

The right size pool for an inclusive community

The current Summerland Aquatic and Fitness Centre is like an old car that you're always taking to the mechanic. Eventually you have to decide whether to bite the bullet and buy a new one.

The old pool is in poor condition and it burns 86% more energy than it should. Mechanical, plumbing and electrical malfunctions are frequent. Replacement parts are hard to find, even used ones on eBay. When the facility is shut down for annual maintenance, we never know if it'll fire back up.

Rather than throw good money after bad trying to salvage the pool, Council is proposing to replace it.

When purchasing a new vehicle, you first have to decide what model to buy: an economical compact that's good for commuting and picking up groceries but not for transporting kids and gear? Or a mini-van so you can also travel with the family and carry larger loads?

That's the question to be answered on Nov 4: is it time for Summerland to upgrade its recreation centre from a compact to a mini-van?

When the Aquatic Centre was built in 1976, Summerland's population was half of what it is today. Nowadays, most pool programs are full with waitlists and only one activity can take place at a time. For example, swim lessons can't be scheduled at the same time as aqua-fit.

Reports in 2018 and 2021 both recommended a 50% larger facility to address physical and programming deficiencies. The proposed new recreation centre would include a six-lane 25-metre pool, separate leisure pool, hot tub, universal change rooms, fitness room, and multipurpose rooms.

Such facilities are typical for B.C. communities the size of Summerland, and smaller – towns like Castlegar, Creston, Dawson Creek, Duncan, Fernie, Ladysmith, Merritt, Nelson, Powell River, Prince Rupert, Qualicum Beach, Quesnel, Revelstoke, Sechelt, Smithers, Terrace, and Williams Lake.

There is no substance to the notion that Summerland is too small for such a facility, or that it doesn't fit with our demographic.

With our current facility, we try to be all things to all people with a modified lane pool, and it doesn't work. Teens and adult swimmers need a colder and deeper lane pool while young children and elders require warmer and shallower water.

As the saying goes, 'Half-measures avail us nothing', and it would be a half measure to re-build our current pool, or build a one with a single basin. It would still cost millions of dollars. Not as many millions as a larger facility, but we need to think about what provides the greatest value for money. A smaller facility means its use would have to be limited. And that begets the question: who would we exclude?

If we want to be an inclusive community, then we should strive to accommodate everyone's needs and not leave people behind, especially the most vulnerable. This is why Summerland residents are being asked to make the difficult decision on whether we should invest in a recreation centre that benefits not just certain segments of the population, but the whole community.

For further information on the proposed recreation centre, visit: summerland.ca/recreationcentre

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland.