

\$9 million water park will be ready next year, county says

ORANGEBURG COUNTY AQUATIC CENTER

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By TUCKER LYON, T&D Government Writer Tuesday, April 07, 2009

The Columbia YMCA will operate and maintain Orangeburg County's planned aquatic center, a move the county administrator says will benefit both partners.

In addition to authorizing the YMCA collaboration agreement Monday, County Council also accepted the low bid for the long-awaited construction project that kicks into gear immediately.

Plans are for "the county to construct and own the aquatic center," while contracting with the Columbia YMCA to "come in and do the staffing and operations end," County Administrator Bill Clark said. With its "long history in management," the YMCA can "come in from day one and deliver" cost-effective management, he said.

"It's still in a negotiated state," Clark said. "We need to get council's blessing to bring closure to the negotiations."

After the session, Clark explained that the arrangement is similar to hundreds of others across the country.

Since the Columbia YMCA operates four or five branch locations in Richland and Lexington counties, "this would essentially fall under their umbrella like any other facility," Clark said.

As a result, the YMCA gets to expand its program into a first-class

facility in another part of the state while Orangeburg County gets an experienced staff and no local millage burden.

“All costs of the staff and operations, down to water bills, electric bills and the cutting of grass, would be the responsibility of the YMCA,” Clark said.

Also, council approved the \$8.996 million low bid, submitted by Palmetto Construction Group of Charleston, for the project.

Interest in the project was high, with “standing room only” for the large number of contractors who expressed interest, Clark said. In the end, 11 bids were submitted, although none were from local contractors.

The low bid was “significantly below what we estimated,” he said.

Based on a 49-week construction schedule, Clark said the aquatic center should be completed “one year from today.”

“We’ll get underway starting (Tuesday),” he said.

Citing the long process, Councilwoman Janie Cooper said the center will offer something for every household, “especially the youth and senior citizens.”

“It’s an immaculate building. It’s something no one will turn down,” she said. “The pool is year-round and the water park will be something our children will use vigorously during the summer months, not only for Orangeburg County, but for all surrounding areas. ... We have not invested our money wrongly, we invested it wisely.”

Councilman Willie B. Owens said he hopes the county will “start

turning dirt” soon so that “next year this time” the center will be open.

Councilman Johnny Ravenell asked for a funding explanation, “so citizens don’t think they’re being taxed for this.”

According to Clark, the project is being funded (about 50-50) by both the one-cent capital sales tax and by the county’s capital fund.

Last August, County Council gave unanimous approval to accept a \$554,800 architectural bid by Charleston-based LS3P Associates toward the development of the aquatic center, which will combine a public swimming pool and a gymnasium on a three-acre site on St. Matthews Road.

The facility will be located near the Department of Social Services and Council on Aging building on county-owned property.

Preliminary plans call for an outdoor pool along with a water park, including plunge pools, tube slides, zero-depth entry, children’s activity pools, picnic areas, concessions, full sun and shade areas.

Adjacent to the outdoor pool there is to be an indoor, year-round pool facility complete with a hydrotherapy pool, swimming classroom space, lockers and administrative offices.

County officials said the facility will be ideal for seniors or those with therapeutic needs. It will have a training and competition area for YMCA swim teams and an instructional facility for swimming. Also, an indoor gymnasium is planned, including a multipurpose activity room with an elevated running track.





