

## Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department

### City Park Pool Community Input Summary

Final Report



## CITY PARK POOL PLANNING *Jump in!*

**Submitted by:**

BerryDunn  
2211 Congress Street  
Portland, ME 04102-1955  
207.541.2200

**Chad Snow, Principal**

[csnow@berrydunn.com](mailto:csnow@berrydunn.com)

Dannielle Wilson, Project Manager

[dwilson@berrydunn.com](mailto:dwilson@berrydunn.com)

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# Table of Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table of Contents.....	i
1.0 City Park Pool Idea Generation Sessions Summary.....	1
Welcome .....	1
Participation.....	1
Blind Buckets.....	3
Budget.....	4
Mural Station .....	5
Feedback Frames.....	7
Accessibility Dot Boards .....	8
Idea Generation Summary.....	9
2.0 City Park Pool Focus Group Summary.....	10
Focus Group Selection Process .....	10
Focus Group Findings .....	12
Design Considerations .....	13
Amenities .....	14
Type of Water .....	18
Pool Accessibility .....	18
Bathhouse.....	20
Group Needs.....	21
Consultant Observations.....	22
Focus Group Summary.....	22

## 1.0 City Park Pool Idea Generation Sessions Summary

On Friday, October 27, 2023, the consulting led two idea generation sessions. The first session was held at Mercer Park Aquatic Center & Scanlon Gym from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.; the second session was held at Robert A. Lee Recreation center from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in conjunction with the City’s Halloween event.

The sessions were designed to be an interactive, self-directed experience while gathering key insights to what pool design and amenity elements were of most interest to participants. The same experience was replicated at both sessions. The City also provided an online survey that mirrored the session experience, available between October 27 and November 14, for those who could not attend in person. The following section provides a description of what each engagement station entailed and then summarizes the feedback gleaned from that station.

### Welcome

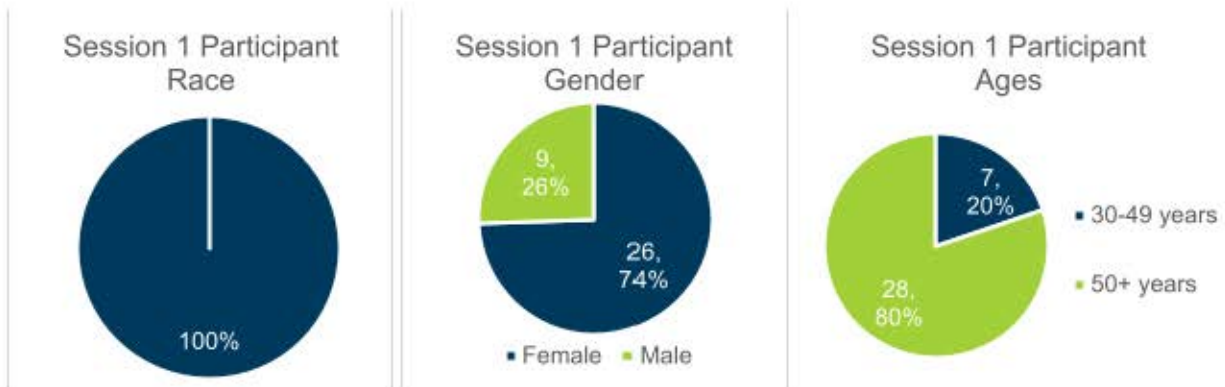
Upon entry, participants were greeted at a welcome table. City staff asked participants to provide basic demographic information to better understand the participants’ background. Each participant received a toy rubber duck and play money to use at two of the stations.

Display boards depicted the project goals, the current pool’s site plan, and historical imagery for context.

Members of the consulting team were available throughout the room to help direct the participants, answer questions, and listen to feedback.

### Participation

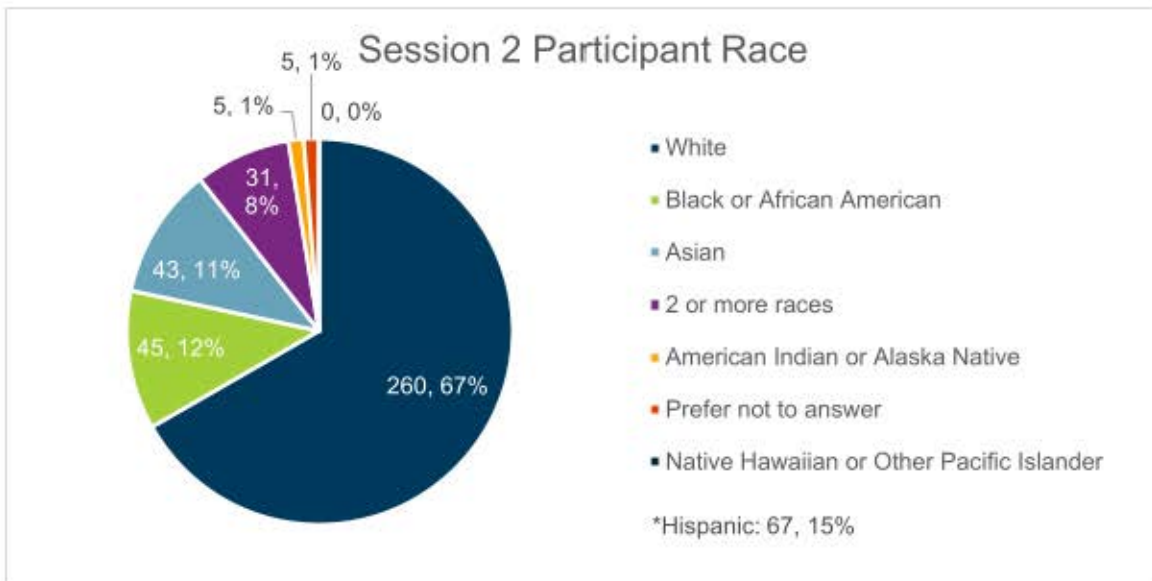
Idea generation participants self-reported their age, gender, and race via paper survey. The 35 Session 1 participants were white, 74% female, 80% aged 50+, and 20% aged 30 – 49 years.



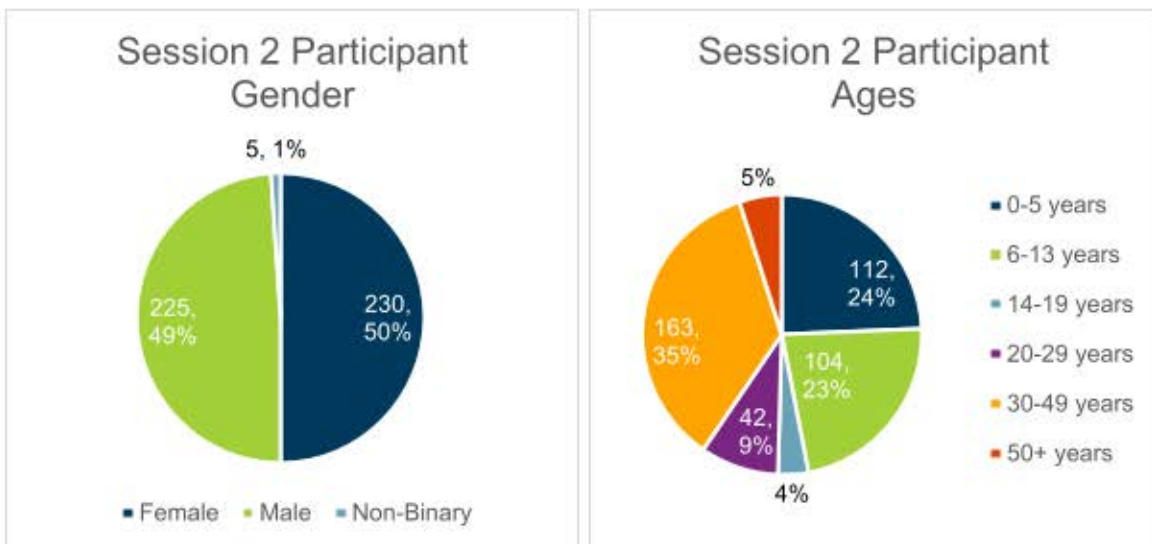
The 460 Session 2 participants were more demographically diverse than Session 1. Of Session 2 participants, two-thirds identified as a race other than white. Gender was evenly split between female (230) and male (225), and those identifying as non-binary were represented (5). Half



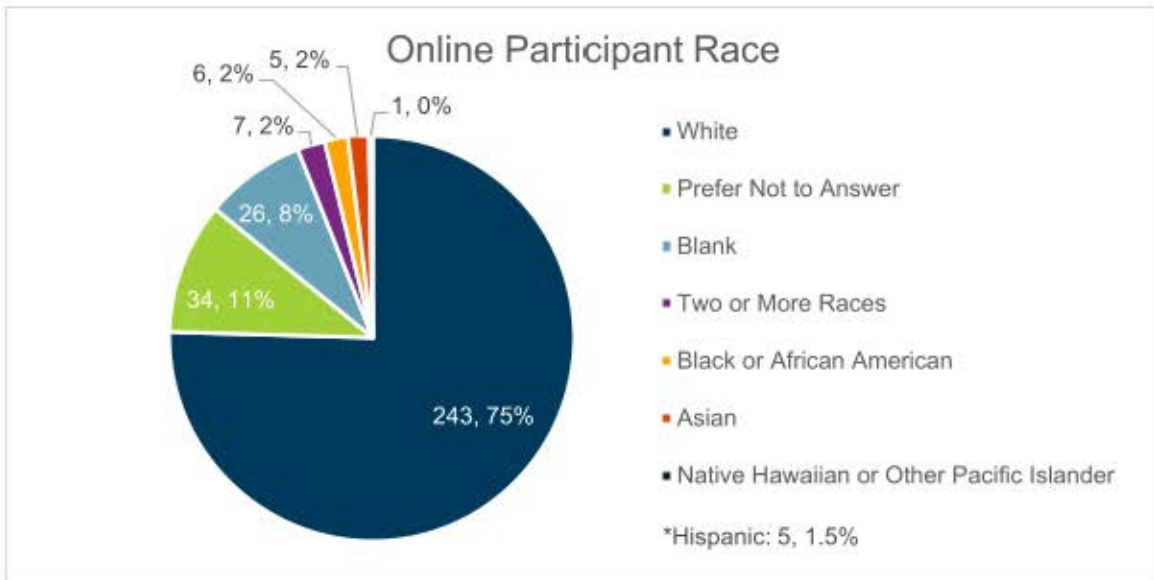
(51%) of the participants were youth, and adults younger than 50 years of age were represented more than in Session 1.



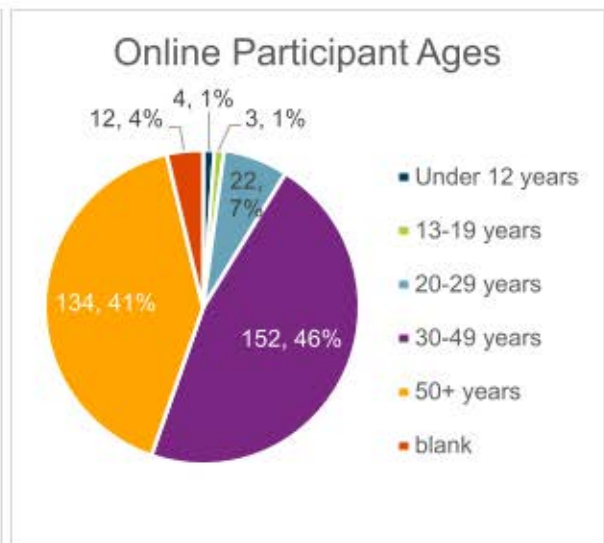
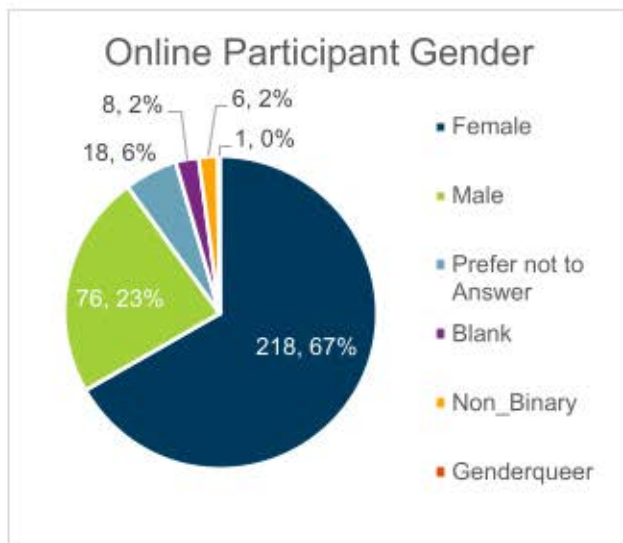
*\*Ethnicity is not a designation of race; therefore, Hispanic heritage is documented independently*



Online participants' self-selected race most closely represented the white portion of the City's population, but the other races were not as equally represented. This could be, in part, due to 19% of online respondents selecting Prefer Not to Answer or leaving the question blank. Online participant gender aligned with Session 1 participants in that more females participated than other genders. Most online participants (94%) were adults, and those ages 30-49 years were represented similarly to those selecting 50+ years. The Hispanic population was most represented at Session 2.



*\*Ethnicity is not a designation of race; therefore, Hispanic heritage is documented independently*



## Blind Buckets

The blind buckets station asked participants to select which of four pool styles they think of most when they think of a new City Park Pool. The participants cast their votes by placing a small rubber duck into a hole in the lid of a bucket. Ducks were hidden from view to promote independent response.



*Blind Buckets Station*

**Table 1: What style do you think of most when you think of a new City Park Pool?**

Option	Number of Ducks		
	Session 1	Session 2	Online
A traditional swimming pool similar to current pool	27	55	179
A small waterpark-like environment	1	89	39
A modern look of family fun and water play for all	6	154	90
No strong opinion	0	13	12
Blank	n/a	n/a	7

Session 1 and online participants tended to prefer a traditional style of pool like the current City Park Pool. Session 2 participants preferred a more modern look of family fun and water play for all. Considering the differing demographics of the groups, the consulting team expected these results.

## Budget

The budget station asked, “How would you invest in these types of pool areas?” Participants could insert their play money into voting boxes that represented where they felt the funds should be invested. Play money was hidden from view to promote independent response.

**Table 2: “How would you invest in these types of pool areas?”**

Option	Number of Play Bills or Selection		
	Session 1	Session 2	Online
Lap swimming area (for exercise and lessons)	58	153	127
Shallow water (for play and lessons)	22	305	36



Open water space	26	250	67
Activity area(s) (slides, spray features, etc.)	7	436	58
Diving/deep water	30	112	19
Blank	n/a	n/a	4



*Budget Station*

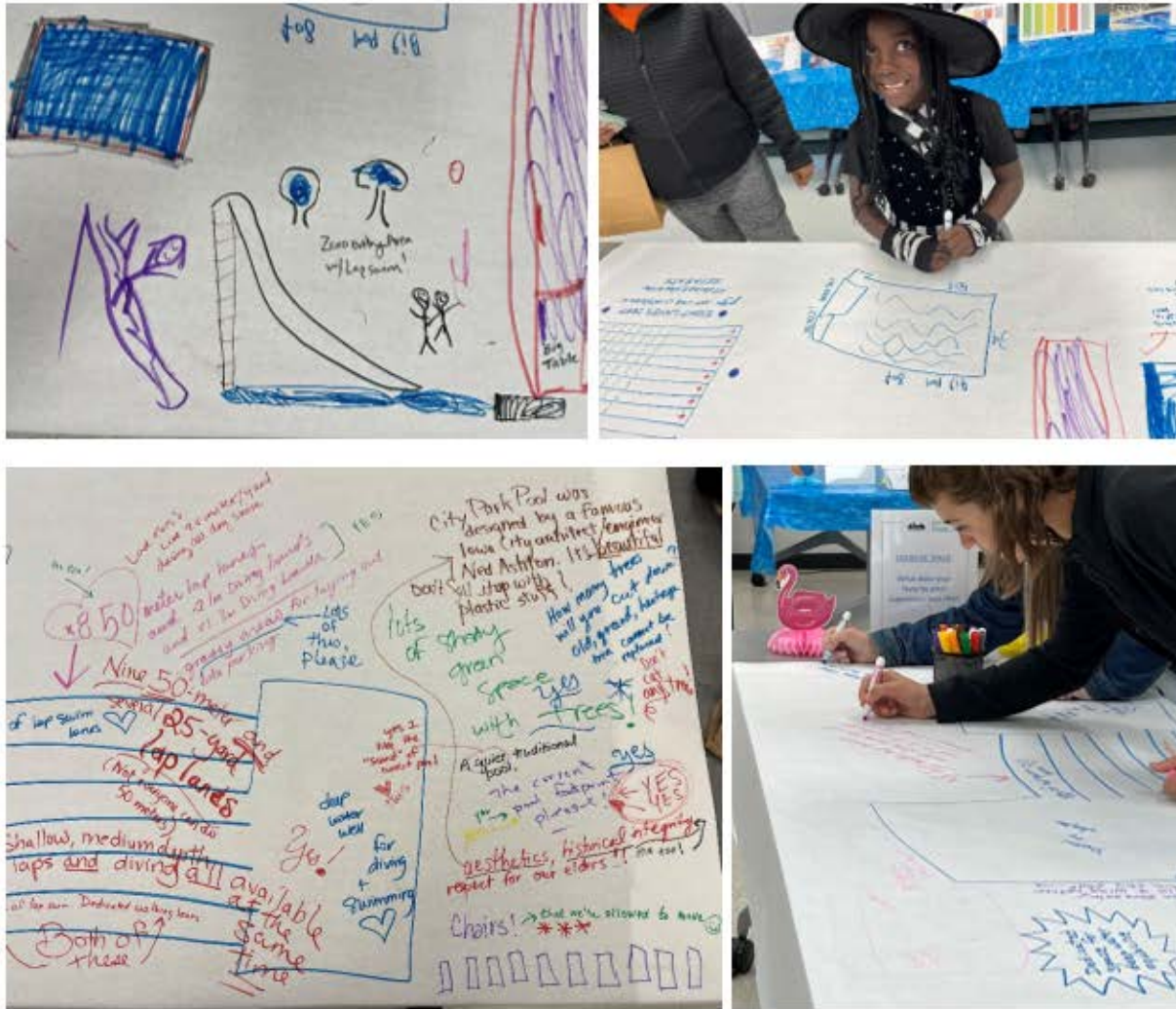
Lap swimming areas and diving/deep water were most important to Session 1 participants, activity areas and shallow water were most important to Session 2 participants, and lap swimming areas and open water space were most important to online participants. The thread of consistency is two of the three groups identified lap swimming areas as their top selection.

## Mural Station

The mural station provided a blank sheet of paper that spanned the length of the table and markers. The question posed at this station was, "What does your favorite pool experience look like?"



*Mural Station Drawings*



Mural Station Drawings

From drawings to statements, participants creatively expressed their ideas in a graffiti-like manner. Participants illustrated numerous ideas, including slides, chairs, green space, tree preservation, grass, both 25-yard and 50-meter lap lanes, zero entry, lap swim, jacuzzi, diving, the same footprint, and many others.

In lieu of a mural station, online participants were able to write a few words about their favorite pool experience. Of the 251 responses, the most frequently mentioned topic was lap swimming with 53 references. Comments also reflected memories of spending time with kids or grandchildren (44), playing (17), and diving (11). At the end of the online survey, participants could share their preferences in a future City Park Pool. The 190 open-ended responses frequently expressed interest in lap lanes, zero-depth, diving, and water exercise. While several mentions of a family- and kid-friendly environment were made (55), some commented they like adult-friendly space as well (16). Of the 18 water park mentions, 17 were against a water park design.



## Feedback Frames

To understand the level of support and/or interest for specific amenities, this station asked participants to rate each amenity on a Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” or “not sure.” The question posed at this station was, “To what extent do you agree that the amenity should be considered in the new design?” The participant placed a blue coin in the slot that best represented their opinion. Coins were hidden from view to allow for independent response. Online participants used Likert scale survey methodology as well.



Feedback Frames Station

**Table 3: “To what extent do you agree that the amenity should be considered in the new design?”**

Amenity	Weighted Average			
	Session 1	Session 2	Online	Cumulative
Shade Over Deck	4.03	4.12	4.34	4.31
Zero-Depth Entry	3.94	4.53	4.17	4.25
1M Diving	4.45	4.07	4.25	4.22
25Y Lap Lanes	4.50	3.85	4.19	4.12
3M Diving	4.30	3.84	3.99	4.00
Water Features	2.62	4.37	3.30	3.93
Shade Over Water	3.64	4.19	3.45	3.88
50M Lap Lanes	4.63	3.73	3.74	3.87
Kiddie Slide	2.33	4.14	3.24	3.64
Jets/Bubblers	2.84	4.09	3.15	3.62
Current Channel	1.97	4.02	3.03	3.61
Water Slide	1.79	3.73	3.04	3.54

Drop Slide	1.92	3.47	2.96	3.37
Climbing Wall	2.18	3.63	2.67	3.22
Water Play Structure	1.69	2.42	2.89	3.18

The weighted averages for each feedback frame were calculated separately for each session, online, and cumulatively. Table 3 arranges the amenity listing according to the cumulative rating. When all the responses were combined, shade over deck, zero-depth entry, and 1 meter diving received the highest weighted scores, signifying that the most people felt the new pool design should incorporate and prioritize those amenities over others.

### Accessibility Dot Boards

Two foam core boards offered participants the opportunity to place dot stickers to articulate which of the accessibility features would be used by them or their family. The same boards were used in both Session 1 and Session 2.



Station 1 asked participants about accessible water entry using five sample images of a pool lift, sloped entry, transfer wall, transfer system, and pool stairs.

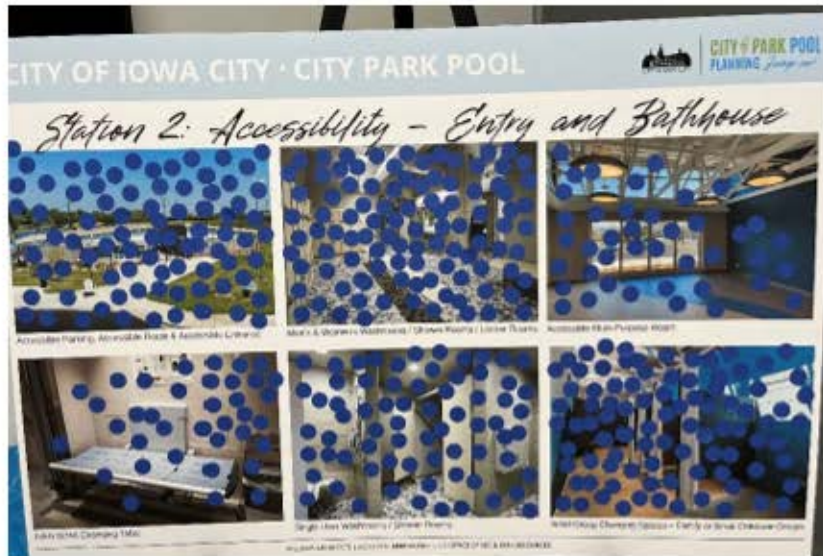
*Accessibility Station 1*

Stairs and sloped entry were the most frequently selected water entry options.

Station 2 asked participants about accessibility specific to the facility entry and bathhouse using six sample images of the following:



- Accessible parking, accessible route, and accessible entrance
- Men's and women's washrooms/shower rooms/locker rooms
- Accessible multipurpose room
- Adult sized changing table
- Single user washrooms/shower rooms



*Accessibility Station 2*

- Small group changing spaces – family or small child care groups

While not all areas received the same number of dots, accessible entry and bathhouse features are important to many community members. The dot board area generated the most discussion with the consulting team members during the two idea generation sessions, which demonstrated curiosity, interest, and need for accessibility features to the consulting team. Online respondents selected men's and women's washrooms the most (260 times), followed by single user washrooms / shower rooms (193). Regarding accessible pool entry, online respondents selected pool stairs most often (236), followed by sloped entry (222).

### Idea Generation Summary

Upon completion of the activities, many participants expressed how much they enjoyed the way the consulting team gathered feedback. One Session 1 participant provided an unsolicited comment, "I'm 67 and I had fun!" Several Session 2 participants indicated they would not have been able to provide feedback had the opportunity not been provided in conjunction with the Halloween event.

Results of the idea generation sessions will be used to guide the development of the City Park Pool design program. An item receiving a lower quantity of "votes" than another does not necessarily mean the lower-scoring item will be excluded from design program and/or concepts. The level of interest and opinions expressed in the session will be combined with focus group results to help inform design decisions.



## 2.0 City Park Pool Focus Group Summary

### Focus Group Selection Process

To engage the community in the City Park Pool pre-conceptual design process, the Iowa City Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) sought out a highly representative group of residents who were interested in participating in one of 14 focus groups. Before public communication began, the Department intentionally identified targeted groups for the focus group meetings to help ensure the most equitable process possible:

- Passholder/Regular User – Families
- Passholder/Regular User – Lap/Fitness Swimmers
- Passholder/Regular User – Aqua Fitness/Water Walking/Water Jogging
- Teens
- Infrequent Users – Younger Adults
- Disability Community
- Childcare Providers (Day Cares and Summer Camps)
- Members and Allies of the LGBTQ+ community
- Swim Lesson Participant Families who used a scholarship for lessons
- Parks & Recreation Commission Members
- City Aquatic Staff (Supervisors, Maintenance Staff, and Lifeguards)

The Department used a variety of communication channels to attract what it hoped would be a cross-section of diverse and historically underrepresented groups:

- Press release
- Social media posts: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and NextDoor
- City of Iowa City Channel 4 video updates
- Email to all Recreation Program accounts
- Flyers and signage in recreation centers and at programs
- Letters to partner groups and neighborhood associations
- Individual outreach to community groups

The Department received 327 focus group registrations. People who registered filled out a questionnaire with several self-selecting questions. Demographic information was collected to

facilitate the balancing of groups in a way that reflected community demographics. Figure 1 depicts the respondent group’s demographic makeup:

**Figure 1: Focus Group Registrant Demographics**

Gender	Race	Age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•78 Male</li> <li>•242 Female</li> <li>•5 Non-Binary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•43 Non-White</li> <li>•263 White</li> <li>•21 Did Not Report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•21 Ages 13 – 29</li> <li>•133 Ages 30 – 49</li> <li>•161 Ages 50+</li> </ul>

A selection committee of three staff, a resident, and a Parks and Recreation Commission member made group selections without seeing participant names, addresses, phone numbers, or emails. Non-Iowa City residents were marked. All registrations meeting the criteria for a certain group were separated from the overall group. Preference was first given to non-white registrants—up to five participants per group of 20. The remaining spots were filled by rolling a dice, then using the number rolled to select every person (number) from the eligible list. The chosen group was then checked for gender, race, and age distribution. Adjustments were made if gender, race, and/or age were far from targets. Most groups were very close to the targeted representation. After nine groups were chosen, the demographics of both the selected and not selected were checked. The selection committee determined that representation was lacking from people under the age of 29. A new group was chosen from younger adults. The last group was assigned based on registrants older than 70 years of age, since many requests had been made from the public to have a specific group for this age cohort.

The selection committee used the registrants’ self-reported availability to schedule the groups. Not all requests for specific times or dates were able to be accommodated. After the 227 invitations were emailed with a request for an RSVP, requests for different times/dates were accommodated if group space allowed. People who were not selected for a focus group or who declined their invitation were emailed an online version of the focus group questions. Table 1 depicts the self-reported descriptors of the 227 invitees:

**Table 1: Focus Group Invitee Self-Reported Descriptors**

Gender	Race	Age	Swimming Ability	Primary Pool Activity	Iowa City Swim Pass
65 Male	33 Non-White	3 Teens	55 Expert	10 Aqua Fitness	110 Have a Swim Pass
157 Female	175 White	18 Ages 20-29	156 Casual	10 Have Not Recently Been	107 Do not Have a Swim Pass
4 Non-Binary	18 Prefer Not to Answer	104 Ages 30-49	16 Non-Swimmers	79 Open Swim	
1 Other		62 Ages 51-69		58 Lap Swim	
		40 Ages 70+	2 Special Event		
			5 Sunbathe		
			30 Supervise Kids		
			1 Swim Team		
			10 Lessons		

## Focus Group Findings

The consulting team led 14 focus groups, on three dates: October 27, November 13, and November 14, 2023. Of the 172 invitees that responded affirmatively to their focus group invitation, 137 people attended and participated in the focus groups. Forty-four people who were not selected for a focus group or who declined their invitation responded to the online version of the focus group questions, provided in survey format. Because the first attempt to attract teen focus group participants was unsuccessful, City staff tried a new route and organized a time to meet with five students from Southeast Junior High School. The feedback from the 15 focus groups and online survey participants are provided in the summary format below. The consultant team tracked the frequency of responses, identified common themes and threads of consistency, and observed singular ideas or sentiment to highlight. The qualitative data is organized in the following sections:

- Design Considerations
- Amenities
- Type of Water
- Accessibility



- Bathhouse
- Group Needs
- Consultant Observations

## Design Considerations

The City Park Pool experience is deeply personal to many of the participants. One described their experience as spiritual and said, “This is the pool of my heart.” A junior high focus group participant (among many others) shared they love how peaceful City Park Pool is. The following subsections describe the key areas of feedback as they relate to facility design.

“This is the  
pool of my  
heart.”

~Focus Group  
Participant

### *History*

Preserving the history of the site was mentioned in three focus groups. In most cases, this sentiment was shared with the intent of preserving the look and feel of open water, a low number of amenities, and the existing pool footprint. One participant pointed to the blue and white lettering above the entryway as something they would like to see preserved. More than half (7) of the focus groups indicated they would like to preserve the trees, grass, and natural landscape. Features receiving the most online survey mentions when referencing what they like most about City Park Pool included wide open space (15), trees (10), and park setting (8).

### *Simplicity*

The simplicity of the current site is beloved and was mentioned in seven focus groups. Ten of the focus groups referenced the Coralville Community Aquatic Center as a nearby water park for community members who want that type of experience. The reference was made largely in defense of retaining the open water aesthetic at City Park Pool and to balance a variety of aquatic experiences in a small geographic radius. Conversely, a handful indicated the Coralville facility was not accessible to all Iowa City residents (e.g., transportation, price).

Although participants tended to focus on pool footprint, layout, and amenities, there was one design-focused participant that expressed appreciation for the current pool layout’s symmetry. The orientation of the pool’s symmetrical shape with the diving boards at the center was described as visually appealing upon entry.

### *Opposing Views*

The consulting team observed a dichotomy between adults who feel City Park Pool’s open water “is” the activity and allows for creative play versus adults who feel there is “nothing” to do at City Park Pool. When in the same group, the opposing views were shared without reaching consensus one way or the other. Interestingly, junior high focus group participants’ favorite feature was the wide open space for general swim.

### *Learn to Swim Focus*

One design-related comment suggested the pool should be designed around the primary purpose of supporting the learn to swim function. This observation connected the project goal of promoting the vision of the Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department that “every child learns how to swim” to the redesign considerations.

### *Multigenerational*

Three of the focus groups specifically called out the need for the new design to support multigenerational use; one group mentioned that the space should meet the aquatic needs for all stages of life. Four online survey respondents asked that the pool appeal to both kids and adults.

### *Line of Sight*

Line of sight and/or visibility were mentioned in five focus groups as being an essential safety consideration. The two example scenarios used most often included adults who need to see the children they are responsible for without obstruction and the lifeguards who need to see clearly across the facility.

### *Safety Considerations*

Several safety considerations surfaced from the conversations. The first was the observation the current pool design does not have clear depth change demarcation. Participants can quickly find themselves in deep water without realizing it.

Emergency support for people with hearing loss was requested. Those who experience hearing loss do not have a clear mechanism to know if there is an emergency in the pool. Suggested methods of signaling people included lights, strobes, flags, and/or LED lanes.

Access for emergency services could be improved with the new design. Direct means of entrance and egress and panic bar exit gates could be considered.

Clearer designation of the lifeguard station could help patrons understand where to seek medical and safety equipment assistance. A better-defined area could help ensure patrons do not place their belongings in the lifeguard space, help maintain clear pathways when emergency response is needed, and serve customers more professionally. The lifeguard focus group brainstormed the possibility of a more permanent extension of the bathhouse, with a roof and possibly half wall with service counter.

## **Amenities**

### *Shade*

Overall, shade was deemed extremely important—whether on deck, in grass, and over water. Shade was one of the top two topics consistently discussed; 13 of the focus groups took time to specifically call out the need for shade. When brought up in the groups, participants tended to emphasize the feature as one of their most important amenities to consider in the future design.



Cited benefits included relief from the sun and heat, and sensitive skin protection. Most participants simply wanted shade “everywhere,” while some expressed strong sentiment against shade over the water. Those who were accepting of shade over the water felt it should only be added in shallow, toddler areas. Of the 39 online survey respondents, seven indicated they would be interested in shade over the water and pool deck.

### *Sun*

Alongside the sentiment of needing shade was the request to retain some areas to sunbathe as well. Participants in five of the focus group and via email follow-up expressed the need for chairs to lounge in as well as grass to spread blankets on.

### *Lap Lane Length*

The thread of consistency as it relates to lap lane length was the desire to retain **both** 25-yard and 50-meter lap lane length options. The flexibility of the current layout’s ability to support both lengths was highly valued by focus group participants. The online survey respondents’ top choice was retaining both lane lengths (38%).

While avid lap swimmers vocalized a passionate desire to retain 50-meters, a larger variety of user groups expressed a need for 25-yards in their discussion. Swimmers at the beginner levels, who do not identify as “strong” swimmers, and those with medical needs (e.g., asthma) expressed an essential need for 25-yards. These user groups require a wall and/or bulkhead at the end of the 25-yard length; using half of a 50-meter length does not work well. This information was not shared with the intention of advocating for their preferred lane length over the other; on the contrary, these users were advocating to retain both lengths so long as a wall or bulkhead was available at each end of the shorter lanes.

### *Lap Lane Quantity*

When asked what a minimum number of lanes focus group participants would like to see in the new pool, the answers varied between groups. While some participants thought four would be enough, others stated there would “never be enough” lap lanes. The average tended to land on eight lanes. Note the acceptable number of lanes was difficult for participants to define, as they often wanted to associate the number with the length (i.e., eight, 2w5-yard lanes).

Online survey respondents indicated the minimum number of 25-yard lanes was two; maximum 10 (mean 6.1). They also indicated the minimum number of 50-meter lanes was two, maximum 14 (mean 6.6).

The consulting team was interested in learning if a lower quantity of lap lanes would be acceptable, so long as they were dedicated to lap swimming during all operational hours. It was difficult for focus group participants to consider the idea of the new layout including a lower quantity of lap lanes. The current operational structure offers dedicated lap swim times only during specific time frames. Because those lap swim times tend to feel busy, there was concern that a smaller number of lanes would not suffice.



### *Lap Swimming*

In addition to the lap lane length and lap lane quantity, focus group participants provided insights regarding lap swimming in general. Water walkers in five of the focus groups asked for dedicated lanes for walkers and slow swimmers, and two of the groups asked to consider a dedicated walking area. Participants in three focus groups used a half-joking tone when they indicated it would be nice to have a separate lap lane pool. One participant emailed that two separate bodies of water could be maintained at different temperatures. The final insight gleaned about the use of the pool for lap swimming was that lane markers are often not used during lap swimming times. Focus group participants expressed a desire for lane markers in four of the groups, with one person stating, “I wish that there were lane markers during lap swimming. It’s difficult to manage waving water and lap lanes make the water smoother.”

### *Competing Functions*

Through the focus group discussions, the consulting team observed an underlying sense of frustration from pool users who want to use the same space for different functions. Eight of the focus groups had at least one participant who mentioned some form of competition for space. Examples included lap swimmers and water play participants colliding, the effect of the diving waves on lap swimmers, water walkers and slower swimmers converging with faster lap swimmers, and aqua fitness participants being crowded by people swimming laps.

### *Diving Boards*

Focus group participants expressed overwhelming support for retaining the diving boards, especially one meter. No one in the focus groups expressed opposition to diving boards.

### *Bubblers/Jets*

Participants in seven groups felt that small bubblers/jets were okay—and even desired—so long as they were not large splashing features.

### *Small Play Feature*

Throughout the focus groups, participants consistently acknowledged that the current pool layout does not serve kids from approximately three to seven years very well. Participants articulated that after two years of age, kids tend to not want to be confined to the baby pool. Several participants (from 10 different groups) suggested the idea of adding a small play area or feature. The idea of a small play area or feature was typically not met with resistance; on the contrary, many shared what they had already envisioned—a possible expansion of the northwest or northeast portion of the current footprint to accommodate the needs of young participants while retaining the rest of the traditional layout. This idea was seemingly accepted by focus group members, as they expressed no opposition to this approach.

Small play features were the second-most mentioned response in the online survey’s open-ended question about spaces for kids under five years of age. Twelve responses included mention of a small slide, bubblers, and fountains.

### *Baby/Toddler Area*

There was mixed sentiment expressed regarding the notion of a separate and/or fenced baby/toddler pool area. While many (12 groups) liked the notion of a fenced in area with gate, some parents shared that a fence can be great to contain small children but can also make it difficult if the family has multiple children with a range of ages/interests. Four focus groups mentioned that a soft surface would be nice in the baby/toddler area, on the pool deck, and on stairs. Of the 39 online survey responses, eight respondents indicated interest in a separate wading pool.

### *Slides*

Large slides were not of interest to most focus group participants. While a handful of participants thought there could be more amenities added for children and teens, most expressed an aversion to “plastic” and “loud” features. The caveat to this observation is the specific mention of drop slides by participants in five of the groups. Drop slides seemed like a compromise of sorts, as they can fill a need for an added amenity without taking up a lot of space. That said, participants in two of the groups where drop slides were mentioned opposed the idea. People who identified with the LGBTQ+ community, with having a disability, and those who tended to be aqua fitness participants were more likely to oppose the addition of slides.

### *Current Channel*

A current channel was supported in six of the focus groups and opposed in two. While a current channel for water walking was of interest to most water walkers, some water walkers opposed the idea. Current channels did not occupy as much discussion of the discussion time as other amenities and features.

### *Splash Pad*

Nine of the focus groups mentioned a splash pad. Most references were favorable and deemed splash pads as a good amenity for swimmers ages five and under. Despite the frequent favorable mentions, caveats were often added—specifically that a splash pad should be “simple” or that the kiddie area could have a few splash pad features. One participant pointed out that splash pads are “inefficient, not cost effective, and will eat up a budget.” Another mentioned that splash pads can be too noisy and if one is added, it should be placed “off to the side.”

### *Climbing Wall*

Four focus groups mentioned a climbing wall as a potential new amenity option. The topic did not have much traction within discussions.

### *Concessions*

Although the predetermined questions did not ask participants about concessions, the desire to have some form of concession service was brought up in five of the focus groups.



### *Water Seating*

Despite not being an amenity provided as an example, six focus groups mentioned the idea of needing seating in the water to support leisure, socialization, learn to swim, and easing into water.

### *Pool Deck Amenities*

Five of the focus groups and an email submission mentioned the need for more pool deck support amenities, including chairs, tables, and umbrellas.

### *Lighting*

Although only mentioned once, a participant suggested the idea of pool deck lighting to support later operational hours.

## Type of Water

When asked which type of water was most important, most groups found the question difficult to answer, given the following options:

- Lap swimming (for exercise and programs)
- Wading (Up to 2'6" deep)
- Shallow water for recreation and programs (2'6" to 4' deep)
- Deep water for diving and programs (8' and deeper)

It was quite difficult for participants to articulate which depth is most important because they deemed each type important for different user groups. Participants see City Park Pool meeting a variety of needs and therefore a variety of water types are needed. This finding was consistent with the online survey respondents; over half (56%) deemed all pool areas equally important.

One participant observed that City Park Pool's bottom is steeply sloped after four feet and expressed a need for more level area in the four- to six-foot range.

Four focus groups expressed interest in warmer water; the makeup of those four groups tended to be older participants, those with disabilities, infrequent users, and those who tend to not have a pool pass.

## Pool Accessibility

### *Pool Entry*

When considering all the pool entry preferences, the following three options rose to the top:

1. Zero-depth
2. Sloped entry with railing
3. Stairs

The zero-depth entry feature received overwhelming support throughout the focus group conversations. Aside from a few participants who felt that the zero-depth area should not be “too large,” there were no dissenters to the zero-depth entry concept. The tone and words used led the consulting team to feel as if it was already decided that a zero-depth entry is an absolute “must” to include. Of online survey respondents, 77% selected zero-depth means of entry as their top choice. Zero-depth entry was the feature most frequently mentioned in the online survey responses (27) for the kids under five pool area.

The sloped entry means of access was the second-most palatable, with 12 of the groups selecting the option after zero-depth. The concept of using stairs to enter and exit the water was received with an almost enlightened interest—an idea that many had not considered but welcomed after contemplating for a moment. Some mentioned the opportunity to use the stairs as seating in addition to means of entrance/exit. While a transfer station was more desirable than a transfer wall, neither idea received much traction.

Though some participants deemed chair lifts as a necessity for their participation, more participants expressed a dislike of chair lifts, sharing rationale that chair lifts draw attention to the user, they are difficult to use, and they are hard to maintain in a functional state (i.e., they frequently break).

Participants cited the need for railings. Desired railing locations included the zero-depth entry area, along stairs, near a transfer station, and along the length of one lap lane (to support water walkers).

“As a neurodivergent person, with neurodivergent kids, the low-stim nature of the pool...has been such a blessing, and a sanctuary on summer days.”

—Email Participant

#### *Other Accessibility Considerations*

In addition to pool entry support, several participants mentioned the need for accessible considerations that had not been prompted by the consulting team.

- Chairs without arms would be more size inclusive.
- Bubblers, small spray features, and current channel can support people with sensory issues.
- An app can help provide a map of where accessible spaces are located, walk people through the accessible features, and prepare special needs participants with pictures of what to expect.
- The tranquil environment can be peaceful and therapeutic for those with neurodivergence.
- Consider options to help reduce the effect of hot concrete on feet.
- While not a factor in pool design, transportation was mentioned in three focus groups.



Barriers to participation expressed by online survey respondents were more likely to not exist (12) or relate to operational considerations such as facility hours (11).

## Bathhouse

### *Changing Areas*

The current locker rooms tend to be avoided due to discomfort, lack of privacy, wetness, small size, and insufficient changing areas. Eight different focus groups mentioned the need for light, ventilation, and/or cleanliness at least once.

There was overwhelming consensus around the need for a different locker room experience that reaches beyond the current male/female designation. Three key types of desired spaces were described:

- Gender-neutral
- Family
- Small group “pods”

Scenarios and stories were often used to describe problem statements needing to be solved with the new bathhouse design. Families with young children need a space where children are contained near parents (e.g., mom with an eight-year-old son). Adults caring for opposite-gendered youth and/or other adults with disabilities must be able to monitor the person being cared for (e.g., camp counselor responsible for multiple children, a female aide with a male adult participant with disabilities). People who do not identify as male or female need a private place to change. Because of these scenarios, focus groups overwhelmingly agreed that the new design needs spaces that accommodate these needs. This sentiment aligned with online survey respondents’ desire for gender-inclusive and family bathrooms (7).

Privacy is essential to users; 11 of the focus groups and 10 of the online survey respondents cited the word “privacy” in reference to the changing areas and showers. Doors in changing areas and showers (not curtains) were specifically requested in four of the groups. Also essential for some focus group participants was their ability to change with like-gendered people for religious reasons; exclusively gender-neutral options will not work for this user group.

Adult changing table were cited as a necessity in five of the groups. Accessible bathroom features, such as grab bars, general ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessibility, and more single-use accessible bathrooms were suggested by five of the online survey respondents.

### *Entrance*

Three groups asked for closer access from parking to the building, as well as a better walkway. The idea of expanding the facility entrance to provide a closer proximity to parking and to provide more entryway space was well-received. A faster check-in system was requested in two groups.

Many of the groups (8) requested the ability to navigate directly onto the pool deck after checking in, so a group is not “forced” to maneuver through a locker room to get to the pool. The camp group asked if a separate group entrance could be possible to bypass the locker rooms.

One participant highlighted the importance of being able to see the pool from the entryway; it builds excitement and draws the user into the space.

### *Bathhouse Experience*

Throughout the focus group conversation, various participants mentioned small items that could greatly enhance the user experience, such as hooks, benches, places to “strap” toddler while adult changes, seats in the showers, and/or suit spinners. Consider things that would help all feel welcome; for example, continue to display a pride flag. Finally, one user shared that they “Do like a bathhouse that has multiple entries and exits. I was in an active shooter scenario and a dead-end hallway with no way to escape was uncomfortable.”

### *Multipurpose Room*

Most of the focus groups (10) and online survey respondents (30) supported the idea of adding a multipurpose room. The caveat to their support was the sentiment that the participants would support the idea so long as the new room did not take away from the pool features/amenities (as related to size of pool, budget for pool amenities, reduction of green spaces or trees, and/or reduction of funding of nearby recreation centers). The conditional support was expressed by 16 of the 30 supportive online survey respondents. Suggested potential uses of the space included parties and rentals, programs, a cooling location, and a sensory-friendly calming space. One email respondent suggested the room could have activities like ping pong, games, crafts, and an observation room for people not swimming.

### *Mother's Nursing Room*

The topic of a multipurpose room prompted the idea of a mother's nursing room in two of the focus groups.

### *Lifeguard Space*

The lifeguard focus group shared that while they manage with the space they have for their personal belonging storage, that it would be nice to have a bit more space. Ideally, they could use a changing location and restroom separate from the patrons. They indicated their storage and pool manager space needs seem to be met.

## **Group Needs**

The focus group designated for entities that bring groups to City Park Pool provided specific insight to considerations that would make their groups' experiences better:

- Passenger loading and unloading
- Changing areas in the bathhouse that accommodate a caretaker's accountability for differently gendered participants



- A gathering area that could accommodate 30 people before entering the pool
- Designated and clearly marked group areas
- Non-swimmer activities
- A multipurpose room could help support non-swimmers, provide a quiet space for over-stimulated participants, and serve as a storm shelter/rain location
- Clocks
- A swim test area and wrist bands system that designates which pool section(s) the wrist band color is allowed to enter

## Consultant Observations

Often, participants expressed competing interests for the same type of water throughout conversations. Lap swim, water walking, water aerobics/fitness, swim lessons, diving, and therapy all tend to occur in the same space. The participants in these types of activities frequently mentioned the intersecting demands. While the underlying tone of any comments related to this topic tended to be matter of fact, the consulting team did hear in a variety of ways that more dedicated time for their activity of interest would be ideal. After several focus groups occurred, the consulting team identified one root cause for the conflicts: operationally, lane lines have not been used to clearly designate lap swim lanes.

Importantly, the consulting team should identify programmatic needs that they did not hear about; those topics included synchronized swimming, scuba, and water polo.

Additionally, a few outlier ideas were suggested that the consulting team has identified as cost and/or operationally prohibitive: lazy river, wave pool, swim competition features, and sauna. These items are included in the report for awareness purposes only.

## Focus Group Summary

City Park Pool's current design, setting, and components are beloved. A multiuse, multigenerational facility is desired. The features receiving the most consistent high-need responses were zero-depth entry, shade, lap lanes of *both* 50-meter and 25-yard lengths, and private changing areas. Diving boards are the amenity with the greatest consensus. The consulting team might conclude that a small play area could be tolerated so long as it is somewhat quiet, off to one side, and the large, open pool spaces are retained. While a strong desire to retain City Park Pool "as it was" there was also an overall acknowledgment that a few accessibility features and amenities were needed—and generally accepted—upgrades.