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Should Johnson City build a comprehensive aquatics center?

Freedom Hall Civic Center's swimming pool is getting a \$80,000 facelift. The 35-year-old facility is undergoing repairs and extensive renovations. City crews are working to replace floor tiles, lockers, shower stalls, plumbing fixtures, light fixtures and water fountains.

Also, ceiling tile replacement, painting and renovations to the women's locker room are currently under way.

City officials say the upgrades to the Freedom Hall pools are long overdue.

During recent discussions concerning the possibility of funding a swimming pool addition to plans for the new Seniors' Center — the \$2 million project was turned down by the commission in March — city leaders floated the idea of allowing seniors near-exclusive access to the Freedom Hall pool if a comprehensive aquatics facility can be constructed.

The proposed multi-use swimming facility is estimated to cost \$16 million if equipped with every amenity supporters would like for it to provide. Early discussions have touched on the inclusion of at least three separate pools that would feature water at different temperatures for competitive, recreational and therapeutic uses.

Members of the East Tennessee Aquatic Alliance, a group that is leading the push for an aquatics center, say they are encouraged by the community response

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to their efforts to get a new swimming facility. Press staff writer Corey Shoun reported earlier this month that the group collected \$4,000 and is due to collect another \$5,000 from pledges

accrued during a "Paddle for a Pool" fundraising event held recently at Freedom Hall.

Chris Coraggio, alliance member, president of the Barracuda Swim Club and swimming coach for Science Hill High School, said early support from the community is a sign of things to come for Johnson City.

"I think a lot of people realize that a good multi-use swimming facility would just be such an asset and improve quality of life here," Coraggio told Shoun earlier this month.

A petition is now being circulated around the city asking that citizens express their interest and acknowledge support.

Tell us what you think. Should Johnson City build a comprehensive aquatics center?

Send your comments to Mailbag, P.O. Box 1717, Johnson City, TN 37605-1717, or mailbag@johnsoncitypress.com. Please include your name, telephone number and address for verification. We will print your responses on the Opinion pages in the coming week.

