

# St. Albans Community Pool Project

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## Year-Round Municipal Pool at Hard'ack Recreation Area

### Frequently Asked Questions

Ver. January 20, 2021

**[Update: This project bond was approved by City voters in March 2021.]**

The City is proposing to construct a year-round swimming pool at the Hard'ack Recreation Area at the top of Congress St. The new pool will be half again as large as the current pool, and offer a "zero entry" area, slide, and diving board. It will be an outdoor pool in the summer. In the winter, it will be covered by an inflatable dome. This document answers frequently asked questions.

1. What is wrong with the current pool?

The current pool is 15 years beyond its useful life; it almost did not open in the summers of 2019 and 20. It needs to be completely rebuilt. The current site is not a good location for reconstruction because it is too small and parking is only available when school is not in session. This means that the pool cannot be converted to year-round use and cannot offer the features of modern public pools designed to serve multiple generations, such as a zero entry area. It's limited size and structure means that we often have to turn people away who would like to use it when it is closed for swim lessons and other programs.

2. What is a zero entry area and why is it so important?

A zero entry for a pool is analogous to an accessible entrance for a building. A zero entry area allows young kids to enter the water at a gradual slope (like a beach) without having to be held by a caretaker giving both a better aquatic experience. It also provides an easy entry for those who use wheelchairs or have difficulty navigating ladders & stairs. This element makes the pool a multi-generational, fully accessible recreation asset.

3. What is the total cost of the project and how will it be paid for?

The total cost is \$5 million. That figure includes the pool, pool house, inflatable dome, and site improvements such as improving the access road and constructing a recreation path across the field. Annual debt service is \$300,000, which will be covered by the one percent Local Option Tax (LOT). The LOT was approved by voters last year and is currently generating revenue. It applies to online purchases delivered to the City as well as purchases within the City.

4. What happens if the LOT does not cover the annual debt service?

The LOT is estimated at \$675,000 per year, not including the hotel. Sales tax revenues have been significantly exceeding projections during the pandemic and this is expected to

continue after the pandemic. The LOT has plenty of capacity to cover the debt service on this project.

5. How will the operating costs pool be paid for?

Operating costs will be paid for through user fees, similar to the parking garage, water and wastewater services, or stormwater. Right now, it costs City residents five dollars (\$5.00) to swim for a half day. We anticipate a similar cost structure for the summer months with the new pool. Nonresident fees will be ten dollars (\$10.00) per half day or more.

In the winter months, fees will likely be eight dollars (\$8.00) per day for residents and sixteen (\$16.00) or more for non-residents. Memberships and family passes with discounts will be available.

6. What happens if the user fees are insufficient to cover operating costs?

The City Council would have three options to protect the property tax. They could utilize funding from the LOT; increase user fees; or a combination of the two.

7. Are there scholarships available or sources to reduce costs for low income individuals?

The City reserves 7.5 percent of the local option tax receipts for scholarships and financial support for recreation programs. This is estimated at \$60,000 per year. In addition, the Chauncey B. Warner Foundation Home Foundation is a long time source for funding pool memberships and swim lessons.

8. Didn't the City approve this project already?

City voters approved the pool last year by a two to one margin, but that project was contingent upon St. Albans Town, whose voters did not approve the project. The new project reduces costs by \$750,000 by reducing the size of the building and leaving the access road in its current location.

9. Why is Hard'ack the preferred site?

The City reviewed and evaluated multiple sites in the City and just outside the City. Hard'ack emerged as the clear alternative due to its ease of constructability and synergy with other recreation infrastructure such as the Greg Brown lodge, sledding hill, mountain bike trails, sports fields, disc golf course, and recreation offices.

These combined offerings allow a family to send their child to Hard'ack for after school programming during the week, go sledding or mountain biking on the weekend, offer seniors a fitness class during the week, and attend a swim meet or ski lesson depending on the season. It is a text book example of the benefits of clustering recreational facilities. Communities such as South Burlington and Essex Junction have clustered facilities like the Maple Street Park and Dorset Park (Cairns site); but no other community in Vermont would have the diverse offerings of Hard'ack.

10. This project also contains \$250,000 in funding for Houghton Park. What would those funds be used for?

Improvements to Houghton Park would consist of a splash pad and improvements to the recreational equipment and snack bar. This allows to the park to serve as a free lunch site instead of the pool and provides a local recreational opportunity for the neighborhoods in the area. The Parks Commission previously recommended a splash pad be installed in Houghton Park and the commission will be active in the planning process for these improvements.

11. How will the inflatable dome work?

The dome will be purchased from and constructed by The Farley Group in Canada. They specialize in air supported recreation structures in northern climates. The dome will be installed in the Fall and removed in the Spring. This allows outdoor swimming in the summer and indoor swimming in the colder months, at a fraction of the cost of a steel building and multiple pools. Smuggler's Notch Resort has used a similar set up at their pool for years. Farley will send a crew to help with assembly and disassembly.

12. How will kids get to Hard'ack to use the pool?

During the summer, the "Aqua Van" will transport kids from central gathering spots such as Houghton Park and the Barlow Community Center to Hard'ack at no cost. The van will have a bike rack so that kids can ride their bikes on the downhill part of the commute. We are also hoping that schools will include the location on the bus route during the school year. Making sure the pool is accessible to all is important to the City, so the van and bussing are key parts of the project.

13. Are there philanthropic opportunities for funding this project similar to the Greg Brown Lodge at Hard'ack?

Absolutely. The City has an ongoing conversation with a major foundation and will continue to apply for construction and operating support. These private contributions will help reduce the costs of the project and donors can be recognized or remain anonymous.

14. What type of programs will be offered?

We will be able to offer year round programming for all ages and abilities. From swim lessons for the little ones, swim team for the school age kids, to low impact exercise classes for seniors, pools serve all age brackets. We will also base our after school programs and Summer Camps at Hard'ack to utilize the pool, Greg Brown Lodge, trails, and recreation fields.

15. How will the pool be heated?

The pool and the air under the dome will be heated with natural gas which is available at the site. This will allow for heating the pool even when the dome is off in early Summer and Fall to allow more comfortable swimming for swim lessons, swim team, open swim, and aquatic programs.

16. What will happen to the old pool on Aldis Street?

The project construction manager will be charged with restoring the existing pool site to preconstruction condition. This includes demolishing the building, filling in the pool, removing the fence, planting grass, etc. These costs are included in the bond vote budget.