SPLASH*Forward*
Water for All | Water for Life

August 3, 2020

Dear Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Nieuwenhuis and City Council Members,

Thank you in advance for the time you are dedicating to exploring the scope of engagement for a new public comprehensive aquatics center in Bellevue. I share with you some additional thoughts as you review the Bellevue Aquatic Center Feasibility Report and the Regional Aquatics Reports that combined solidify the great need and present options for further refinement. We welcome a future opportunity to share with you our SplashForward Aquatics Analysis and Study.

Despite the sudden dramatic economic impact our cities are faced with, Bellevue stands in a unique position to be a regional leader for the health and wellness of the community and investor in the vibrancy of our diverse population at a time when it is needed most. The economic recovery path, though unclear, will require support and strengthening of our community. A public aquatic center is an investment in our community and creates a wide range of opportunities for so many with one very important unifying opportunity…. empowerment through healthy movement and interaction. A public aquatic center is an oasis, a place of refuge and respite for everyone regardless of age, ability level or background. Whether you are a Learn to Swim toddler, participant in an exercise class or an adult receiving aquatics therapy, you have the opportunity to grow new skills, interact with others, and move in ways that optimize the human brain and set the stage for healthy life styles.

There is **more alignment behind moving the aquatics agenda forward than there has ever been**. The ability to 'stack' our funding sources and sustainable commitments is rather exciting. We must **build on our region's failures** (Bellevue 2009, Kirkland 2015, Shoreline 2019) and leverage the moment to create success and pave the way for additional public aquatics facilities in our region. **Someone must go first and it should be Bellevue**. We must not let this opportunity pass despite the challenges. We must be **ready when the economy begins to recover with a 'shovel ready' plan well prepared**. The aquatics 'can' has been kicked down the road for far too long.

SPLASH*Forward* is committed to engaging the private sector to not only identify funding partners and sources, but to invest in the relationships that will form the fabric of success long term. We will be champions of this great vision for our community and remain steadfast in realizing the path to success. For many, to see is to believe. We will continue to share & communicate the vision such that all stakeholders can adopt it and make it their own.

We have identified reference models for Best In Class regional scale facilities and believe through partnerships we can achieve the same for our communities. **Our communities need spaces that bring us together, allow our paths to cross, give us a sense of belonging, allow us to improve our health and wellness and offer year-round respite for all ages, abilities and backgrounds.** The investment in our community's health and wellness and priority to support community aquatic centers must remain high. **King County has created a catalytic moment with the Aquatics Grants Program**. There will be **six years** with which to apply for up to $5M for new and refurbished public aquatics facilities. A city can apply for separate feasibility and capital grants. **The time is now, for council members and Parks staff to be ready on the starting line within this time frame**.

Our region simply doesn't have enough public aquatics facilities. There are not enough lanes and pool time to meet either the local or regional demands, much less prepare for anticipated growth. The public facility summary below illuminates the dire state of affairs. Nationally, Washington State ranks among the bottom of the list of states for

facilities per population. Private facilities are shoring up the lack of public aquatics facilities and these require membership access cutting out segments of our community who cannot afford to pay.

Existing Eastside Public Aquatics Facilities per Population

City	2019 Population	Public Aquatics Facilities	Community Programming	Competition Capable
Kirkland	89,557	1 indoor 6 lane 25 yard pool (Juanita Aquatic Center)	Y	Y
		1 outdoor summer only L-shaped pool 6 lane, 25y (Peter Kirk Pool)	Y	N
Redmond	64,291	1 indoor 6 lane 25 yard pool (Redmond Pool)	Y	Y
Bellevue	148,100	1 indoor facility with 2 pools, 1 6 lane 25y with dive tank and a therapy pool (Bellevue Aquatic Center)	Y	N

Note: This does not include daytime population growth. Bellevue estimates 200,000 additional daytime workers. Development including light rail will enable an even greater number to our daytime workforce and visitors.

Regional vs Local Approach

Our aquatics facility needs do not know city boundaries. Our communities are fluid and willing to commute across boundaries for modern facilities that serve public needs. The first new facility that is realized on the Eastside, whether local or regional in scale, will be a draw for Eastside families. Lynnwood Recreation Center is an example. In the Regional Aquatics Report, it is used as a 'local' example, yet we find that it serves both local and regional needs. In the research SPLASH*Forward* has done, Lynnwood Rec Center serves local needs for Learn to Swim, high school aquatics (Edmonds School District, 4 teams), summer league teams, homeschooling community and recreational swimming. They serve both local and regional needs for recreational and adaptive swim program needs. In the summertime, they draw from a 40-50mi radius for recreational swimming. Their adaptive swim program has a 3-year waiting list and draws from as far away as Anacortes, Orcas Island and Olympia.

The scale of aquatics and dryside design elements along with the programming provided best define the difference between a local and regional facility. An aquatic center can serve both local and regional needs. Through stakeholder input and aquatics research, we have defined a SPLASH*Forward* preferred facility design option. We share with you an attachment that compares the City's Aquatic Center Feasibility three design options alongside our preferred and alternative designs. Our preferred design, and what we believe to be RIGHT-SIZED aquatic and dryside components, meet local and regional needs. Our SPLASH*Forward* research and analysis can help better understand both the Regional Aquatics Report and City's feasibility study to prioritize the key elements of the local and regional facility concepts that are most critical to Bellevue's needs. We look forward to sharing our work with City Council and Parks Staff in appropriate forums following Monday's review.

We believe that **Bellevue must consider its needs first**, **but also prioritize a regional approach** when it comes to facility scale, partnerships and funding.

To consider an Eastside facility model that will scale as our communities continue to grow, **we believe a regional facility and several local satellite facilities are necessary**. Yet the complexity for multiple cities to partner on a regional facility seem daunting. We believe each council should consider the following.

- What is each City's capacity to support both regional and local?
- Should a City focus solely on its local facility needs if another city or cities are better positioned to support a regional aquatics facility?
- Should a City with more capacity support both local and regional facility efforts?
- How best can each City contribute to a regional effort from both a capital and programming standpoint?

- Based on local and regional needs of each City, how can the design elements be best integrated with current and new facilities to reduce the overall scope and cost of options?

Regional Facility Approach
We recommend that representatives from each City Council (Kirkland, Redmond and Bellevue) meet to discuss plausible avenues for regional participation in addition to each City's review and discussion. There should be an additional forum for council members from Kirkland, Redmond and Bellevue to discuss alternatives for a regional approach such that guidance given to Parks staff is truly regional minded. SPLASH*Forward* can help facilitate this conversation both informally or formally if desired.

Funding Model
In the Elkhart Aquatics Center example that is shared in the Regional Aquatics Report and which SPLASH*Forward* provided as a Best In Class reference facility, $69M was raised to support both build costs ($59M) and an operational endowment ($10M from a Community Foundation). Of the $69M, $24M was raised from private funding. The importance of private funding in this example and others we have provided cannot be understated.

Funding that is primarily raised through public sources is risky as demonstrated by the recent failed Shoreline $80M bond measure to fund the ShARCC and in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, a failed tax increase to fund a $38M community aquatics center on city owned land.

Private funding is critical to success for both regional and local facilities. Yakima, WA recently opened their first new public pool since the 70's. A $22M public private partnership between the City, YMCA, Virginia Mason and the community. The City donated the land and 80% was funded by the community.

SPLASH*Forward* Support
SPLASH*Forward* is committed to raising the private funding and develop the private partnerships necessary to realize a new public regional aquatics facility and future satellite facilities. We have a Fundraising Feasibility Study RFP and plan to commence a fundraising feasibility study when our lead seed funding is secured. Seed funding support, project champions and lead donors are necessary for us to undertake this effort and is our current focus.

SPLASH*Forward* is committed to supporting and collaborating with the City of Bellevue, the Bellevue School District and the private sector to identify partnership opportunities, bring stakeholders into the conversation and provide continued research that leads to Best In Class outcomes.

The demand and need are clear, next steps must focus on partnership development and further refinement of the design options to realize state of the art aquatic facilities that best serve our region. Partnerships will help define the scope of the facilities and more importantly create sustainable revenue models. As our national best in class research shows, partnerships can take many forms. An important next step that we are uniquely qualified to facilitate, is to provide an in depth identification of local partnership and management models. SplashForward has identified additional steps to strengthen and tune the design options that are RIGHT SIZED for serving Bellevue's needs.

We support continued exploration and leave you with three things to consider as you evaluate next steps for both continued regional and local approaches.

1. **The time is now to be ready for when the economy improves**. Our communities are underserved and have waited too long for public aquatics facilities that meet the basic needs for health, wellness, basic water safety, leisure and aquatic sports.
2. **Private funding and partnership development are crucial**. Without the commitment or involvement of the Cities and School Districts it will be difficult to attract the necessary private funding and partnerships to bring these facilities to fruition and ensure their sustainability whether local or regional.

3. **Site Location is critical**. Continue to build upon the site exploration the City has begun. Explore options with the greatest partnership potential, economic impact and affordances for transit and parking. This includes private development options.

Please enable the City to **take the next step** to refine the design options for a regional aquatic center, identify a site, and embrace community partnerships. This great need will outlast the current pandemic.

Let's keep Bellevue as the city where you want to be with an amenity that will attract and retain the diverse and growing community and businesses bringing their workforces to Bellevue. And most importantly, provide health and wellness opportunities for generations to come.

We are stronger together.

On behalf of SPLASH*Forward,*



Susan Pappalardo
SPLASH*Forward,* Board President