

Staff Report

STAFF REPORT REGARDING FITCH FAMILY INDOOR AQUATIC CENTER PROPOSED FACILITY SCHEDULE, SURVEY, AND FEE SCHEDULE

December 10, 2024

BACKGROUND:

Over the past two years, there has been considerable discussion regarding the design, bidding, and construction of the Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center (FFIAC). Although staff continues to be heavily involved in the construction process, focus is starting to shift to operations once FFIAC is open for use. This report details proposals regarding facility schedules for FFIAC and Furman Aquatic Center (FAC), FFIAC survey results, and fee schedules for FFIAC and FAC.

A complete budget impact is not provided in this report because the facility schedules and fee schedules are two major variables that will impact the budget and tax subsidy impact. As such, staff is asking Council to first approve, in concept, the facilities and fee schedules, which will then be used to outline the budget impacts.

FACILITY SCHEDULE:

Staff has spent considerable time discussing the year-round schedule for the Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center (FFIAC) and what it will look like once it is open. Several factors have been considered including staffing, duplication of services, and the overall operations of the facility. As Council is well aware, hiring lifeguards for the Furman Aquatic Center (FAC) has been a challenge the past several years. At FAC, approximately 25 guards are needed to have all basins and amenities open at the same time. In contrast, FFIAC will require nine lifeguards to have all basins and amenities open at one time. Staff believes enough lifeguards will be hired to staff FFIAC from September to May. **However, since FAC basins and amenities have at times had to close due to staffing levels, it is not realistic or feasible to have FAC and FFIAC fully open at the same time during the months of June - August. Instead, staff is recommending an approach where, during summer months, FFIAC is used on a more limited basis. This concept involves the following:**

Saturday Before Memorial Day to Labor Day (14 Weeks)

- FAC is open for programs and open swim
- FFIAC is used for swimming lessons during mornings and evenings
- When FAC is closed for inclement weather, FFIAC would be open

Tuesday After Labor Day to the Friday Before Memorial Day (38 Weeks)

- FFIAC is open for programs and open swim

Staff recognizes that ideally, both facilities would be fully utilized and fully staffed during warm weather months. However, the reality is that staffing is a limitation to keeping the facilities open for use. Recruiting and retention practices are continually reviewed in order to increase the number of lifeguards on staff. On a positive note, having a facility for lifeguards to work during the school year may help

with retention as employees could guard year-round and would not have to find another job when Furman closes for the summer. It should also be noted that this proposed schedule had been implemented at times when the former Municipal Pool facility was operational. If in the future there is an increase in the number of guards hired, this schedule can be revisited. However, staff is not expecting this to be the case for the foreseeable future. Additionally, staff believes it would be prudent to plan for this more limited operating scenario during warm weather months rather than raising expectations that are difficult to meet once the facility opens.

COMMUNITY INPUT SURVEY:

On November 8, 2024, staff released a survey seeking feedback regarding programming for Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center. The survey focused on the type of aquatic programming the community would want to participate in at the new facility, and what days and times these programs should be offered.

Survey information was sent directly to over 12,589 emails, included in the Parks and Recreation newsletter, made available via Parks & Recreation and City of Ames – Government social media, and announced through a City of Ames Press Release. The survey was open for a total of 10 days and received 2,154 responses. These responses will assist staff in developing a program schedule for the first year of facility operations at FFIAC. An executive summary of the survey responses can be found in Attachment A.

PROPOSED FEE SCHEDULE:

When developing the proposed fee schedule for FFIAC, staff worked off the proposed Furman Aquatic Center fees for FY 2025/26 as a model, which are shown in Attachment B. Fees are shown for daily admissions, punch passes, and season passes and vary depending on the user (e.g. youth, adult, ISU student, senior, and family). It should be noted that FAC is on property leased by ISU, and the lease agreement stipulates that ISU students pay a fee that is at the midpoint between a youth and adult fee. Also included in the attachment is additional information regarding season passes, including cost per week and cost per visit depending on utilization frequency. This information was the basis for developing the proposed fee schedule for the Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center, which can be found in Attachment C. **The daily admission and punch pass fees for FFIAC are proposed to be the same as FAC. For FFIAC season passes, staff started with the cost per week for a FAC season pass and multiplied it by 38 (number of weeks for the FFIAC season) to determine the proposed FFIAC season pass fees for each user group.**

Of the 1,693 individual and family season passes sold for FAC in 2024, 3.4% received scholarship assistance. Staff is aware and understands the need for scholarships for individuals and families who need financial assistance in order to utilize the FAC and FFIAC. Staff is continuing to work on increasing the Scholarship Endowment Fund so the interest can be used for scholarships. Staff also recognizes that some individuals or families may not be able to pay for a season pass all at once so options are being explored as to how remove this barrier. A proposal on scholarship assistance will be presented at a later date.

OPTIONS:

1. Approve in concept the proposed facility schedules and fees for Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center and Furman Aquatic Center as outlined above knowing that changes may be necessary between now and when FFIAC opens.

2. Provide direction to staff to modify the facility and fee schedules.

STAFF COMMENTS:

Providing direction regarding the concepts for the Fitch Family Indoor Aquatic Center and Furman Aquatic Center facility schedules and fees once FFIAC opens will allow staff to better prepare a plan for operational needs and budget impacts. Once direction is provided and these items are developed, they will be presented to Council for further discussion.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Attachment A - FFIAC Survey information.pdf](#)

[Attachment B - FAC Admission & Pass Fees & Cost per Visit.pdf](#)

[Attachment C - FFIAC Admission & Pass Fees & Cost per Visit.pdf](#)