

## GUEST COMMENTARY



Improvements are needed at many McMinnville facilities and parks, including Discovery Meadows, left; the aquatic center, middle; and the community center. Submitted photos

# New rec facilities needed for kids, community and future

By LISA MACY-BAKER

Having been born and raised in McMinnville, I benefited from just about every McMinnville library and parks and recreation program that was available to local kids in the 1980s.

These programs were foundational to me as a youth. They are, in part, what led me to a lifelong love for and career in athletics.

But our current fields, pools and courts are the same ones I grew up with and competed on, even though our city has doubled in size. Not only are those facilities now bursting at the seams, but the seams are splitting as well.



Macy-Baker

Since returning to McMinnville in 2007, I have been engaged with the city of McMinnville on its efforts to develop new recreation facilities. As someone who cares passionately about access to health and wellness opportunities, I believe fulfilling that vision will create a stronger McMinnville for generations to come.

Because of that work, I was glad to see the News-Register highlight a poll finding a majority of McMinnville voters support moving forward with a bond measure that would fund improvements to key community assets. The bond measure currently being considered would fund a new recreation center to replace our existing aquatic and community centers; renovate and expand the existing senior center; enhance the library; and upgrade parks and outdoor spaces across the city.

**About the writer:** Lisa Macy-Baker is a Mac High Hall of Fame athlete who spent the majority of her career coaching youth and small college tennis. In 2021, she founded the McMinnville Community Tennis Association, a nonprofit providing affordable youth tennis programming. She is a member of the McMinnville Programming Advisory Committee, which was created to examine the future of recreation and library facilities in McMinnville, along with associated programs and enrichment services.

It has been a long path to this point. After years of discussion with the community and completion of feasibility studies and concept plans, the city, informed by the recent poll results, is considering this bond measure as the best way to ensure these community assets meet the needs of our residents for years to come. This project would expand access to health and exercise opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, increase options to safely recreate outdoors, add spaces for

residents to gather and learn in safe environments, and increase access to activities to stay engaged and healthy.

Planned upgrades include a warm-water recreation pool with additional play features and space for swim lessons, more swim lanes in a lap/competition pool, and a drop-in child care center for people using the facility. In addition, the recreation center



# VIEWPOINTS

“Democracy thrives when honest opinions provoke public debate.”



A city assessment found inadequate space for children's activities at the McMinnville Public Library. Submitted photo

## Assessment finds facilities no longer meeting needs

The city of McMinnville conducted an assessment of all 57 of its buildings in 2019, and found several in dire need of replacement or renovation. It also identified needs in its parks system.

Found most wanting were the community center, aquatic center and public library. McMinnville's population has more than doubled since they underwent any major additions or renovations.

Deficiencies were chronicled this way:

**Community Center:** Housed in former armory ill-designed for recreation, sports, fitness and other community activities. Age, obsolescence and deterioration beyond scope of cost-effective renovation. Lacks parking, ADA accessibility and adjacent outdoor space. Location next to county jail less than desirable. Layout not conducive to effective activity supervision.

**Aquatic Center:** Aging facility also facing unsustainable repair needs. Lacks ADA accessibility, second-floor elevator access, family changing room, recreational pool amenities and sufficient parking. Features inadequate locker rooms, cramped weight room and serious security issues.

**Public Library:** Faces long list of deferred maintenance needs. Lacks adequate study,

meeting and children's activity space. Also lacks modern library amenities and room to accommodate growth. Disjointed multi-floor layout fosters inefficiencies and raises safety issues. Short on restroom and parking space.

**Senior Center:** Newer building in better condition. However, lacks dedicated active recreation space and adequate space to conduct fitness programs and host events. Access to back rooms poor. Furnishings worn and outdated.

**City Parks:** With some exceptions, play equipment aging to point of needing replacement within five to 10 years. Many parks facing accessibility issues, including physical barriers and absent or inadequate pathways, and lacking in modern safety amenities, such as cameras and lighting. Smaller parks marked by missing or aging amenities, especially in city's southern and eastern sections.

In response, the city created the McMinnville Programming Advisory Committee, known as MacPAC. The committee presented a concept plan to the city council in 2022, with an acknowledgment the city needed to stabilize its financial footing before moving to secure funding for a project of such scope.

MacPAC decided it made the most sense

to develop a new recreation center on a new site and combine community and aquatic center programs there. It eventually settled on a site near Joe Dancer Park that is under McMinnville Water & Light ownership.

It concluded new construction would provide operational savings for the city's community and aquatic center programs, as well as the opportunity to modernize health, wellness and recreational spaces to better meet community needs over the coming decades. It found other facilities more amenable to renovation, expansion or repurposing for continued use.

Over the intervening period, the city has taken several steps to address financial shortfalls created by a property tax system failing to sufficiently fund the public's demand for services for cities all across the state. Those steps include establishing a new service fee on utility bills and transferring fire protection duties to a new voter-approved fire district.

June 25 adoption of a new Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Plan also helped pave the way. As a result, the city is now looking toward placement of a bond issue on the May 2025 ballot in an effort to secure necessary funding.

Compiled from information provided by McMinnville Parks & Recreation.