

# ADVOCATES FOR ALEXANDRIA AQUATICS

May 23, 2017

## **Advocates for Alexandria Aquatics to Withdraw from Partnership with City on Chinquapin Project**

*City of Alexandria removed all funding for the proposed 50-meter pool at Chinquapin with no cooperation or consultation with Advocates for Alexandria Aquatics*

On May 19, 2017, Advocates for Alexandria Aquatics (AAA) served formal notice to the City of Alexandria that it is withdrawing from the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) it has with the City regarding the planned 50-meter indoor pool at Chinquapin. Furthermore, AAA will terminate its working relationship with the City on this project.

“It is with a heavy heart that we made this decision,” said Bill Rivers, outgoing chair of AAA’s board of directors. “We have worked closely with the City for over four years to improve the aquatics infrastructure of Alexandria and to present a vision for a new pool at Chinquapin that would add so much to our community.”

In its public-private partnership with the City, AAA had pledged to raise \$2.5 million in private sector funds to supplement the City’s \$20 million investment.

In withdrawing from the MOU, AAA cited two reasons for its decision: first, the action by the City and the City Council to remove all funding identified for the planned pool at Chinquapin from the current budget; and second, the failure of the City to communicate and cooperate with AAA about the status of the Chinquapin project as explicitly stated in the MOU.

Specifically, in November 2016 the City Manager – with no consultation with AAA – announced the Chinquapin project was being put “on hold.” As a result, the \$4.5 million in funds in the FY 2017 budget approved by City Council in May 2016 were not to be released to begin the design process of the 50-meter pool.

Following the decision by the City Manager, Alexandria’s City Council refused to take any action – either as part of its oversight of the FY 2017 budget or in creation of the FY 2018 budget – to reverse the City Manager’s decision to put the project on hold.

“The decision by the City Manager to pause the work on the 50-meter pool at Chinquapin was a complete surprise,” said Melynda Wilcox, incoming chair of the AAA board of directors. “For over four years we operated in good faith with the City. Yet we never received a satisfactory explanation as to why the 50-meter pool was ‘paused’ while numerous other projects around the city went forward as planned.”

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“AAA and its members are committed and dedicated partners with the City,” stated Bill Rivers. “By a conservative estimate, the volunteer community has spent over 11,000 hours of its time to help the City improve its aquatics facilities. Over \$800,000 of volunteer time and City funds has been spent on a project that was arbitrarily and abruptly eliminated by the City this year.”

The most significant consequence of the City’s decision to not move ahead with the new pool at Chinquapin is that both current and future generations of Alexandrians will be deprived of many of the simple pleasures of life that aquatics brings, not the least of which is the life-saving ability to learn how to survive in the water.

“There are approximately 7,500 kids in Alexandria who don’t know how to swim,” said Carolyn Griglione, AAA board member. “If every child in our community is to have the opportunity to learn basic swimming and water safety skills we need more pool space in Alexandria. There simply is not enough room in the existing pools to give every child a chance to learn to swim.”

A [public opinion survey](#) conducted on behalf of AAA in March 2017 showed that the proposed 50-meter pool at Chinquapin has strong support in the community. According to the survey, roughly two-thirds of Alexandria residents favor the City of Alexandria investing \$20 million on a new 50-meter pool at Chinquapin.

In particular, Alexandrians believe a new pool is needed to expand access for local children to learn to swim and to allow residents of all ages to use the facility for exercise, rehabilitation and recreational uses.

Residents also appreciate the economic benefits a new facility will bring to the community. With a state of the art 50-meter pool in Alexandria, local swim teams finally will have the ability to host meets – ranging from events for regional youth swim clubs to high school teams to adult Masters swim teams from the East Coast. By attracting more visitors to Alexandria, the community understands that restaurants, hotels and other local businesses will see an influx of customers.

“Because the design money was not released to begin work at Chinquapin, it is impossible to foresee when Alexandria will get its first and only 50-meter pool,” said Bob Ludke, Treasurer of AAA. “We had a wonderful opportunity to improve our community for the benefit of all residents. Knowing that an arbitrary decision by the City has closed the window on that opportunity is a bitter disappointment.”

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