

Notes of the Aquatic Working Group (AWG) Meeting
Wednesday, July 16, 2009
Metro Central YMCA, 20 Grosvenor Street
12:00 – 2:00 pm

These notes were written by Nicole Swerhun, Meeting Facilitator. Questions, comments, and results of discussion are integrated throughout the Notes.

I. Welcome & Agenda Review

David Crombie opened the meeting, welcomed participants, and as always, thanked them for coming and continuing to participate in the AWG process. He highlighted the importance of continuing the AWG's work to keep all 32 pools open, and particularly the 13 pools the TDSB has decided to close (but not drain before the end of 2009, giving the AWG from now until the end of the year to develop strategies for generating enough revenue to cover the incremental costs of operating these pools).

Nicole Swerhun, Facilitator, reviewed the proposed agenda, and confirmed with participants that it presented a reasonable outline for discussion at the meeting. All participants also introduced themselves.

II. Presentations & Discussion

Karen Pitre, consultant to the Toronto Lands Company (TLC) covered the following points as part of her update on activities since the last meeting (June 8, 2009):

- 1. Review of TDSB most recent decision:** In April the TDSB had agreed to keep 13 pools open, and at their last meeting (in June) another 6 pools were added to the "open" list. One of those pools, North Toronto, will not stay open in the long term (West Toronto was also not on the list of 39 pools provided by the TDSB to David Crombie), which means that at the moment there are a total of 18 pools with sufficient momentum in permit capacity that they can cover the incremental costs required to stay open. Also at their June meeting, the TDSB decided that 7 pools will be drained and permanently closed. That leaves 13 remaining pools that the TDSB will close at the end of August – however they have agreed to keep water in the pools until the end of December 2009, and indicated that they are willing to consider reopening these pools as long as the AWG is able to demonstrate that sufficient revenue is available to cover the incremental operating costs. The next TDSB Board meeting will be held at the end of August (and every month thereafter), and that is the earliest that the AWG could go forward to the Board with a revenue model that demonstrates an ability to cover the incremental operating costs of some (or all) of the 13 pools.

2. **Capital Improvements:** We now have a draft provincial agreement with the details of the capital improvements the province is committed to supporting. It reflects the AWG's recommendation for an investment of up to \$15.8 million. The Province has indicated that this money needs to be spent by March 2011, which gives us less than 2 years to do all of the capital upgrades.

We have toured the 5 pools where we're thinking of starting the capital work, including Harbord, Riverdale, Keele, Leacock, and Northern Secondary. The reason we picked those five pools is because when we went to the Board in April, those 5 pools didn't have permit holders for the summer. We're just starting now because the TDSB couldn't move forward until they received a firm commitment in writing from the Province. Our thinking is that construction could happen in August (the tenders for contractors should be ready to go by the end of July) and September (possibly October). The TDSB is very committed to getting this work done, and they understand there is a really tight window. We are meeting again tomorrow with the TDSB to try and sort out the schedule.

Right now our challenge is figuring out when it makes the most sense to close pools to do the capital work, and how to make sure it's for the shortest possible period of time. The only pool we anticipate will require more time is Keele, because it has significant roofing issues.

We are also starting to think about how neighbouring schools can support each other – for example, if Forest Hill is not in use during the summer, we could move all Glenview activities temporarily to Forest Hill while construction is underway at Glenview. We're also exploring the possibility of using some of the 13 temporarily closed pools to host swim programs that are displaced from other pools undergoing capital improvements. We're still not sure if this will be an option. We need to work out a strategy that makes the most sense.

3. **Signage:** Our plan is to have two signs at every pools, including one sign at the street let's people know there is a pool in the school, and a second at the entrance to the pool so people know how to get in. We're also going to be putting "wayfinders" inside the school so that it's easier to find the pool. The signage will include the name of the club using the pool, and how to get in touch with them.

Discussion (responses, where provided, are in *italics*):

- **Caretaking:** The Scarborough Swim Club has a problem with RH King. Right now they're being charged caretaking overtime on Saturdays and double time on Sunday. It means that a \$50 per hour permit fee increases to \$140 per hour. *I'm not sure how we will solve this weekend problem when the pool user is the only permit holder in the school on the weekend. We do think we're making progress on weekdays though – it looks like we'll be able to set up a system where the caretaker starts their shift early and goes home early. We're just working this option through with the Facilities Department now.*
- **Caretaking:** Have we resolved how much time a caretaker needs to come in before the permit starts? Sometimes they bill for 1 hr or 2 hrs, when the caretaker is only needed half and hour beforehand. *As you run into caretaking issues, please let me know (email is preferable). The people in the Permit Office appreciate our help sorting*

through these issues. Right now the staff in the Permit Office need to enforce the existing rules.

- **Permits on schools to be closed:** Right now Earl Grey is permitted for October 2009. Given that Earl Grey is one of the 13 pools to close (at least temporarily), will those programs continue? *At the moment, no. Earl Grey has an incremental operating cost of approx. \$56k and a permit revenue of about \$1k. We need to work at increasing the number of permits.*
- **Summer permits:** Can all pools be permitted for the summer? *Yes, and if you have difficulties with this, tell us. We tried to permit Jarvis in June, and were told that we couldn't. If you have permit for Jarvis or Earl Grey, should be able to get it.*
- **Potential permit holders being directed to City:** Our pool has had 2 possible permit holders referred to the City. I understand that the problem is that the TDSB doesn't provide lifeguards. That means that if you want to permit the pool but don't have a lifeguard you get bumped to the City (because the City provides lifeguards). *When you have problems with permits, please let me know. We are exploring different options to facilitate easy access to lifeguards, and will forward an update on this as soon as possible.*

Also in terms of permitting, please don't try and book birthday parties or one hour sessions. We need to increase the number of permit hours by hundreds of hours, and the permit office has to do the same amount of work whether a permit is for one hour or a season's worth of hours. Right now the office is working hard to adjust to and accommodate our changing needs – they're trying to be helpful and it's difficult to manage when they're pulled in different directions. We are most effective when we bring issues to them as a community – they will pay attention.

- **Varying degree of pool use:** Why are some pools permitted so much more than others? Are the same programs offered at all pools? Is it not mandatory that kids learn how to swim? *Pools are most used in those communities with volunteer capacity and/or an organization that wants to use the pool. In most cases this happens in communities that value swimming and have a culture of swimming. Our work is focused only on what happens in the pools outside school hours. In some areas of the city there is incredible aquatic capacity (like North York and North Toronto), in other areas there isn't. There are communities now where pools are getting no response – these are communities that often don't have the capacity to organize.*
- **How to generate interest in a pool:** Could one option be for schools to organize after school programming themselves? *This is likely hard for school administrators to deliver. From our experience it really takes community involvement. For example, at Humberside we generated \$21k worth of permits within a month through focused community outreach. The community really rallied around – we're active with Let's Make Waves, we have kids on Facebook, lot of community support, whole school behind us. We have a lot of practice in community organizing. The administration told us that without us, they couldn't have done it.*
- **Demand for additional programming:** If a company wanted to partner up to run swimming programs and other types of aquatic programs for elementary and high

schools, would there be an interest? Assuming the price was appropriate for the area? If so, then I'm very interested in doing that. *We think so, some programs have to be culturally sensitive, and will take time. The YMCA has also said they're happy to help. The challenge is getting enough kids signed up. Canadian Tire said they'd fund kids that can't afford programs, but someone has to take on the responsibility of putting the program together and putting the permit application in. We also need to remember that while we have "saved" a number of pools, we still have capacity at a lot of those pools and we need to continue to push our numbers up. The good news is that once the capital improvements are done we know those pools will stay open for a minimum of 8 years.* There are adult groups also interested in swimming – we're the only masters group in Toronto. Though we need to do a lot of things (e.g. ski days, golf days, cycling days, etc.) to keep people interested.

III. Sponsorship & Philanthropy (and strategy for 13 remaining pools)

Robert Jordan, reviewed the work of the AWG Sponsorship and Philanthropy Committee (SPOC). Highlights of his comments include:

- The main focus of the SPOC is on raising sponsorship funds, as well as donations – from both corporate and grassroots sources.
- Sponsorships can be permanent, however donations are often “one offs” and can't be sustained.
- The SPOC is also looking at how programs can be set up so that AWG can form partnerships with various foundations (e.g. Canadian Tire).
- Work has been done to develop a “recognition wall” concept for donors and sponsors, but at the point a final decision about the wall has not been made.
- The SPOC worked very hard to get something as concrete as possible to the AWG, and now is in need of direction/additional discussion regarding next steps.

Discussion (responses, where provided, are in *italics*):

- How can we get permits for the 13 pools that are temporarily closed? *We now have confidence that if we can demonstrate sufficient permit revenue, the TDSB will make the right decision to keep the pool(s) open. Our aim is to work hard between now and the end of the year to promote and build programs so by January we have a strategy that is rock solid to take to the TDSB.*
- Kids don't swim in January because it's too cold. Companies go under in the winter. *There are ways to keep pools active in the winter. Also swim teams still need the pools in the winter.*
- If we were going to fill all 13 remaining pools, we would need a huge program. To cover \$760,000 in incremental operating costs we would need about 1000 hrs to break even. That's about 2.7 hrs per day. If we provide excellent programs at an affordable cost, is it not realistic that we could use the pools 20 hrs a week? *We have learned that if we can make a significant dent in the number of permit hours/revenue, then we can show the TDSB we can make it happen.*
- Why don't we pick 3 pools as a start in communities that we pick strategically? Then over time we can work to fill all 13 pools. *We need to work to save all 13 pools. In some cases there is already a start on permit revenue (e.g. up to \$12k). At others,*

like Downsview, we've often talked about the opportunities that would be lost if the pools were closed. Some pools need more help than others.

- I have a community where there are not enough lessons for kids. Some can afford to pay for lessons, but in some areas of the ward people find the programs less affordable. If we could run programs that can subsidize or cover the cost of participants, then we might be able to save that pool. Also we could partner up with community centres where social workers can help us find the kids. We should focus on pools where we think there is a high demand, if we could make the programs more affordable. Then partner with an organization like Canadian Tire to make the program affordable.
- I strongly believe we should not rank the 13 remaining pools. We need to look for additional funding from other sources to save all the pools – for example, look to other provincial ministries like the Ministry of Long Term Care or the Ministry of Culture. *Groups should look at submitting proposals to the Ministry of Health Promotion by the July 31st deadline.*
- I think an incremental approach is important, and starting with schools at the low end of the Learning Opportunities Index (LOI) makes sense. We need to think about what we can realistically achieve by August. *A possible starting point could be Downsview, George Harvey, Jarvis, Monarch, and Queen Alexandra. We want to find a way to get at least a couple more pools “saved” by the August TDSB meeting – it’s important that we show progress. We will need to tap into all supports to make this happen (Kiwanis donation of \$20k, CUPE donation of \$20k, Canadian Tire, etc.). It’s likely that questions of equity will be raised at the Board – and we need to be ready to address them. To date, the TDSB has been very accepting of our approach.*
- We should invite others from the 13 communities to attend future AWG meetings. We should also create a resource list of people interested/available to help communities save their pools.
- I am interested in putting together programs in pools, with the assistance of people who want to make it work in the local community. *You may want to consider starting with Jarvis and Queen Alexandra. There may also be an opportunity to start something at Downsview (Larry and Robert working together on this). If we get a model up-and-running in 2, 3, 4, schools then we can add it to other schools. Fern may be another school where it could be easier to generate interest (since it’s close to Parkdale and we lost Parkdale).*
- I think we can assume the donor wall can go forward, the question is how to pay for it. We do not have it budgeted right now, so the cost of the wall would need to be drawn from the donor/sponsor contribution. *Just as an update, two people approached John Campbell about selling \$1 million in naming rights to help support the pools. We understand that the TDSB is still exploring the option. If it were to go forward, the process would likely need to go through an RFP (request for proposal) process.*

Andrea Demchuk reiterated her appreciation for the amount and quality of work completed by the SPOC – a sentiment shared by a number of participants in the room.

IV. Communications, Diversifying AWG Involvement & Other Supports

Karen reported that there are some funds remaining from a grant received by Let's Make Waves from the Heart and Stroke Foundation. The following ideas were discussed by participants:

- We can generate revenue by generating permit hours at the 13 “remaining” pools and/or by increasing revenue at the pools already “saved”. Why don't we use the approximately \$3000 left from the Heart & Stroke Foundation Grant to “get the word out” about pools in schools?
- We could send information out to all kids before classes start. The flyer should list all programs being offered in all pools, including contact information for those pools. If a pool is not open, the flyer should include a contact for parents to contact – so we can gauge the demand for a pool in that school.
- We should send the flyer to all principals and all parent councils. Glenna agreed to develop a draft.
- We should also get more representation from the 13 communities at our next AWG meeting – including trustees, pool captains, and several other contacts (especially those who can help get the word out about the pools in the school, and those connected to potential pool users – community services, resident associations, BIAs, etc.). Nicole agreed to develop a strategy to outreach to the 13 communities, and send that strategy to participants.
- If anyone wants to start a swim club and needs help, Ron from Kiwanis is willing to help. If you're interested in his help, please contact Andrea Demchuk at and she will connect you (Andrea's email is demchuk@interlog.com).
- Who do I need to contact if I put together a business plan for programming a number of pools? How do I connect with the AWG to move forward? What are the steps? *It's best to connect with Karen Pitre at kpitre@thelonsdalegroup.com.*

V. Next Steps

David Crombie said that he thinks it's important that the AWG meet again before the August TDSB meeting. He also reiterated that whatever happens with the general pool program in the fall, it's critical that no pool is left behind (other than the 7 that the TDSB agreed to close, on the as per the March 2009 AWG report). It is crucial that we have 2 more pools saved for the TDSB meeting in August – so we can keep our momentum.

The next meeting of the AWG is on Thursday August 20th. We will try and get the same room at the YMCA, but will confirm location closer to the meeting date.

Appendix A. Participant List (from meeting sign in sheets)

Community Matters	Margaret Coshan
Community Matters	Surabti Khari
CYC, Kiwanis, Boys Club	Ron Caulfield
David Crombie Associates	Robin Crombie
Earl Grey Sr. PS	Janet Dabrus
Facilitator	Nicole Swerhun
Forest Hill CI/SPOC	Robert Jordan
Forest Hill	Lori Tanzer-Chad
Glenview	Mona Rozenblum
Glenview	Glenna DeHann
Humberside	Sarah Doucette
Humberside CI	Leslie Gooding
Humberside CI	Katherine Trimble
NTAC	Glenna deHaan
NYMAC	Sandra Oliver
Special Olympics	Pratima Bhalt
Swimming Dragon	Yang Gao
TDSB	Barbara Langenberger
Toronto Lands Company	David Crombie
Toronto Lands Company	Karen Pitre
Toronto Swim Club	Laura Pratt
Town Crier Newspaper	Kris Scheuer
York University	Patricia Murray
	Andrea Demchuk
	Larry Tobin
	Chris Choy