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Officials to wade into pool requests

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The Johnson City Commission will dive into consideration of options for new aquatic facilities tonight during a special session preceding its regular meeting.

For more than a month, the commission has been debating whether to add a pool to plans for the new Seniors' Center facility, to be located along Liberty Bell Boulevard and Guaranda Drive, or come up with a more comprehensive solution.

With city leaders aware that seniors would like a pool at their new facility, another group supporting the idea of a new facility aimed at all ages will have their say at the 5 p.m. session at City Hall.

Members of the East Tennessee Aquatics Alliance will ask the commission to fund a facility featuring three pools designed for the enjoyment of all ages. Suggestions from the group will include a 25-meter lap pool, 50-meter competitive swimming pool, a therapeutic pool and amenities such as a retractable roof. The project could potentially come in at a cost of several million dollars.

Commissioner Pete Paduch has championed the idea of building a pool specifically for senior citizens, which could bring the cost of the \$7 million center up as much as another \$2 million.

"To me, I can see there being something for the seniors and something for the rest of the city," Paduch said.

Mayor Steve Darden said that approach is unrealistic. During a recent meeting, Darden advocated looking a facility that would service the entire city and which might allow seniors to exclusively use the indoor pool at Freedom Hall Civic Center, which is not suitable for competitive swimming.

"I don't see us building multiple pools in this city," Darden said. "We've gotten by for years with Freedom Hall and Legion (Recreation Center) pool."

Coming in at 38,000 square feet indoors and 10,000 to 12,000 square feet outside, the new Seniors' Center facility design consumed the entire maximum amount of \$7 million, approved by the commission last year, without inclusion of a pool.

The shape of the building was designed in relation to its location at the corner of Liberty Bell Boulevard and Guaranda Drive. Likewise, the interior corridors will run parallel to the outside streets.

Amenities within the new facility will include:

- High school-size gym/multipurpose area.
- Elevated walking track with elevator access.
- Performing arts room.
- Arts and crafts suite.
- Games and computer rooms.
- Media room and classrooms.
- Exercise room.
- Lobby with fireplaces.
- Movable walls.

Paduch wondered if the elevated track shouldn't be eliminated from the project.

"If that feature wasn't in there, how much would I save," Paduch said.

Street said the track would cost about \$100,000 and removal of the elevator, which also provides access to an elevated stage in the gym/multi-purpose area, would save an additional \$75,000 to \$100,000.

The regular commission meeting will follow the workshop and is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. in the commission chambers at City Hall (Municipal and Safety Building), 601 E. Main St.