

Delray pool's woes force frequent closures

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The free-form pool at the Delray Beach Swim & Tennis Club is lovely to look at, but it has been closed for repairs as often as it has been open since the city bought it in October 2000.

In fact, the pool has been closed for the past seven months, said Dave Woodard, aquatic operations supervisor.

City engineers and hired consultants couldn't figure out why the pool continually has equipment failures. Motors and the pump burn out; the heater stops working and water doesn't recycle properly to meet health department codes.

"Unfortunately, we've gone through a series of consultants who have been wrong, and I think we finally got to the bottom. It is a piping problem," City Manager David Harden said.

So far, \$143,000 has been spent to refurbish the pool and bring it and the surrounding area up to code, said David Haskell, the city's environmental services director.

After the clubhouse was torn down, a 5-foot mound of dirt had to be flattened because it blocked wheelchair access to the pool. A long, concrete pathway was built to accommodate wheelchairs; a deteriorating stone deck around the pool was replaced with brick pavers; and a lift to take handicapped people in and out of the pool was installed.

City workers moved two trailers that serve as the temporary clubhouse north of the tennis courts so they would be midway between the pool and courts for easy access. Water and sewer connections were hooked up to them for restrooms and changing rooms.

Haskell said bids will come in soon for new pool equipment, which includes replacing the heaters, pump and recirculation system. "It's an extensive job, and it's too early to forecast the cost," he said.

The pool house will be remodeled to meet new health codes, so new restrooms, changing rooms and an office for pool staff have been added. "We're trying to take advantage of an existing structure," Haskell said.

Harden says health department requirements have undoubtedly changed since the pool was built in the 1970s, which has only added to the problems.

Part of the money to pay for the pool improvements will come out of the Parks and Recreation bond that passed last year, said Ivan Ladizinsky, public information officer for the city.

"If you already put the money in it, you can't back out, and once it's stable and open and operating, then typically they use it because they know it's going to be open," said Rex Taylor, assistant city manager.

In retrospect, the center was probably more run down than they thought, Harden said.

The city bought the tennis complex at 2750 Jaeger Drive south of Linton Boulevard for \$570,000. The sale included the clubhouse and tennis courts, planned as an adjunct to the Delray Beach Tennis Center downtown.

"We had the pool as part of the package when we bought the whole area," Harden said. "Other pools are far away, and we think there is a need for it in this area."

But attendance at the 92-person capacity pool, which is 41 feet wide and 94 feet long, was low when it was operational, and according to Woodard, it averaged 13 or 14 people a day.

By comparison, Pompey Park averages 200 people a day during the summer and 20 people during the coolest months.

Once the pool is working, the city will make people aware of it.

"We've not been able to promote it," Harden said.

He is unsure when the pool will open.

But not everyone is excited about the prospect.

Lou Konell of Delray Beach plays on the tennis courts almost every day.

"They should just fill it and make more tennis courts," he said of the pool.