

Amherst NY Residents Support New Aquatic Center in Master Plan

from *Athletic Business*, May 2017

by Joseph Popiolkowski from *The Buffalo News*

Should Amherst build an aquatic center? More soccer fields? More ball diamonds? Those questions and others will be answered with input from residents during an update this year of the town's Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

"It is well overdue," said MaryDiana Pouli, executive director of the town's Youth and Recreation Department. "It's probably about 10 years overdue."

A kickoff of the update is scheduled for 7 p.m. Tuesday with a community meeting in Council Chambers at Town Hall, 5583 Main St. GreenPlay, the town's Colorado-based consultant for the update, will facilitate the meeting.

Residents' input is vital for the update, which will chart the future for the town's parks and recreation offerings, Pouli said. "It's twofold," she said. "One is that we really want to hear what the residents want to see in the community. We are the Town of Amherst and want to be on the cutting edge wherever possible. Then it will help us lay out a roadmap for how to fund things in stages."

One of the most frequent requests, she said, is for an aquatic center. "That is a huge investment and a huge commitment," Pouli said. "If that's something we're going to do, we have to be sure that is what people really want to see."

There are several other important questions town officials are seeking input on:

The town has several parks "on the book" that are undeveloped with no amenities. "Do people want to see those remain passive places of nature or do they want to see some kind of activity happening there?" Pouli asked.

Amherst also has a shortage of soccer fields and ball diamonds. "Where does it make sense to put those things if we're adding new? Or are there other places that can be revitalized to provide that?" she asked.

And new sports popular among baby boomers such as pickleball are emerging. "How do we incorporate that into our existing facilities?" Pouli asked. The town hired GreenPlay late last year and is spending about \$80,000 on the update, which Pouli said should be complete by later this year.

A public survey will be conducted following Tuesday's community meeting. "We really hope folks come out," Pouli said. "All suggestions will be considered. It really is a time to look to the future."

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