

# Survey: Indoor pool, community center top priorities for Gloucester recreation

By **Frances Hubbard** · **Contact Reporter**

fhubbard@dailypress.com

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**G** LOUCESTER — Residents would like to see an indoor swimming pool and new community recreation center, according to the results of a needs assessment survey.

Aquatic facilities or programs and indoor recreational space top the list of priorities — along with maintaining the county's current parks — in the survey mailed to residents earlier this year by the Gloucester Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department.

The county distributed 3,000 surveys to random citizens and received 443 responses, according to Art Thatcher with GreenPlay LLC, a consultant firm hired to help the department with the needs assessment project. Thatcher said an additional 280 responses were received after the survey was opened to the public.

The 15 percent response rate, Thatcher told the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday night, was a higher return than most national surveys, which usually have an 8 to 10 percent rate.

Responses showed that residents are interested in activities such as more swimming, fitness and outdoor programs, adult sports leagues, tennis, pickleball, youth leadership development, senior trips, fine arts, and therapeutic recreation. The questions for the survey were developed from a citizen focus group of 56 people and a recreation staff focus group, Thatcher told the board.

According to Carol Steele, director of Gloucester's parks, recreation, and tourism department, the results of the survey will help parks and recreation officials plan capital projects and budgets, along with programs offered, for the next five to 10 years.

Supervisor Michael Winebarger said the survey was very thorough but only represented about 1 percent of the county's population.

"To me, it's still a very small amount to drive this whole thing to make it like everybody in this county wants this," Winebarger said.

The needs assessment process, Thatcher said, is one step toward a master recreation plan. He suggested the county develop a plan with an inventory of facilities and programs, look for gaps in services and look for partnerships to offer those services, in addition to looking at costs for future projects.

The county hired GreenPlay LLC in November of 2015 to help with the needs assessment. The contract cost the county \$22,000, according Steele, which came out of the county administrator's contingency fund.

This is not the first time the county has conducted a similar assessment, Steele said, but it is the first time a consultant has been hired.

"I can't get excited about (this)," said Supervisor Andy James. "We've got too many other things going for using our money and I don't feel like a recreation center or aquatic center or maybe even an aquatic waterfront playground — I don't think anything like that is on the radar at the present time."

*Hubbard can be reached by phone at 757-298-5834.*