

Linn-Mar pool project is on again

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The on-again off-again plan for a Linn-Mar school district swimming pool is back on again.

And this time it looks like it might actually be built.

“We’ve been talking about it for too long,” school board member Bob Crawford said Monday at a board work session. “We’re either going to be a school with a pool or a school without a pool. I say it’s time we get on with it.”

Though no decision was made at Monday’s meeting, the board directed Superintendent Katie Mulholland to report back at the Jan. 23 session with some specific cost figures and other details.

Mulholland said the long-discussed issue is back on the front-burner because Kirkwood Community College recently announced its decision to put a new regional learning center in Hiawatha rather than Marion. The college had been part of a consortium along with Linn-Mar, the city of Marion and Marion Chamber of Commerce and other entities to construct a multi-purpose education, recreation and fitness campus on the north edge of Marion.

Linn-Mar’s part of the project was to fund and have primary control of a swimming complex for its boys and girls high school teams and other district students. The proposal also called for a satellite campus for Kirkwood, park and recreation facilities operated by the city of Marion, and fitness and rehabilitation services under the supervision of one or both local hospitals.

The Marion YMCA also had expressed interest in the project.

The plan, under discussion for at least the past two years, was spearheaded by the Marion Chamber of Commerce. Expectations were that grant money from the state would help finance part of estimated \$32 million cost.

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Without Kirkwood's participation, the entire concept is now in limbo.

At Monday's work session, Linn-Mar school board members indicated a desire to proceed with plans to build a pool on its own. When the idea was last discussed in 2009, the estimated cost was \$4 million. Mulholland said a current estimate is \$5 million. She told the board it could be financed over 10 years using available local sales tax revenues. A public vote would not be required.

Linn-Mar is the only school in the Metro that fields boys and girls swimming teams, yet does not have its own on-campus pool. The Linn-Mar teams practice at the Coe College pool early in the morning and in the evening. Home swim meets also are held at Coe.

Mulholland said an on-campus facility also would see heavy use for physical education classes from schools throughout the district. She said it would likely take two years to build once board approval is given.

"This has been talked about since I moved here in 1990," said Crawford, a former swimming coach. "We need to make a decision and move ahead on it."

"If we wait, it may never get done."