

NEWS

Carbondale Aquatics Center capital campaign to ‘Make a Splash’ on First Friday

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June 5, 2024



Land+Shelter and Connect One Design have formulated a sleek design for the net-zero aquatics center with elements that can be subtracted or phased in depending on how fundraising goes. Courtesy graphic

The “Let’s Make a Splash” capital campaign benefitting the Carbondale Aquatics Center will officially launch its fundraising efforts at Chacos Park at 4th and Main on First Friday, June 7.

The Sopris Sun recently spoke with Carbondale officials, Town Manager Lauren Gister, Parks and Recreation Director Eric Brendlinger and Recreation Programs and Community Center Manager Margaret Donnelly for the latest news on the pool fundraising campaign, which has a goal of \$1.6 million.

From 1979 to today

The John M. Fleet Pool, on the corner of Main and 7th Street, is currently closed for demolition. Opened in 1979, the well-loved and well-used pool's annual statistics on usage averages over 10,000 users, with over 2,000 people taking public swim lessons (100 taking private lessons), over 700 students from schools and camps visiting the pool and over 500 older adults taking water aerobics classes.

Donnelly cited the pool as a popular destination for many community youth groups, including Stepping Stones, Marble Charter School, Blue Lake Preschool and the Carbondale Community School, to name only a few.

In addition to usage intensity, other factors determining an outdoor municipal pool's longevity include construction quality, maintenance practices and climate conditions.

Brendlinger said in 2015, as the pool was approaching its four-decade mark, the Parks and Rec Commission began writing a 10-year master plan.

"A big piece of that plan was to look at how, in those 10 years, we could replace our aging pool," he said. As pool repairs became more frequent, the Town determined it was time to build a new pool facility to ensure a functional, safe and enjoyable user experience.

In 2020, the Town completed a master plan for a new aquatics center and in 2022, voters passed an \$8 million bond issue with 72% approval.

In May 2023, the Town contracted with AD Miller Services, Inc., a Colorado construction company with considerable pool-building expertise.

In June 2023, the Town chose Carbondale-based Land+Shelter Architecture and Planning and Basalt-based Connect One Design for landscape architecture to lead the design teams.

The latest design features a six-lane lap pool with a 12-foot deep diving end. Two lanes will remain open for swimming when the diving board is in use. It also includes a 2,448-square-foot recreational pool with a toddler shelf and multiple play features, a 153-square-foot hot tub and a 2,743-square-foot building with women's, men's and family changing rooms, a guard shack, staff office and mechanical room.

The three separate bodies of water will each have temperature control, depending on their use: warmer for swimming lessons for smaller children versus cooler for lap swimming for adults.

Rising construction costs

Since the COVID pandemic, construction costs in the U.S. have increased significantly due to higher materials prices, labor shortages and supply chain disruptions.

The rise in construction costs revised the price tag from \$8 million to \$11.6 million. Town trustees allocated \$1.6 million from reserves to help bridge the gap and a fundraising campaign aims to raise an additional \$1.6 to \$2.5 million. Design options account for features that can be subtracted to make the budget.

"We did the master plan in a study with the outside consultant pre-COVID. During COVID, as price changes were happening, what came from our feasibility study was not what the pricing would be today — not even close," Brendlinger stated. "And that's across the board, including a specialty industry like an aquatics facility."

Brendlinger said the uptick in projected construction costs created the need to seek additional funding through grants. To date, the Town has received a \$500,000 grant from the Garfield County Federal Mineral Lease

District. They've also applied for an electrification of public buildings grant through the Colorado Energy Office.

"Our grant writing is not done. We're going to be looking and seeing what other opportunities are out there," Brendlinger shared.

The aquatics facility, projected to open in Spring of 2026, "is a big project for a Town of this size. We are replacing an amenity that is wanted and needed that anybody in town can use. It's a public space," Brendlinger explained.

Going net-zero

The trend of building all-electric municipal pools is gaining momentum as communities seek to reduce their carbon footprints and embrace more sustainable and energy-efficient solutions.

This will be the first net-zero municipal pool in Colorado, using fully electric systems with roof-mounted heat pumps and a PV (photovoltaic) system for pool operations, which include heating, filtration and lighting. "Net-zero aquatics facilities are out there, mostly in places like Florida, where they don't have to heat the water like we do," Brendlinger said. "We're looking at a net-zero building with all-electric air-source heat pumps to heat and cool the building and to heat the pools. We're saying, 'Let's trust the technology. Let's trust the future. Let's go all-electric,' and that meets our climate goals."

Not just another brick in the wall

"I'm really impressed with the [building] design, with the historical terracotta brick, intermixed with glass block to let daylight in," Brendlinger shared.

Donnelly said the design team took special care with details, including walking down Main Street to take photos of every building with a brick façade. "They wanted to make sure the brick would match and feel like it belonged," she said.

The new facility will have a shaded space for birthday parties, as well as in the youth area, where there will be a water slide and water spray features.

Donnelly said a corner space in front of the building will be left open as a food truck vendor opportunity. "It's a community pool, and we want it to be a community project," Gister said. "We welcome participation from the community at any level. At the end of this, we want people to say, 'I did this.'"



The building features a mosaic of terracotta brick mingled with glass blocks allowing light to filter in. Courtesy graphic



A project to bring community together

Brendlinger recalled how the Carbondale Recreation and Community Center building on Colorado Avenue transformed the Carbondale community.

“I worked for the Town for a year before that was built,” he said. “I got to see what was happening in town recreation-wise, how people were interacting and what was happening. Once we built that, there was this new spot that brought this whole community energy to it. We had all these special events and rental opportunities for people. All of a sudden that changed the town. I think a pool can do the same thing. It can bring together people that wouldn’t otherwise be together.”

The project team hopes to generate that same enthusiasm among community members, starting with the First Friday kickoff.

If you are interested in making a tax-deductible donation or receiving updates, register at Carbondale Connect: www.carbondaleconnect.org