# Wheaton Park District

**Wheaton Park District Board of Commissioners Workshop Meeting Minutes**
**Thursday May 14, 5:30 p.m.**
**DuPage County Historical Museum 102 E. Wesley Street Wheaton, Illinois**

**CALL TO ORDER** – President Vires called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Barrett, Frey, Kelly Mee, Pecharich, Welker were present.

Staff Present: Executive Director Benard, Executive Assistant Siciliano, Director of Marketing Wilhelmi, Assistant Director of Marketing Medina, Superintendent of Planning Hinchee, Creative Services Manager Whelan

**Guests:** Jeff Andreasen, President, aQity Research

Jacqueline Rachev- Public Communications, Inc.

**COMMUNITY INPUT**

None

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. **Rice Pool and Waterpark** – Review of Exploratory Survey Draft

   - aQity Research and Insights Inc.

President Vires stated that the purpose of this special workshop meeting was to review and discuss the concept of conducting an exploratory survey that would provide the board with likely voter opinions regarding the placing a referendum on the November ballot seeking funding for the renovation or replacement of Rice Pool and other projects.

Executive Director Benard provided a verbal summary report on the subject which included the following points:

- A recap of related board discussions which occurred 2/2/25, 1/17/26 and 3/18/26
- A recap of important dates related to conducting a polling survey, referendum decision deadline and public education
- Park District debt margin and tax impacts at certain referendum amounts
- A review of projects under consideration
- Rationale for multiple project consideration

President Vires asked to board to provide their position on the concept of placing a referendum on the November 2026 ballot.

Commissioner Kelly said he is having a hard time with the idea of putting a referendum on the November ballot, he doesn't think it can pass in this economy. He also thinks the timeframe for gathering information and decision making is too short. He would like to see it on the Presidential ballot in 2 years. He has talked to some residents who believe that it wouldn't pass. He stated that he was confident we can continue to provide maintenance on Rice Pool over the next several years.

Commissioner Barrett agreed with Kelly about the economy being a challenge. He stated concerns about the short time between now and the election to educate the public about a referendum. He referenced the recent successful Naperville referendum and stated they had taken a longer lead time to decide and educate the public. He thought all the projects that Benard reviewed were needed but wanted the public's feedback through the survey to help the board decide. He was open to a referendum on the November ballot pending the results of the survey.

Commissioner Welker is not against a referendum on the ballot however, she thinks more information is necessary for the field house and irrigation to be considered. She isn't in favor of those items being on this ballot but doesn't want to wait 2 years. She is willing to defer it for one year. She doesn't want to drop these issues, she wants staff to continue to provide information and, or alternative ways to solve these problems. She stated that some fields are in bad shape and are dangerous, she stated she knows this because she is out there all the time. She thinks this needs to be addressed.

Commissioner Frey is not in favor of a referendum right now because he needs more information. He does not favor pushing the decision 2 years and would like to revisit this in one year.

Commissioner Mee stated that the board needs the survey results. He favors completing the voter survey to see if there is any interest from the residents in pursuing the referendum now. He agrees that the economy being bad would be a challenge. He would like to see multiple projects in the survey.

Commissioner Pecharich agreed that the timeframe for gathering information and decision making is too short. She stated that we asked people in the survey last summer, and many people liked Rice Pool the way it is, they just want it fixed. She doesn't think there are many people who want a field house. She wondered if there is a way for us to expand usage with the school district property to create more program space. She said that there was not an overwhelming need expressed in the last survey for year-round bathrooms either. She would like more information on what we could do over the next few years to keep the pool in good shape.

President Vires agrees, the more he thinks about it the more he thinks it will fail in November. The small tax raise on the ballot for the highway commission, which was very modest tax increase, was rejected by the public. He feels that coming to the voters in November would not be greeted well. He would like to get the pool done but thinks there isn't enough time; if we want to do it in 2028, we need to start next summer. We need to make sure the public is aware of the condition on the pool. He is in favor of putting it off.

President Vires asked Jeff Andreasen from aQity if we worded the survey differently, would he expect a drastically different result from the survey conducted last year? Andreasen said the result would be different because what we tested last year was very broad, we didn't talk about tax impact or need. The prior survey was a resident survey, this next survey would be a voter survey.

Commissioner Kelly asked if we aren't going on the November ballot why would we do the survey now? Andreasen said if there is no possibility of putting a referendum on the November ballot, he wouldn't recommend doing a voter survey now.

Commissioner Kelly is in favor of doing a voter survey when we have a target referendum date. Commissioner Pecharich agreed. Commissioner Welker wants an assessment of need.

Commissioner Pecharich would like to have at a future meeting the results of the survey so that they can look at the results and what projects we might consider. We need a needs assessment to go with that and see what projects overlap. Commissioner Pecharich stated that Commissioner Kelly is correct, we can fix Rice Pool now, the pragmatic thing would be do it now, trying to plan around what we can afford.

President Vires said we will want to discuss this beginning next May when new board members are seated. President Vires agreed that a needs assessment should be done.

President Vires said that when he looked at the survey last year, it didn't seem like the public was really enthusiastic about any project. Andreasen agreed. He said that's true with most agencies. Any time there is a referendum there needs to be education.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 6:20 p.m., Commissioner Mee moved to adjourn the meeting. Second, by Commissioner Kelly. Motion carried by voice vote.