

## Procedural move to sharpen resolve for city's pools

By KENDRA WALTKE / Lincoln Journal Star

Lincoln may sharpen its resolve to provide public swimming pools, placing a higher priority on providing neighborhood pools.

If future funding allows, pools could be built in southeast or southwest Lincoln.

Aging pools could be refurbished or relocated nearby, and aquatic centers such as Star City Shores could expand.

Lincoln Parks and Recreation will soon suggest revised language for the aquatics portion of the Lincoln-Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan.

It's a procedural move — more of a shift in general policy over the next 20 to 25 years than a proposal for specific changes.

It reflects opinions gathered online and at a pools open house in November, said Parks Director Lynn Johnson.

"We heard a number of things, mostly that there was significant interest in continuing to invest in the existing neighborhood pools," Johnson said.

"Also, there was interest in building new ones in developing areas."

The current Comprehensive Plan gives mixed messages, he said.

"It's kind of schizophrenic."

It calls for building pools to serve quadrants of the city and says no new neighborhood pools should be built.

The revisions proposed are very general, but Johnson said they would pave the way to:

n Relocate Kuklin, Arnold Heights and Meadow Heights pools.

"These pools are reaching the end of their life," Johnson said.

Arnold Heights, 4000 N.W. 46th St., was built for the air base that used to be there. It could be more useful if it were on the other side of Northwest 48th Street, Johnson said.

Meadow Heights Centennial Pool, 900 W. Avon, is close to two private pools and may serve more people if it were a little closer to new development, he said.

The basin at Kuklin Pool, 2300 N St., is starting to cave in and is expected to last five to 10 more years, Johnson said. It would be replaced with another neighborhood pool.

Some people have said a new sprayground planned for Trago Park could justify the loss of Kuklin Pool later on, but Johnson said the sprayground is merely a fun addition for the park.

"The intent is not to replace Kuklin with the sprayground."

\* Renovate features at Irving, Ballard and Belmont pools.

These pools are aging and their bathhouses need repairs.

- \* Explore opportunities for adding spraygrounds, or nonpool water features.
- \* Explore funding alternatives, such as a bond issue, park improvement districts or a local option sales tax.
- \* Build pools in newly developed parts of town.
- \* Explore opportunities to build an indoor competitive and leisure aquatic center.

This idea received support at the open house in November, Johnson said. That could have been due to timing — swim programs that meet at the public high schools found themselves displaced or shuffled by the school's swim season.

The idea was included in the current comp plan as well.

"There's no question that at some point, Lincoln would need a 75-meter indoor competitive pool," Johnson said.

- \* Add features to Star City Shores, as well as Woods Pool and Eden Pool.

Star City Shores, 27th Street and Nebraska 2, would get such amenities for older kids as a lazy river and slides.

At Eden, the basin would be enlarged and zero-depth entry could be added.

Woods, 3200 J St., would have more interactive play features.

"I think this is a good direction for the city to take," said Joe Tidball, who is on the Parks and Recreation Advisory board, which worked with the Parks Department on the amendment.

"It gives the Parks Department some policy backbone for planning for the future," said board Chairwoman Susan Larson Rodenburg.

The revisions will go to the Planning Department later this month. Eventually, the amendment would need approval by the City Council and Lancaster County Board.

To see actual physical changes come from the plan would, of course, require money.

Johnson said he personally prefers a quality-of-life bond issue, six to 10 years from now or sooner, to finance some of the new projects.

In the meantime, no major changes are planned at the pools this summer.

"People in Lincoln are very supportive and very concerned that we continue to provide neighborhood services," Johnson said.

"We're going to reinvest and relocate older pools as funding opportunities allow."