

Water park idea makes a splash with council

Council members OK \$300,000 to develop plans for park; if built, could open May 2012

By [Damian Mann](#)

Mail Tribune

September 11, 2009 5:00 AM

Medford will dive into a proposal to build a \$13.5 million water park that would be larger than similar parks in Redding and Fremont., Calif.

City Council members agreed Thursday to spend \$300,000 from a contingency fund to develop plans for the park, which would include slides, a lazy river, family beach areas, splash pads and a wave machine.

The aquatic center could be built in Bear Creek Park, where the existing dog park and BMX track are located, parks department officials told the council. The city would relocate those existing facilities as part of the project.

Hawthorne Park would be closed, while the more popular pool at Jackson Elementary would remain open.

The water park could pay for itself or generate a substantial profit for the city, depending on admission prices. Additional revenues could be generated from concessions and renting umbrellas.

"I think we have come up with a way that will pay for itself and be a revenue generator for itself," said Craig Stone, chairman of the Medford Parks and Recreation Foundation.

"This will be a better facility than what they have in Redding."

It costs \$19 to use Waterworks Park in Redding. Charging the same in Medford would bring a profit of \$1.6 million annually to city coffers, said Brian Sjothun, Medford Parks and Recreation director.

At one point during the council's study session Thursday, about half the people in attendance raised hands indicating they knew of someone from this area that had gone to Waterworks.

Some parks charge as little as \$5, a rate that would require an annual city subsidy of \$68,300 to maintain the Medford facility. The city subsidizes Hawthorne pool with \$128,300 annually to keep it open during the summer.

Fremont's Aqua Adventure charges \$15 for local residents and \$16 for nonresidents.

Sjothun said his department would develop up to five funding strategies that would be presented to the council at a later time.

Visitors to the park would spend \$2.2 million a year at local businesses and create 61 jobs, according

to a study of the park proposal by REMI Northwest of Medford.

"This would keep people in Medford, attracting people to our restaurants and shops," said Sjothun.

Councilman Al Densmore said the city has to be careful not to charge fees that would put the facility out of reach for low-income families, who spend \$1 to let their children use the local pools.

"We cannot just view it as an income producer," he said.

Densmore said the fee should strike a balance between generating revenue and remaining viable for the community. He also wanted to know whether enough income could be generated to make repairs at Jackson pool.

Sjothun said significant studies of the fees would be conducted, including whether to charge more for nonresidents. A scholarship fund could be set up to help low-income residents attend the aquatic park.

If the council ultimately agrees to build the park, the grand opening could be May 5, 2012. It would be open on weekends in May, then daily from Memorial Day to Labor Day, cutting back to weekends through the end of September.

With about 20,000 square feet of water area, the park would still use less water than the pool at Hawthorne Park, which loses about 7,000 gallons a day, Sjothun said. The water features at the park are generally fairly shallow.

If the city received 30-year revenue bonds of \$13.5 million, the annual debt payment would be \$900,000. Most of the revenues would be generated through admissions.