the BBAC. With all due respect to the OG thirteen, input from additional stakeholders is clearly justified and sorely needed as a third evolution of the BBAC is under consideration. Please respond to this request asap.

Anna Christensen, Long Beach Area Peace Network (LBAPN)

LBAPN on Stakeholder Committee:

1. Community input: The BBAC is a project of the City of Long Beach, described as serving the needs of residents, and funded with public monies. Considering the scale and cost of the BBAC, public outreach has been totally inadequate. The majority of residents have neither been informed of the specifics of the project nor have they been included in the decision making process. Thirteen of the fourteen member Stakeholder Advisory Committee for the BBAC are either aquatics professionals or members of the "aquatics community" residing in the 3rd District. Stakeholder Committee meetings were not open to the public and no public record was made of discussions. The only district to hold community meetings was the Third, where residents were invited to meet the architects and comments were strictly limited to the building's design. Public concerns as to the BBAC's location, size, and cost, were raised at these meetings, in an online survey, and in response to the DEIR. Neither the Stakeholder Advisory Committee nor the Planning Department appears to have taken them into consideration.

Surfrider Foundation – Act Coastal 2021 California Coastal Commission Conservation Report Card

https://www.actcoastal.org/wiki/2021_ActCoastal_Conservation_Report_Card

Worst of 2021 – Belmont Beach Aquatic Center

In February, the Coastal Commission approved an appeal of a City of Long Beach coastal development permit for construction of a swimming pool complex with indoor components, a cafe, and public restrooms covering 5.8 acres of sandy beach space on Belmont Beach. The project raised important environmental justice, coastal access and beach preservation issues. First, the proposed site is directly atop public beach space. Second, the site will be subject to hazards from sea level rise and extreme weather in the coming decades. Finally, the location of the public facility will be easily accessible to high income coastal residents but less accessible to lower income residents from inland neighborhoods, raising important equity and justice concerns.



Image: Belmont Beach Aquatic Center Rendering, Coastal Commission Staff Report

Many local residents, along with the Surfrider Foundation and Citizens About Responsible Planning, raised these concerns in public comments on the project. Commissioners expressed concerns about the environmental justice implications of the project location but were generally satisfied with the City’s proposed public transportation plan. Ultimately, the commissioners approved the project with the caveat that the City complete a robust public transportation plan to be presented to the commission, leaving important considerations regarding sea level rise and beach access largely unaddressed. The vote was 10-1 with Commissioner Shelley Luce (alternative for Commissioner Linda Escalante) the lone dissenting vote against the project.

Commissioner Effie Turnbull-Sanders led the discussion about the importance of accessibility for all community members and noted that the City needed to “bake environmental justice into the project”, rather than “sprinkling it on top” with an undefined public transportation plan. She suggested that the City include a program to help elevate inland swimmers to the elite competition level and to include more community services that will ensure the entire City can benefit from the pool. The City promised to incorporate those suggestions leading a majority of commissioners to approve the project.

Nobody opposes building a new public pool. But the proposed location is clearly the wrong place - on the public beach and far from low-income communities most in need of the benefits from large public investments in recreation, and who have most often endured inequitable underinvestment in access to the outdoors. While the City’s public transportation system may help some inland residents to access the pool, the distance will remain a barrier for many. Finally, competitive swimming is not a coastal dependent use, a key criterion established in the Coastal Act for deliberations on development proposals. Sacrificing California’s open beaches and public coastal recreational opportunities for activities and projects that can occur inland is particularly ill-advised and shortsighted as sea level rise threatens to drown our remaining beaches, and the public’s opportunity to enjoy them.

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