

**AQUATICS WORKING GROUP
MEETING NOTES
MAY 20, 2025**

Location: Belle Haven Pool

The May 20 session was attended by approximately 40 participants, around 80% of whom indicated that they have been in the water at Belle Haven Pool in the past year. The session focused on gathering questions, ideas and feedback about Belle Haven Pool; a discussion with representatives from Beyond Barriers Athletic Foundation (BBAF) about the youth swim scholarships they fund; and strategies for increasing attendance at Belle Haven Pool. Over the course of the session, participants' comments were captured on a [poster board](#). City staff is preparing information and action items in response to the May 20 feedback for the next Aquatics working group meeting tentatively in June.

General feedback

Participants offered the following feedback and questions. Comments are listed in order they were shared during the group discussion, as captured on the poster board, with some light editing for clarity:

- Beautiful facility
- Need to consult the community about classes, times
- Where are nearby residents? Need more outreach – neighborhood groups are happy to help!
- Need more offerings for students in local schools
- Hours are too short; pool closes too early in the evening for working adults
- Swim pass should have reciprocity between Belle Haven Pool and Burgess Pool
- Advertise youth swim more, for example in the City's activity guide
- Instructors who speak Spanish
- The Belle Haven Swim Team has been doing outreach to local schools, churches
- Adjacent communities like Redwood City don't have pools – do outreach there
- Questions – who is responsible for outreach, the City or the Operator?
- Outreach to Kelly Park users (soccer teams, etc.)
- Traffic varies by time of day – hard to get here; timing of classes is important
- Sign on fence, "Public Pool" multilingual
- "Dollar Day" swim event
- Aqua fit class is impactful, add more at reduced price
- Residents in other communities need pool access, including East Palo Alto who also receive BBAF scholarships

- Why are there no City Council members present?
- Can't make people do something they don't want to do (i.e. come to the pool) – subsidize the pool to encourage participation
- All Menlo Park residents are residents of the City, and Belle Haven neighborhood residents have unique/ different needs
- Partner with schools for outreach
- Disappointed that Aquafit paused; please bring it back
- Traffic from Palo Alto to Belle Haven Pool is hard. Focus on people who live nearby
- “Reality check” – need to subsidize the pool operations, hours and access
- Gym user: Is price a factor preventing more use?
- Need to do footwork to reach low-income residents
- Some parents don't speak English, need other methods
- Send a card or activity guide by mail
- Swimming is time and money; not all have it, Communicate that there are scholarships, low rates
- Swimmers often grow up “in the water” and carry forward as adults, pass it on to children
- Belle Haven Swim Team prioritizes getting kids into the water through access, low price, equipment, meet fees
- Survey Belle Haven Pool users about preferred days/times
- Don't overlook adults
- Swimming is part of a swimmer's life
- Word of mouth is important, effective
- Grassroots community engagement to help people feel like the pool is theirs
- Can there be evening Aquafit?
- (In Spanish) (Translation) Unclear what is available for seniors. I went to the pool; it was closed due to a breakdown, I had a pass from a different pool, and couldn't get help/information—it was confusing
- Discount rate for East Palo Alto residents?
- Menlo Park is effectively two communities, but only one can easily access Belle Haven Pool – it was built for them, focus on Belle Haven neighborhood residents
- All kids love to swim, if given the chance

Strategies for increasing attendance

Participants offered the following ideas and comments about ways to increase attendance at Belle Haven Pool (comments are listed in order received, as written on the poster board. with light editing for clarity):

- Afterschool swim programs in coordination w/ schools
- Repeated, direct outreach to local schools
- Social media, local “influencers” as inspiration/examples
- Special education students – dedicated/special participation times
- Analysis of root causes of low attendance; focus groups and surveys?
- There’s no lack of interest or good ideas – now mobilization is needed
- Who is responsible for success? City did a good job building the pool, but is not investing in its ongoing success
- Disappointed none of the City Council members are here
- Show up to the City Council meeting, Parks and Recreation Commission meetings
- Can’t expect any business to run at a loss