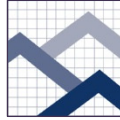


Si View Metropolitan Park District

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NEW AQUATICS CENTER

DRAFT

JUNE 2023



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PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NEW AQUATICS CENTER

June 2023

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of a survey to assess public support for the development of a new Aquatics Center proposed by the Si View Metropolitan Park District (SVMPD). The survey was designed to update a 2022 survey with response to a revised design for the Center. Specifically, this survey measured:

- Use of Si View parks and evaluation of the Park District administration;
- Overall support for the proposed new Aquatics Center;
- Willingness to increase property taxes to fund the Center;
- Comparison of results from surveys in 2020 and 2022, which tested earlier designs and taxes for the Center;
- Favorability of potential “phase two” additions to the Center;
- Demographic information to compare answers.

A total of 647 adults in registered voter household in the park district were interviewed between May 15-30, 2023. This sample thus includes approximately 9% of the voter households in the district.

The interviews were conducted via telephone and online. Respondents were contacted by landline telephone, cell phone and US mail.

This report includes Key Findings, followed by annotated graphs summarizing the answers to each question. The full questionnaire, verbatim responses to the open-ended questions, and a complete set of cross-tabulation tables are presented in the appendix.

This survey was designed and conducted by Elway Research, as were the previous surveys cited here.



METHODS

SAMPLE:	647 adults (age 18+) in the Si View Metropolitan Park District.
TECHNIQUE:	Mixed Mode 33 Land line interviews with live interviewers; 24 Cell phone interviews with live interviewers; 74 Online survey via text; 516 Online survey via mailed invitation.
FIELD DATES:	Phone: May 15-18, 2023 Online: May 15-30, 2023
SAMPLE FRAME:	All households within the District in which at least one person was registered to vote (N=7170).
MARGIN OF ERROR:	±3.7% at the 95% level of confidence. That is, in theory, had this same survey been conducted 100 times, the responses would be within ±3.7% of the responses in this survey, at least 95 times.
DATA COLLECTION:	<u>LAND LINE:</u> Calls were made during weekday evenings by trained, professional interviewers under supervision. <u>CELL PHONE:</u> Text messages were sent to cell phones with a link to the online survey. <u>ON-LINE:</u> Invitation letters were mailed to households inviting residents to log on to the survey website to complete the questionnaire. A follow up postcard was mailed one week later. Virtually every household in the District with at least one registered voter was either called, texted or received a letter of invitation to participate in the survey.

It must be kept in mind that survey research cannot predict the future. Although great care and the most rigorous methods available were employed in the design, execution and analysis of this survey, these results should be interpreted only as representing the answers given by these respondents to these questions at the time they completed the questionnaire.

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Mixed-Mode Survey Method

This survey was conducted using a mixed-mode sample design that combined landline telephone and cell phone with online data collection. We used the same sample frame used in the previous surveys: households in which at least one member was registered to vote – a total of 7170 households.

Telephone numbers were available for 4495 of the households, 1892 of which were land lines. Those numbers were called up to 6 times each or until someone answered and either agreed or refused to be interviewed.

There were 2603 cell phone numbers. Cell phone numbers were called and/or sent a text with an invitation and link to the online survey.

The 2,675 households for which we had no telephone number were mailed a letter from the District Executive Director asking a designated adult in the household to log on to our survey website and complete the questionnaire on-line. They were sent a thank you/reminder postcard one week after the initial mailing.

In addition, we mailed a post card to 4000 households we had attempted but failed to reach by telephone. The card noted that we had tried to reach them and invited them to go online and take the survey.

A total of 673 responses were gathered, resulting in 647 usable interviews for a 9% completion rate. The lost 26 were deleted as obvious duplicates or were too incomplete to be useful.

The data from all modes were combined into a single data set. The combined data were statistically weighted to align age, gender, household makeup and income with the demographic profile of the district more closely.

Interpreting “Support”

More people responded to the mailed invitation than to the telephone contact, even though the sample had more telephone numbers. This suggests that people more interested in them may have been more likely to respond to the mailed invitation to take the survey. The letter came in a Parks Department envelope and was signed by the Parks Director, so a recipient interested in parks or the Department might be more likely to open the letter and take the survey. Caution is therefore advised in the interpretation of these results, as they may be artificially tilted toward positivity toward the parks and the proposed Aquatics Center.

Another factor to keep in mind involved the questions used to measure support for the proposal. This survey makes use of four-point scales for that purpose. There are several ways to interpret the results from scale items. A customary practice is to combine "strongly support" and "support" into "total support" and do the same for the "oppose" side of the scale. In the *realpolitik* of public debate, however, it is likely that those with the strongest opinion will have the loudest voices. In this case, those who said they “definitely” support a proposal are more likely to act on that position, and more likely to engage in the debate, than those who said “probably.”

Moreover, there is a known tendency on the part of survey respondents to answer positively. Most respondents tend to want to be helpful and polite. While this



tendency may be less pronounced in self-administered (online) questionnaires than with live interviewer questionnaires, it is pragmatic to treat "probably support" answers as less reliable than "strongly support." Think of it as latent support. Those who said they "probably support" a proposal are positively inclined, but not convinced.

Because of this positivity bias, it is prudent to consider "probably oppose" and "strongly oppose" responses to be reliable estimates of opposition. If people naturally tend to give positive answers in surveys, then those who say they are opposed are likely to be genuinely opposed.

For purposes of situation assessment and strategy development, then, examining the "strong support" versus all "opposed" provides a judicious (some would say realistic) assessment of the state of public opinion.

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RESPONDENT PROFILE

In interpreting these findings, it is important to keep in mind the characteristics of the people interviewed. This table presents a profile of the respondents in the survey. As noted, the results have been statistically adjusted to align with population parameters. Age and gender were matched to the voter rolls for the park district. Because other demographic variables are not available on the voter lists, household makeup and income were matched to Census estimates for zip code 98045. The sample profile is thus an approximation of the District profile.

This table compares the sample profiles of the four surveys we have conducted since 2016.

NOTE: Here and throughout this report, percentages may not add to 100%, due to rounding.

Sample Profile

		2016	2018	2020	2022	2023
GENDER	Female	52%	54%	51%	48%	46%
	Male	48%	46%	49%	50%	50%
	Non-binary			>1%	>1%	1%
	No Answer				2%	3%
AGE:	18-35	15%	12%	19%	17%	17%
	36-50	39%	32%	38%	38%	33%
	51-64	34%	33%	24%	29%	32%
	65+	11%	23%	18%	16%	18%
	No Answer			1%	2%	1%
PARK USE	None	12%	12%	12%	16%	18%
	1 to 6 visits	25%	31%	20%	25%	25%
	More than 6 visits	63%	56%	66%	57%	57%
	Unknown			2%	1%	1%
HOUSEHOLD:	Couple with children	36%	38%	45%	36%	32%
	Couple with no children	43%	39%	37%	43%	44%
	Single with children	3%	5%	6%	4%	3%
	Single with no children	17%	17%	13%	14%	18%
	No Answer	1%	1%	1%	3%	3%
INCOME	\$50,000 or less	N.A.	14%	8%	8%	19%
	\$50 to 75,000		13%	11%	9%	8%
	\$75 to 100,000		18%	16%	11%	10%
	\$100,000 or more		46%	55%	62%	59%
	No Answer		9%	10%	11%	4%

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A Note About the Sample

As noted above, age and gender data were adjusted to match the voter files. This year – differently from previous years – household makeup and income were matched to the 98045 zip code. In previous years, household makeup and income weighing were extrapolated from larger area data. As a result, compared to previous years, this sample is less affluent and less likely to include households with children.

This is significant because the high-income respondents with children at home were the most likely to support the new aquatics center. The lower proportion of those households in this year's sample may account for some of the difference in measures support levels.

If the proportion of sampled households with children was the same in this year's sample as in last year's (40%), the overall support for the tax to fund the new aquatic center would likely have been 3 points higher, politically significant, but within the survey's margin of sampling error and therefore not statistically significant.

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KEY FINDINGS

◆ Si View parks usage remained high

- Reported usage is down slightly from previous years, but the difference is not statistically significant:
82% lived in a household in which someone has visited the parks this year, vs. 83% last year year, and 86% in 2020 and 2018.
- 57% had visited more than 6 times, the same proportion as last year.

◆ While overall satisfaction declined slightly

- 80% rated the value they receive for their tax dollars from SVMPD as “satisfactory” or better.
- 55% rated the value as “excellent” (32%) or “good” (23%); this year, down from 64% last year.
- The overall rating has declined in each survey since 2018, when 92% rated the value as “satisfactory” or better.

◆ Support for the Aquatics Center concept declined

- 63% were inclined to support the Center, including 47% who said they would “definitely” support it.
- The level of support is down from last year’s survey, when 75% were “inclined to support” the Center, including 50% who would “definitely support” it.
- The number opposed increased compared to last year from 18% to 31%, as the number of “definitely opposed” doubled from 11% to 22%.
- The ratio of those who “definitely support” the Center to all those opposed decreased to 1.6:1 from almost 3:1 last year.

◆ Support for the tax package to fund the Center dropped below 60%

- By a margin of 57% to 39%, respondents were inclined to support the property tax increase to fund the Center.
- This represents a net loss of 17 points compared to last year, when 64% favored, and 29% opposed the proposal.
- The gap between support for the Aquatics Center and support for the tax package to pay for it dropped to 6 percentage points from 11 points last year.

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◆ **Combining the initial response with the response after the tax bill was introduced results in this profile of the community:**

- 38% solid supporters;
- 19% probable supporters;
- 31% hard core opponents;
- 8% initial supporters but who opposed the tax;
- 4% undecided throughout.

- The proportion of solid support has remained stable (40% last year) while the proportion of hard-core opponents has increased from 21% to 31%.
- Those in the middle, “soft” supporters and opponents, plus undecided, decreased from 39% to 31%.

◆ **Supporters tended to cite community benefits while opponents were focused on the taxes and the cost.**

- As before, when asked why they supported or opposed the Center, supporters overwhelmingly cited various community benefits and the need for a new pool: 55% cited a variety of community benefits, and 44% cited the need for a new pool.
- Opponents, as before, named the cost (37%) and the taxes (32%). They also tended to say they would not use it (19%) and that it was not needed (18%).
- This open-ended question asking why respondents were inclined to support or oppose the Center was asked before the tax amount was introduced, indicating that, for many opponents, the *amount* of the tax does not matter.

◆ **Given the options of what to do about the pool, most (56%) would choose to build the new Aquatic Center, but 22% would risk closing the pool entirely to avoid a tax increase.**

◆ **Support declined for potential second phase elements**

- Support for a cool-temperature competition pool dropped to 57% from 69% last year and 75% in 2020.
- Support for “Dry community spaces including a multi-purpose room, and classroom spaces” also dropped, to 50% from 61% last year and 74% in 2020.

◆ **Lingering questions**

- When asked at the end of the interview if they had any questions about the proposal, 40% had at least one question, compared to 30% last year.
- The content of the questions has changed little. Finances remain the top question for Opponents and undecided respondents. Opponents also wanted to know why they were being asked to vote on this again, while undecided respondents questioned the need for the new Center.



FINDINGS

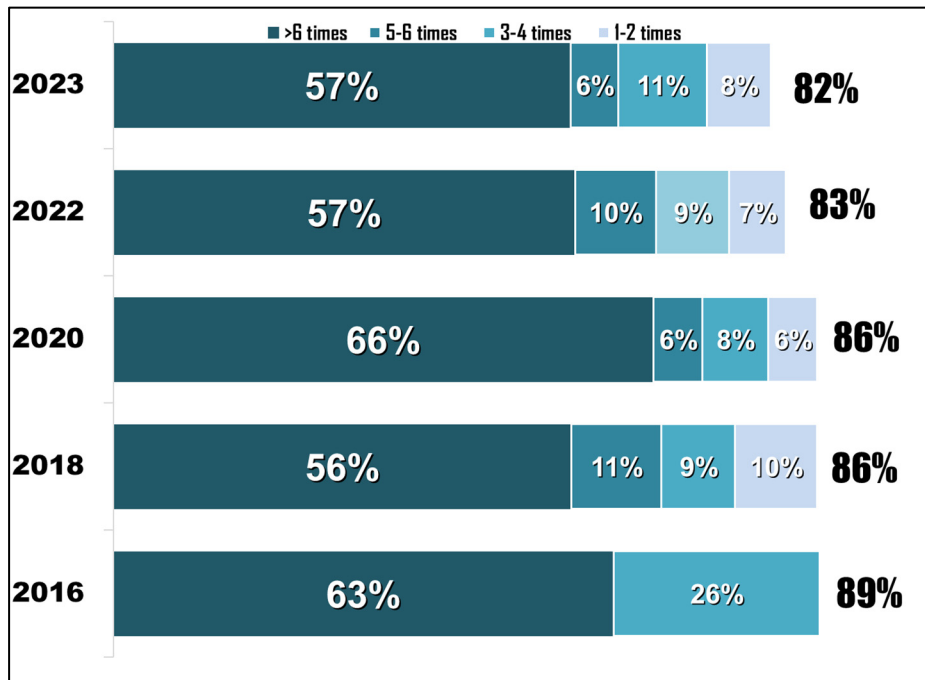
- This section presents the survey findings in the form of annotated graphs.
- Bullet points indicate significant or noteworthy differences among population subgroups.

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Park Usage

82% Reported Visiting a Park Facility in the Last Year



Q1 First, has someone from your household visited a local park, swimming pool or community center in the last year? How many times has someone visited one of these facilities?

Reported park usage was at the same level as last year, but down slightly from previous (pre-Covid) surveys. The differences in total usage are not statistically significant between the surveys since 2018. The 2016 data are derived from a different set of questions.

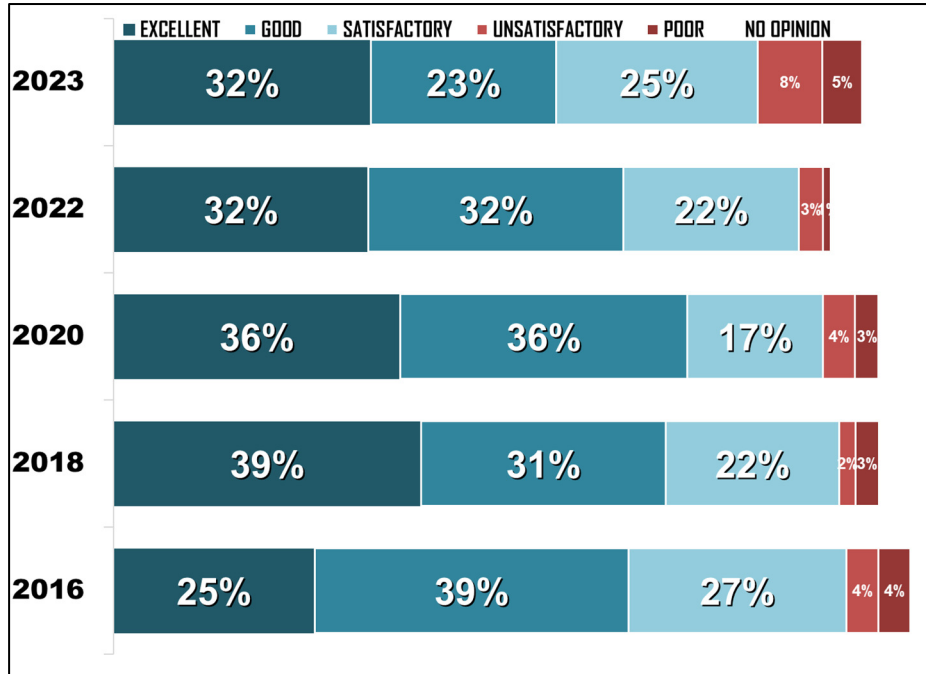
- The total percentage of people reporting visiting Si View Parks was down a single point from last year and four points compared to 2020 and 2018. The difference is not statistically significant.
 - The proportion of respondents who visited the parks more than 6 times was consistent with last year and 2018. The unusually heavy usage reported in 2020 is an outlier in the five-year pattern.
- Park usage was generally high across the population, with a large majority (63%+) in every demographic category having visited the parks in the last year.
- As before, park visits went up with the presence of children and with income:
 - 92% of respondents with children at home visited the parks last year (74% more than 6 times);
 - 76% of those without children did so (47% more than 6 times).
 - 92% of those with incomes over \$100,000 visited the parks (69% more than 6 times; while
 - 62% of those with incomes under \$50,000 visited (36% more than six times).

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Si View Parks

80% Rated Value from SVMPD as “Satisfactory” or Better; Said 55% “Excellent” or “Good”



Q2 As you may know, the Si View Metropolitan Park District is a public agency supported by local tax dollars. Overall, how would you rate the value your household receives from Si View Parks. Would you say the value is excellent, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory or poor?

The overall evaluation of “the value your household receives from Si View Parks” remained high, although the ratings have declined slightly each year since 2018.

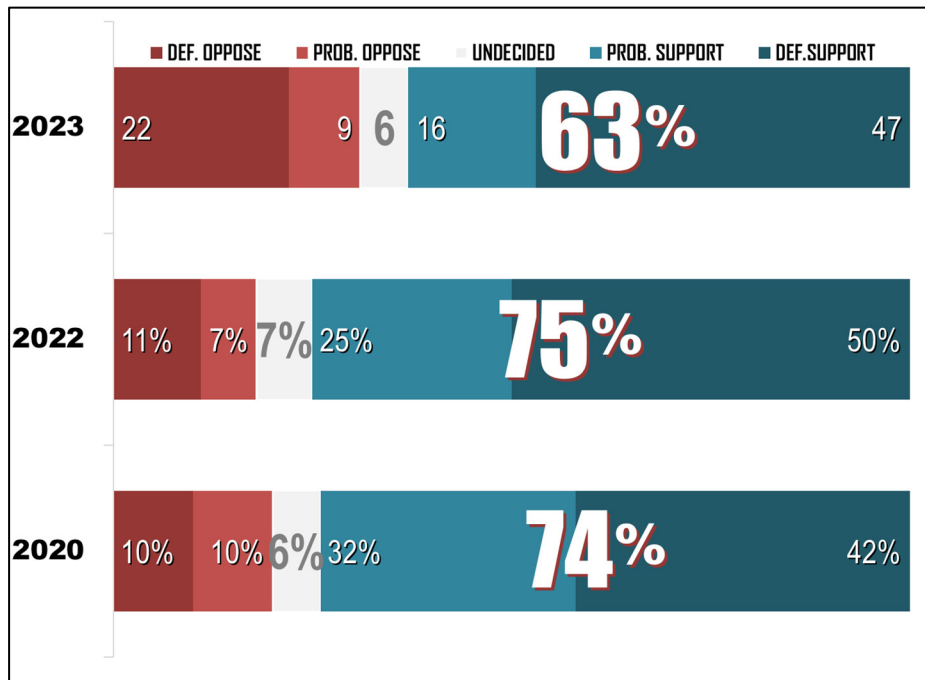
- 80% of respondents rated the value as “satisfactory” or better – six points lower than last year and nine points lower than in 2020.
- The main difference since 2020 has been a shift in the ratings from “good” toward “satisfactory.”
 - The 9-point decline compared to last year was entirely in the “good” category, as “excellent” remained at 32%.
- As before, park users rated the value of the parks higher than non-users:
 - 74% of those who had made 7+ park visits rated the value as “excellent” (47%) or “good” (27%), compared to
 - 21% of those who had not been to a park in the last year (23% of whom gave no answer to this question).
- It must be noted that the answer sequence was scrambled in the phone interviews, which may have led to some confusion among respondents and affected the results. However, there were not significant differences in the responses by survey mode.

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Support for the Center

Just Over 60% Inclined to Support Aquatics Center



Q3 Si View Metro Parks is considering replacing the 85-year-old Si View Pool with a new aquatic center in downtown North Bend. The conceptual design is based on community input and recommendations from a comprehensive feasibility study. The design calls for an indoor aquatics center with four 25-yard lap lanes, an accessible entry recreation pool with flexible programming spaces and features for all ages, abilities and interests. This project would be paid for with a regional grant plus local tax dollars. If a proposal were put before the voters, would you be inclined to **[READ & ROTATE]** this new Aquatic Center?

Initial support for the Aquatic Center was significantly lower than in last year’s survey, and opposition was higher.

- After the revised features of the proposed Aquatic Center were described, 63% of respondents were inclined to support the use of “local tax dollars” to build it – down from 75% last year and 74% in 2020.
- The core support grew from 42% “definitely support” to 47% since 2020, while the soft support (“probably support”) has been cut in half, from 32% in 2020 to 16% this year.
- In those same three years, opposition has grown from 20% to 31% as core opposition (“definitely opposed”) doubled, from 10% to 22%.
- There was majority support in nearly every demographic category, although support is slightly weaker than last year. Most likely to support were:
 - Couples with children at home (76%, including 66% “definitely”); Last year it was 84%/66%;
 - Most frequent parks users (74%/62%). Last year: 82%/60%;
 - Those with annual incomes over \$100,000 (74%/60%). Last year 83%/59%;
 - People under age 50 (75%/56%), Last year (79%/56%).

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- **There were large negative swings among lower income respondents and non-users of the parks. This year, majorities were opposed among**
 - Those with incomes under \$50,000 (56% vs 29% last year);
 - Non-users of the parks (55% vs 25% last year)
- **Opposition was also higher this year among households with no children (37% vs 22%), but a 56% majority in childless households supported the concept.**

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Support for the Center

Supporters See Community Benefits and Need; Opponents Question the Value, Taxes

Table with 3 columns: Reasons to Support, Reasons to Oppose, Reasons Undecided. Rows include categories like Good for Community, Need, Would Use, Features, Value, Cost/Value, Taxes, Would Not Use, Don't Need It, Other, Need More info, No Answer, Don't Use, Cost/Value, Taxes.

Q4 What is the main reason you (support / oppose / are undecided about) this proposal?

Respondents were asked in an open-ended question why they supported or opposed the Aquatics Center proposal.

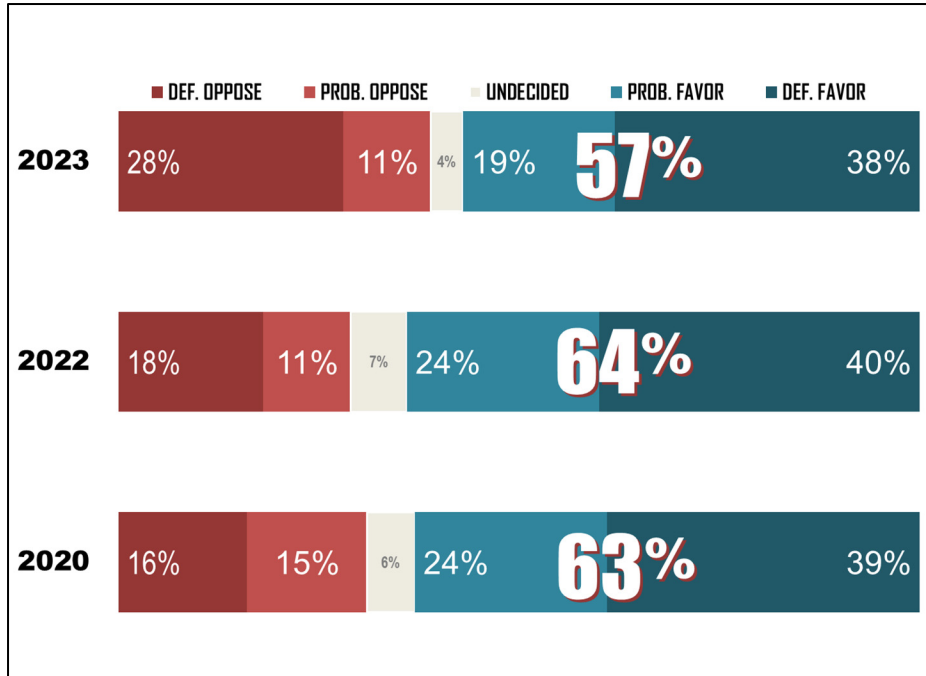
- As in previous years' supporters tended to cite the benefits to the growing community and the need for a new pool. Included in the "good for Community" category... Money, unsurprisingly, led the list of reasons given by opponents... Opponents also were dubious about the need for a new pool... 20% of opponents cited other reasons...

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Support for Package

Support for Tax to Fund Aquatics Center Just Under 60% Threshold



Q5 Funding the new Aquatics Center as described would require a property tax increase of \$10.67 per month for an average household in the district. Would you be Definitely Opposed, Probably Opposed, Probably in Favor Support, or Definitely in Favor to a tax increase of that size to build a new Aquatics Center?

Support for the Aquatic Center proposal declined when the tax increase was specified, as it had in two previous years. This year, willingness to support the tax increase to build the Center dropped below the 60% threshold.

- The tax cited in this survey was \$.92 per month higher than last year.
- The proportion of survey respondents who would support the tax increase was the same proportion that voted for it in last year’s bond measure (57%).
- Those opposed outnumbered those “definitely in favor” 39% to 38%.
 - Last year, the “definitely in favor” outnumbered the opposition by 40 to 29%.
 - The proportion of those “definitely” in favor dipped slightly (40% to 38%), while the proportion of those “definitely” opposed grew 10 points (18% to 28%).
- As before, the highest level of support came from households with children:
 - 74% of household with children supported the proposal (66% “definitely), vs. 49% of households with no children at home.
- Support went up with income from
 - 26% of those under \$50,000 to
 - 70% of those over \$100,000.

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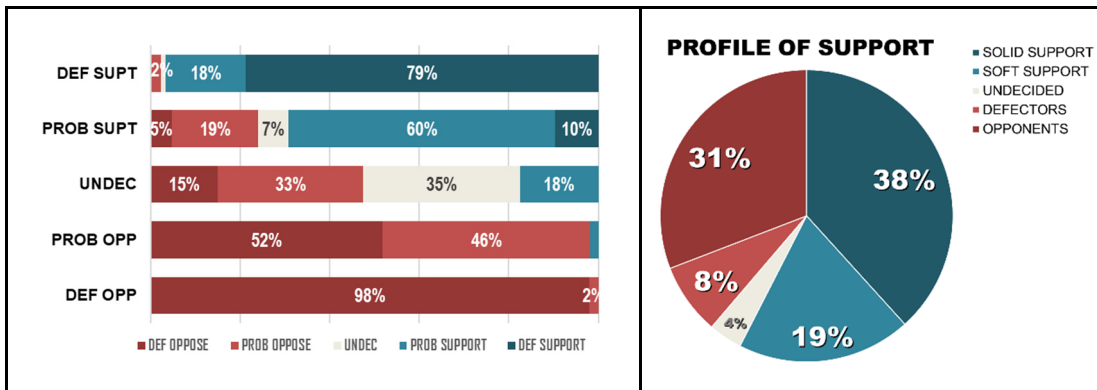
- **Not surprisingly, the highest level of support came from households with children and incomes over \$100,000:**
 - 83% supported the Aquatic Center concept and 80 said they would support the property tax increase to build it.
 - That category of respondent makes up 31% of the sample but 44% of all the supporters in the survey.
- **Most likely to oppose the tax increase were:**
 - Those with incomes under \$50,000 (69%);
 - Non-park users (60%); and
 - Light users (1-4 visits last year) 52%.

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Profile of Supporters, Opponents

Support Before / After Hearing the Tax Amount



As seen earlier, overall support for the Aquatic Center dropped from 64% to 57% when the tax amount was introduced. These graphs indicate the internal dynamics of that change by looking at how initial supporters and opponents answered the second (tax) question.

- The bar graph on left indicates displays the answers to the second (tax) question for each category of the initial (concept) question. For example, among those who initially said they “definitely supported” the Aquatic Center (top bar):
 - 79 still “definitely supported” it after they heard the tax amount;
 - 18% softened to “probably support”:
 - 2% became undecided; and
 - 4% turned into opponents.
- 10% of “probable supporters” turned into “definite supporters” and 24% became opponents (19% + 5%).
- 98% of those initially “definitely opposed” were still “definitely opposed” after hearing the tax amount.
- The pie graph on the right categorizes the changes for an overall view of the sample.
 - 38% of respondents were categorized as “core supporters.” They were supporters or undecided in the first question and “definite supporters” after they heard about the tax.
 - 19% were “soft supporters.” They said they would “probably support” the tax measure to build the Center.
 - 8% started out as supporters but switched to opposition once they heard the tax amount.
 - 31% were opposed at the beginning and stayed opposed.
 - 4% were undecided about the tax; 4 in 10 of them had been supporters of the concept.
- There were some significant demographic differences in the profiles of these support types. These are presented on the following page.

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Profile of Supporters, Opponents

Differences between Supporters, Opponents

- **CORE SUPPORTERS (38% of respondents):**
 - 79% of the Solid Supporters had incomes over \$100,000; 78% made 7+ park visits last year; 54% had children at home; 60% were under age 50.
 - Most likely to cite the benefit to the community (60%) and the need for a new pool (48%).
- **SOFT SUPPORTERS (19% of respondents):**

Compared to Core Supporters, they were:

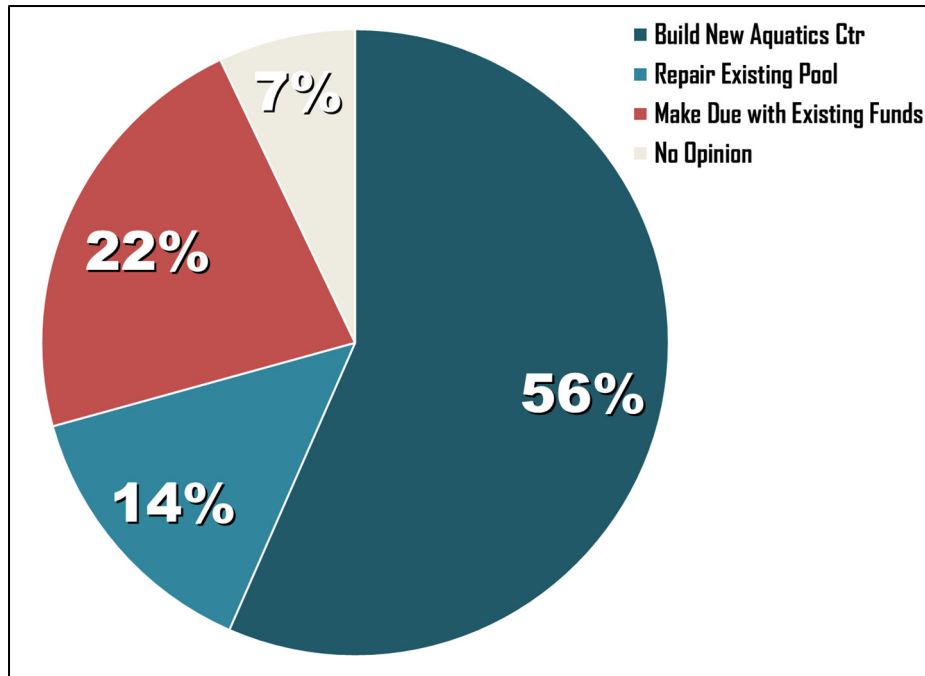
 - Somewhat less frequent park users (49% had 7+ visits last year vs. 77% of Core Supporters).
 - Less likely to have children at home (31% vs. 54% of Solid Supporters);
 - Somewhat lower income (59% made more than \$100,000 vs. 78% of Core Supporters);
 - Less likely to point to the community benefit (44%), or need (42%) as a rationale for support (60% and 48% of Core Supporters);
- **“DEFECTORS.” supported the concept initially, but opposed the tax (8%).**
 - 12% of the “Defectors” had children at home – the lowest proportion by far of any category (even 22% Core Opponents had children at home);
 - 45% had incomes under \$50,000;
 - 100% had visited a park at least once in the last year (49% had 1-4 visits).
- **CORE OPPONENTS (31%)**
 - 77% of Core Opponents had no children at home;
 - 24% were over age 65;
 - 42% had incomes over \$100,000 while 32% had incomes under \$50,000;
 - 40% were frequent (7+) park users;
 - 31% simply opposed any new taxes; 35% said it was too expensive; 20% said they would not use it, and 40% gave no reason for their opposition.

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Preferred Option

Given Options, Just 22% Would Risk Closing Pool to Avoid Tax Increase



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Q6 The Si View pool is 85 years old and was built for a population of 650 people. It is inadequate for today’s population of 30,000 residents and needs extensive repairs just to keep it open. Those repairs will cost \$6 million and will require a voter-approved tax increase. The pool will be closed for 18 months for the work. The repairs will not increase the capacity or add any new features. The Park District has a choice to make. Which of the following options do you support:

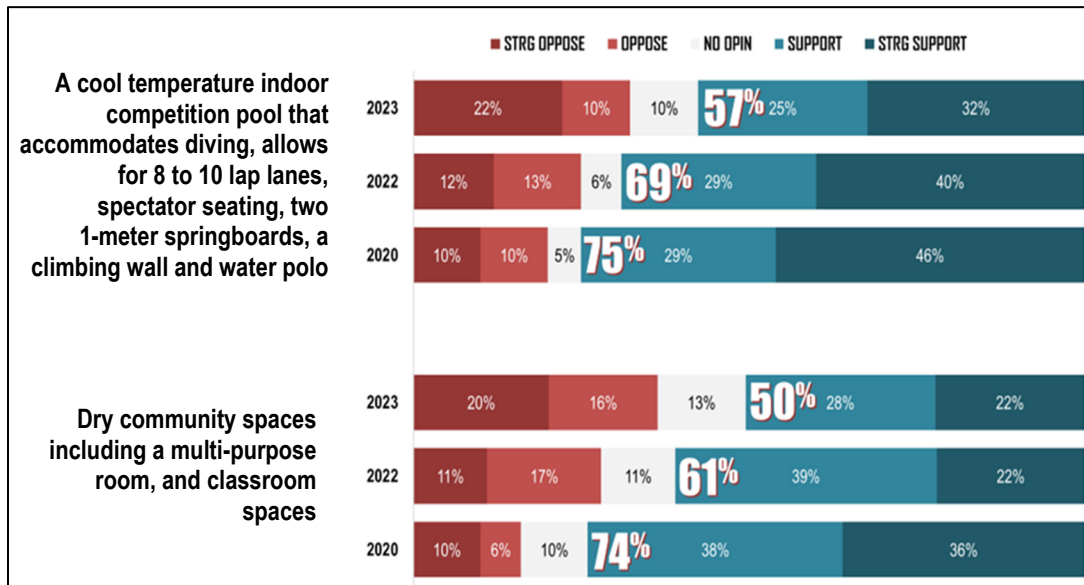
- 56 Build the new aquatics center by raising the taxes described earlier
- 14 Make the necessary repairs to keep the existing pool open, paid for by a smaller tax increase. But don’t build a new aquatics center.
- 22 Make do with existing funds and no tax increase, even if that could mean closing the pool.

- **Given the options before the District, just 22% would be willing to risk closing the pool to avoid a property tax increase.**
 - 56% favored proceeding with the Aquatic Center as described, while
 - 14% would prefer to repair the existing pool, funded by a smaller tax increase than would be necessary for a new Aquatics Center.
- **These “real world” options had the effect of moving some respondents:**
 - 85% of “Soft Supporters,” opted for building the new Aquatic Center;
 - 29% of the Undecided respondents opted to support the Center; (13% favored the repair option and 38% remained undecided).
 - 22% of the “Defectors” came back to support building the new Center, although 41% favored the repair option and 22% said make do with no new taxes.
- **Among Core Opponents**
 - 61% said make do with existing funds, even if that risks closing the pool, but 29% were open to a smaller tax to repair the existing pool.



Additional Elements

Support Declined for Additional Elements in “Phase Two”



Q7 The current planning includes some additional features that would be included in a separately funded second phase of the new Aquatic Center. Are you inclined to Strongly Oppose, Oppose, Support, or Strongly Support, these features?

Support continued to decline for elements that “would be in separately funded second phase” of the new Aquatics Center.

- As previously, most were supportive of “cool temperature indoor competition pool that accommodates diving, allows for 8 to 10 lap lanes, spectator seating, two 1-meter springboards, a climbing wall and water polo.” But support has shrunk by 18 points compared to 2020.
 - 57% said they would be inclined to support that addition (32% “strongly”); vs 69% last year (40% “strongly”). 32% would be opposed – up from 25% last year.
 - Support generally followed the same pattern as support for the Center:
 - 71% of parents with children at home;
 - 67% of those who used the part 7+ times per year;
 - 71% of those aged 36-50;
 - 67% of those with incomes over \$100,000;
 - 63% of men (vs 55% of women).
 - All of those percentages are higher than last year, even though overall support is lower – indicating more of a divergence of opinion in the community.
- “Dry community spaces including a multi-purpose room, and classroom spaces” had bare majority support (50%), compared to 74% in 2020.
 - These features continued to be popular among households with kids (64%), with incomes over \$50,000 (58%) people under age 50 (64%)

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Remaining Questions

Questions About the Proposal

At the end of the interview, respondents were asked what questions they had about the proposal.

- 40% responded, more than last year (30%) but fewer than two years ago (58%).
- The bulk of questions mirror those asked two years ago and should be easy to address. Much of the information has already been made public and is likely to be included in the final description of the proposal put before the voters.

Supporters		Opponents		Undecided	
Finances	9%	Finances	17%	Finances	12%
Features	9%	Why Voting Again?	10%	Need	12%
Timing	4%	Features	5%	Location	3%
Programming	1%	Need	5%	Programming	1%
		Location	2%		

Breaking the answer down further:

- **Core Supporters** asked about features (8%); finances (7%); and timing (7%). Only 28% had any questions; 10% just expressed their support.
- **Soft Supporters** also asked mostly about features(9%) and finances (8%), but also location (4%). Just 33% had questions.
- **Undecided** respondents were most likely to have questions (51% did), including questions about finances (15%), features (12%), need (11%) and location (5%).
- **Defectors** were most likely to ask about finances (24%). Questions about features were a distant second (6%). 36% of Defectors had at least one question.
- **Core Opponents** asked about finances (16%), why they were being asked to vote on this again (9%), the need (5%), and features (4%). Some 41% had a question; 4% just expressed their opposition.

A verbatim list of the questions is provided in the appendix to this report.

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DISCUSSION

After holding steady from 2020 to 2022, overall support for the new Aquatics Center declined this year. Support for the concept was down 12 points from last year’s survey and support for a property tax increase to fund the Center dropped 7 points. The combined measure of hard-core support remained relatively steady at 38%, but “soft supporters,” and undecided residents migrated to opposition, increasing the proportion of opponents from 21% to 31% . These survey results are almost exactly the same as last year’s vote.

The profiles of supporters and opponents, as well as the arguments for and against the Center, are well-known and have not changed substantially. Last year’s election loss may have bolstered the opposition – when asked if they had any questions, 1 in 10 opponents asked why they were being asked to vote on this again.

The core of support is among households with children at home and annual incomes over \$100,000. Supporters cite the need for a larger, updated pool to an array of community benefits from a new Aquatics Center, from swimming lessons to overall health benefits to people of all ages, to a community asset.

The hard-core opponents mainly are opposed to a property tax increase and question the need, especially for such an “extravagant” facility.

Faced with the real-world options, most respondents (56%) would favor building the new Center over repairing the existing pool (14%), but 22% would risk closing the poll altogether to avoid a tax increase. That number is the bedrock opposition. However, one-third of this group (10% overall) were open to supporting a smaller tax increase to repair the existing pool. That might indicate an opening to make the case that a new Center is more cost-effective.

The key to the success of the Aquatics Center lies with the 40% of residents who are in between the 31% hard-core opponents and the 38% hard-core supporters.

The question of a new Aquatics Center turns on the simple question of community value. Simple, but not easy. The challenge to building support for the Center is one of making sure the core supporters are motivated, shoring up soft supporters, convincing undecideds, and perhaps winning back some people who like the concept but are wary of the tax increase.

The pool is widely popular. Perhaps the specter of losing it entirely to old age will convince enough reluctant supporters to make the hard choice to agree to a tax increase to keep (and enhance) a valued community asset.



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