

Municipality of West Elgin
22413 Hoskins Line, Rodney, ON N0L 2C0

Greetings, members of the Council of the Municipality of West Elgin,

I am writing to you about the Rodney Pool. Our family has had extremely positive connections to the pool and its programmes for over thirty years, since our children began lessons. In recent years, my wife Gwen and I have been daily participants in the Aqua Fit sessions. We have always been strong supporters of the pool and its staff, especially the generations of young lifeguards and maintenance staff, many of whom are former students. I am writing to provide you with our feelings about the importance of the pool (when I use the word 'pool' throughout this letter, I will be referring to the physical structure and all who are involved in its operations), in conjunction with those recently expressed in various communications on Facebook and in messages to me. The words and opinions expressed below will be mine, informed by input from others, but will occasionally quote from others' input, especially if the views differ from my own. Facing the dual challenges of a pandemic and general drop in community and interpersonal involvement, the pool has fallen upon hard times. We are concerned by this, and wish to work with and alongside our municipal government.

The role of the pool in our community is diverse and historic. Most of the folks in our "discussion group", brought their children and teenagers faithfully to the pool for lessons, to lifeguard and for pool parties, and have now aged into the role of participants ourselves in Aquafit. Many families have enjoyed social and family bonding while at the pool waiting and observing, as well as learning and getting to know others. It has allowed innumerable numbers of people of all ages to swim and to be comfortable around water – both of which are and can be essential life-saving skills, combined with the water safety lessons and practices absorbed at the pool. "The Rodney pool is also a place where families have an opportunity to swim together. The public swim is an affordable recreational activity that is right here in our community. We do not know what the public health restrictions will be this summer. The pool would be one of the few activities that could be safely managed.

Many parents and grandparents would be willing to pay an increased fee. There could be a season grandparent pass, as well as a season family pass. This is money that is spent without knowing the amount of usage. Perhaps service clubs would consider donating a lump sum of money to aid in the running of the pool. The more times the pool is open, the more opportunities people have to use it and the more work for the young people working at the pool." (Ruth Karn) When the Kiwanis Club and others originally raised the monies for the pool, a large part of their reasoning was the high number of drowning deaths in the area, given our proximity to numerous bodies of water, which can at times be treacherous. Given the prevalence of boating and beach-going in our area, having this basic skillset and safety knowledge has likely played a part in preventing many drownings.

Swimming is a wonderful physical workout and a great social time – an antidote to the claustrophobia of Covid life! Our fees are very modest per session, and we would certainly be willing to pay a premium for having this opportunity provided. The single major reason for having low numbers, I believe, is the lack of publicity, encouraging students, seniors, and people of all ages to participate. I am quite sure that other community groups would support such an enterprise, and perhaps the WECHC might be able to find funding or programming to support it as well!!! We are only limited by our imaginations and lack of resolve, as a community, to support and protect these programs. We should be actively growing them!! Young people (perhaps the greatest focus group for potential involvement) love to be involved in active, fun and social activities, and swimming has

amazing health benefits. We need to encourage their engagement and activity, especially in the aftermath of the stay-in-your-house commandments of the lockdown. A “new normal” needs to be established, involving being active and laughing!

Having a pool and the requisite services can only be attractive when people are looking for a community to make their home. West Lorne has the arena and Rodney has the pool, both of which reflect very positively the vibrancy of a community!

With regard to being open Thursday to Sunday, as you propose, “Here’s hoping even if it’s only open Thursday to Sunday that (assuming with restrictions and Red Cross) that they will consider offering condensed lessons on weekends. 2 weekends of 4 days would be a great way to still offer some lessons, offer more services and get some more hours for the guards!!” (Natalie Gillis)

We appreciate that there are many ongoing, repair, and staffing expenses associated with the pool, and have limited knowledge of these. It is apparent that the pool in its current state needs some costly repairs, and that several of these are mandated by the Province. Balancing current and future needs, lack of current demand, the opinions of taxpayers, and the need for community growth and infrastructure seems to be an insurmountable peak of complicated and often conflicting priorities. We are attempting to do our best to comprehend these issues and to balance them against our enthusiasm, interest, and loyalty to the pool.

Suggestions from those who responded, in no particular order:

-Many people proposed that fundraisers be held for the pool and its programmes, in partnership with community groups, grant applications, (50/50 draws, donation drives, adopt-a-swimmer campaign, Kiwanis; to study how other communities have worked to enhance the funds available for the pool, etc.)

-offering activities on a cost-sharing basis with other organizations, special pool-focussed events paired with others (Canada Day, Olympics); collecting and offering regular prizes for young people, to help attract and motivate them.

-Publicity for the pool and its sessions has been invisible. Many families were unaware of what was offered at the pool last summer. The pool is virtually hidden from sight from major roadways. We need to make it extremely visible, with signage, public announcement signage on main roads/streets (we know that you are working on some new signs), using the signs at the schools (yes, all three!), businesses (as temporary and therefore attentions-getting) pop-ups. So many venues are available to us: social media, copied handouts created and distributed through the schools. Use student artists, energy, and creativity. Run contests for slogans, artwork, mottos, groups, and businesses for the most engaging appeal possible. The only limit is our imaginations! We need to return to the original thinking of the pool as a centerpiece and symbol for our municipality. Lifeguards could be tasked as active participants in this publicity before and during the early open sessions of the pool. We need to find ways to create excitement and interest.

-thoughts about the proposed Thursday to Sunday schedule: Having this availability as opposed to having the pool closed totally is an amazing possibility to us. Four days of Aquafit and other sessions is indeed a very viable and attractive option, while: Those who commented often shared a concern that weekends are a time for families to travel, as much as is allowed. Last year early morning Aquafit often had up to 20 people present, while weekend sessions had very few participants. For some reason, this number is not reflected in the stats given to us.

-there were several suggestions about reconsidering planned renovations to the Township Office and the former Town Hall and moving the Library, as opposed to moving the municipal offices to that structure.

- "I think there should be the option for private or family groups to have lessons. I feel every child should have the chance to learn to swim. Maybe instead of a donation to Aldborough Public school drown proofing, lessons should have been offered. Pick a grade -- 3?" (Lynda Ford)

- "We need to reconsider additions to Municipal office and relocate to empty buildings in downtown and open pool." (Lynda Ford)

- "It is during these covid times that we need our community to offer us safe things to keep us in our own area, where we are safer." (Ruth Karn)

It is an overwhelming brick wall for us all, especially municipalities, setting priorities and budgets, now that so much of what we can or cannot do is more stringently and meticulously restricted by Provincial regulations, so amplified by Covid-19 circumstances and rules.

At the heart of our message, we believe that having a functioning pool in our community can be a powerful, attractive spoke in the wheel of the whole that is Rodney and West Elgin, and will continue to be an integral part of our ongoing renewal, growth, and wholeness. The pandemic has threatened its wellbeing, as it has just about all aspects of our lives and activities. A strong local culture must be an integrated whole that is built of an array of businesses, lifestyle-supporting entities, active volunteers, artists, a thriving and wealthy surrounding area, in our case agricultural pursuits, and visionary leaders and groups.

The pool is and can continue to be a part of the beating heart that is West Elgin. The question of taxes always arises, as you know so well, but we pay taxes so that we can benefit from a large range of services, utilities, and facilities. I am told that the pool is a perennial financial drain, as are many valued and necessary institutions – we must pay for what we get.

Those of us who are concerned for the ongoing wellbeing and thriving of the pool will support council and the pool, striving to engage a wider array of people in the life and support of the pool.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry Schneider". The ink is dark and the signature is written in a fluid, connected style.

Larry Schneider, with input from Lynda Ford, Ruth Karn, Gwen Schneider, Laura Kieraszwicz, Taraesa Tellier, Beth Schweitzer, Natalie Gillis, Earla Walker, Duncan McPhail, and others.