

Ward 3 Vision

RE: Department of Parks and Recreation 2018 Budget Oversight Hearing

Dear Members of the Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Tom Quinn. I am a 24 year resident of the District of Columbia and I live in Ward 3 just off of Wisconsin Avenue and I am also the parent of two elementary school age boys.

I am also a founding member of Ward 3 Vision, a group of Ward 3 neighbors actively advocating for positive growth and change and more walkable amenities in our area. Our supporters are drawn from all parts of Ward 3 and it is on behalf of Ward 3 Vision that I offer this testimony.

I am here today to urge the council to maintain the earmark for an outdoor swimming pool in Ward 3 and to not postpone that particular line item until the 2020 fiscal year and to instead insert the previously allocated monies for a pool into the 2018 fiscal year budget.

Our group has been closely following the debate about whether and where to locate an outdoor swimming pool in Ward 3.

Currently there is no public outdoor swimming pool in Ward 3 while every other ward in the District has a least one outdoor pool and some wards have more than 1.

Unfortunately the debate about where to site an outdoor swimming pool has devolved into one that is similar to debates about development in our part of town with immediate neighbors making many of the same arguments against locating a pool at Hearst Park that we hear when proposals for new buildings are floated.

Immediate neighbors think a pool is a great idea but of course believe it would only make sense to actually build one if it were located in some other neighborhood and in the case of this pool it should of course be located on someone else's property.

To buttress this argument all sorts of specious arguments are offered ranging from a laundry list of problems with the site as well as the usual perfect is the enemy of good line of thinking, false baselines and of course the oft repeated concerns about changes from the status quo and additional parking and traffic concerns.

As always seems to be the case when someone proposes to build something in Ward 3 wild concerns about hydrology and underwater streams that somehow had previously gone unmentioned and unnoticed for decades are referred to as an existential threat.

But these arguments are always trotted out and the worst case scenarios never realized and instead when a new building or facility opens what instead happens is the neighborhood changes and evolves for the better and everyone benefits and our city moves forward.

In this particular instance Hearst Park is a great location for an outdoor swimming pool in Ward 3. The park is walking distance to two Metrorail stations and 8 Metrobus routes and is also within comfortable walking distance of two high schools and two elementary schools whose school years typically overlap by several weeks with the summer pool season.

But most importantly an outdoor swimming pool can serve as what is often referred to in Urbanism as a Third Place – community gathering places where residents of all ages can informally gather and socialize during the summer.

While it is true, as pool opponents often state, that folks in Ward 3 can go elsewhere to find an outdoor pool it is not true that such a pool is nearby nor is it true that residents are as likely to meet their friends and neighbors when they have to travel far outside of the neighborhood to find a place to swim.

It is also significant that the greater distance makes visits to such a pool more time consuming and for most residents also precludes walking or biking to the pool and while it is true that one can take the bus to the Volta and Jeleff pools both pools are much less convenient

to get to on public transportation and the distance precludes quick trips and many parents won't send their older children alone to pools so far away.

Finally it is worth mentioning that for many residents of Upper Northwest the nearest outdoor pools are in Montgomery County and are not reachable at all via public transportation and are very expensive for non-residents to use.

Every other ward in the city has at least one outdoor pool and most suburban neighborhoods also include publicly accessible swimming pools.

Lacking such a pool means Ward 3 residents don't have that critical so called Third Place where they and their families know they can congregate with their friends, neighbors and classmates in their own community.

This community fought a public swimming pool at Fort Reno Park more than 50 years ago and none was ever built and it would be a mistake to allow similarly poor arguments to preclude a pool today.

For these reasons and others, Ward 3 Vision respectfully asks that the City Council not move the earmark for an outdoor swimming pool to 2020 and instead simply move the earmark to the 2018 budget and provide the political support to the Department of Parks and Recreation to enable them to move forward with the pool our community needs and deserves.

Sincerely,

Tom Quinn
Supporter, Ward 3 Vision

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