

About the City
By
Councilman Kingery

Recently you read in the Douglas Budget that we will have "free" swimming at the municipal pool this summer. I want to share with you some of the actual costs of having "free" swimming.

First I would clarify that the City Council did not refer to it as free swimming but that we would not charge fees for swimming at the municipal pool this summer. Sounds like we are talking out both side of our mouths I guess, but take a look!

First I want to explain that the City "maintains" the pool, pumps, filters, other equipment and chemicals to keep the pool safe. The City does this each year and I am not including this cost in the pool "operation" costs. The City's cost for maintaining the pool varies considerably depending upon what maintenance, repairs, replacements must be done during any particular year. This maintenance by itself assures that the pool will not be free to the community!

Let's go back to the summer of 2013 when the pool operation contract for the City was \$89,367. In addition, pool users paid \$39,166 in admission fees. What the City paid for the contract for the pool operation plus what the swimmers paid in fees was a total of \$128,533. There were 17,487 swimmer days at the pool that summer so the cost per swimmer day was \$7.35 (\$128,533 divided by 17,487).

If we divide the cost of pool operation for the City (\$89,367) by the number of residents in our city (est. 7,000) we find it cost \$12.76 tax money for each man, woman and child living in Douglas to operate the pool during the summer of 2013. This was in addition to the maintenance costs and money paid for admission fees by the swimmers.

Fast forward to the summer of 2014 when the pool operation contract was for \$82,200 and the total admission fees paid was \$31,492. The City had more bidders to operate the pool than previously and the successful bidder gave the admission receipts back to the City. The result was that the pool operation cost to the City was \$50,708 (\$82,200 less the admission fees of \$31,492). The admission fees were made up from what swimmers paid and fees provided by Converse County Bank who purchased season passes that were given away by them.

However, there were only 10,810 swimmer days at the pool in 2014 so the cost per swimmer day went up to \$7.60 (\$82,200 divided by 10,810), with the swimmers paying a higher percentage of the cost per swimmer day. The

tax money cost per man, woman and child for operating the pool dropped to \$7.24 during the summer of 2014 because the admission fees went back to the City to help pay the costs. Unfortunately any way we look at it there will not be "free" swimming in Douglas as far as the tax payers are concerned! This comparison was the basis a year ago for awarding the contract to a different entity. Instead of costing the City \$89,367, as it did in 2013, when the City received the admission fees in 2014 the cost for the City dropped to \$50,708. Instead of spending \$12.76 of tax money for every Douglas resident we only had to spend \$7.24 of tax money per Douglas resident for the operation of our pool. The remaining \$5.52 per resident of our tax money was used for other important uses. We had some criticism for the choice we made, but we believed it was the right thing to do.

Fast forward again to now. We are in a new year and the Council may have opened itself for further criticism. Council voted 3-2 to not charge admission fees at the pool this season, which means our savings which we felt were important last year have been given away and your tax dollars to operate the pool may go back up where they were, or possibly higher still. If our City pool operation contract comes in lower than last year, say \$80,000, it will cost \$11.42 for each resident in tax money. If the contract comes in at \$100,000 it will cost \$14.29 for each resident in tax money, and if the contract comes in at \$120,000 it will cost \$17.14 for each of us in tax money!

No it won't be "free" swimming, at least not for the citizens that live in Douglas. It might be free for those who don't live in Douglas, however we hope people coming to enjoy the free swimming will purchase items while in Douglas thus providing sales tax revenue which will help us operate the pool! Does this make this a bad deal? Not necessarily. It depends upon how much you believe the community should pay and how much you believe the pool user should pay for pool operations. Someone must pay if we wish to have a community pool in Douglas, and I am sure we do!

There are other concerns which may or may not materialize. No admittance fees may result in the increase of the pool usage to the point where we reach our maximum capacity of 259 swimmers much more often. (We have reached the maximum capacity each of the last two summers.) If that happens those at the end of the line won't get to swim. That may be you, your children or your grandchildren. If we reach our maximum pool capacity it may be the small children or weaker people that get crowded out by bullies that crowd ahead in the line. This would cause problems for the people operating the pool in trying to keep it fair for everyone. Problems at the pool will require more police time at our pool. Higher usage may require

more lifeguards to assure safety and thus increased expenses for the operator, possibly encouraging the operator to cut corners somewhere else. And, no one will like it if we find it necessary to go back to charging admission fees next year!

This may turn out to be an example of the Council not looking at all sides of an issue more carefully before a decision was made. If so, we deserve your criticism! If not we can all be happy!

We all hope this change for our pool operation will not result in a bad situation for the employees and patrons of our pool. We want it to be a great summer at the pool and we ask each of you to help make it a great summer in any way you can.