



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

June 24, 2013

## The Sherbrook Pool and the struggle for inner-city health and recreation

In November of last year, the City closed the Sherbrook Pool, leaving the community and its dedicated swimmers high and dry. The closure was the result of corrosion of the structure; a City of Winnipeg assessment of an engineer's report released last week indicates the Pool needs \$2.7 million in immediate repairs, as well as maintenance costs of \$3.5 million over the next 20 years. The Standing Policy Committee on Property Development received the report and accepted its one recommendation: to have community consultations on the status and future of the pool.

Since the City's report was narrowly focused on structural issues and some usage data, it is curious why it is now undertaking broad consultations on the recreation needs of the area, especially when there is so much support and demonstrated need for the Sherbrook Pool. The community has spoken clearly through two public meetings and community-based research about the need to retain and invest in the Pool. Furthermore, it is unclear when the consultations will begin – leaving current residents without a local pool and its future unknown.

Since it was built in 1931, Sherbrook Pool has stood as a Winnipeg icon; but to many others living in the West End today, it is simply one of few places they can get to on foot to access recreation. For some Winnipeggers, it is the only place to go for

physical activity because the uniquely large shallow end and warm water of Sherbrook Pool is soothing to their sensitive joints. People with arthritis, Multiple Sclerosis or fibromyalgia come from all over the city to Sherbrook Pool to swim. It is well used by local Seniors and for many children it is the only place their parents can afford to send them for swimming lessons.

The Sherbrook Pool fulfills an important need and value in the inner-city, one that cannot be found through simply comparing user rates with other city facilities. In 2009, I was involved in a year-long research project around Sherbrook Pool, which involved consultations with key stakeholders in the community, an extensive literature review of the barriers, costs and benefits of recreation, as well as an examination of the history of Sherbrook Pool. The report, *Winnipeg's Best-Kept Secret: A Community Development Vision for the Sherbrook Pool*, made clear the need for the Pool, the extensive benefits to the community, to individuals who have been regular swimmers at the Pool, (some for over fifty years!), as well as to the larger society.

The recreation literature indicates that people living in low-income neighbourhoods face significant barriers to participation; chief among these is poverty, which leaves families unable to send their kids to programs, as well

there is an alternative.

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as a lack of transportation to get them there. A report by Canadian Parks and Recreation Association examined the relationship between youth-at-risk and recreation and indicated that every focus group and interviewee had identified cost and transportation as the two main barriers to families accessing recreation, with one parent stating, "it will soon be just the rich that will be able to have their kids involved".

The research also indicated the enormous cost-savings investing in recreation has in terms of crime, health, and poverty. Investment in recreation in low-income neighbourhoods leads to a reduction in crime, anti-social behaviour, and gang involvement. A 10 per cent decrease in crime, achieved through investment in recreation, will cost 7 per cent less than through spending on incarceration. Recreation also provides direct benefits to individuals and families including physical health, quality of life, mental health, family health and stability, and social inclusion.

The Sherbrook Pool, before the November closure, offered a high number of free swim hours or low cost loonie/toonie swims. The Friends of Sherbrook Pool (FOSP) offer free swim lessons, including a bathing suit, for the neighbourhood kids. Many groups call the Sherbrook Pool their recreational home. The Pool rents space to the Canadian Muslim Women's Institute, who runs a women-only swim so that Muslim women can learn to swim while following their religious traditions. Chemosavvy, a group of breast cancer survivors train for dragon boat races at the Pool. It is also home to the Sherbrook Sharks, a swim club of local youth, West Broadway Youth Outreach and many other groups within walking distance.

The cost of repair to Sherbrook Pool are not high, the upgrades would keep the pool open for 20 years and are a fraction of the cost of tearing down and building new. The benefits of investing in recreation will far exceed its cost, and with every dollar spent, more than a dollar's worth of benefits are received. The tank itself is in good condition

and if there were the political will to invest in inner-city recreation, there would even be opportunities to upgrade the existing facility.

Cost efficiency is an argument FOSP will make when the City consults the community, and is at the heart of a battle they have fought before. In the early 1990s, when Sherbrook Pool was threatened with closure, FOSP lobbied successfully for a tri-level government agreement for a two-phase restoration and improvement of the Pool. The first phase of restoration was completed in 1997, and yet, despite the City's commitment, dollars for Phase II were never released and the restoration project was never completed. The \$700,000 raised for the pool was spent elsewhere by the City. This time, FOSP has questions about the City's assessment of the repairs, as there are more short and long-term expenses than the engineer's report recommends.

After the Property and Development meeting, the Mayor said FOSP should apply to the province for recreation funding to repair the facility even before the consultations start. The Mayor himself knows the value of the facility to the entire inner-city neighbourhood, but he wants other funding partners. The need for consultation is questionable, the entire inner-city, not just Daniel MacIntyre ward benefits from this facility. The FOSP believe the repairs to the pool should be made as soon as possible and the consultations should focus on a long-term plan. The community has spoken, and will speak again about the Sherbrook Pool as a key piece of infrastructure for the health and recreation needs of our city.

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