

# City unveils plans for rec, aquatic center

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This is an artistic rendering of the main entrance of the new Bardstown Aquatic and Recreation Center that will begin construction in 2024 with a scheduled completion date coming in 2026.

COURTESY OF THE CITY OF BARDSTOWN

“The third time today is a charm,” said Kim Huston, the county’s retired economic development chief who has found a new calling in helping head up fundraising and organization for the facility.

In her remarks Friday morning, she noted this is a project that has been brewing for decades, but the first two efforts stalled. But they kept on trying, and thanks to several generous donors from around the community, the project is off the ground and running.

“It’s something that every one of us deserves here in Bardstown and Nelson County,” Huston said.

After consulting with several members of the community, Huston and the city found out the chief wants for the facility included an indoor pool with a lap pool area where local high school swim teams could practice, a three-lane walking track, a multi-purpose gym with courts that can host volleyball, basketball and pickleball, and a safe playground area.

The artistic renderings also showed off water slides, an outdoor splash park, green spaces for the community to gather, a restaurant and lounge area, and other amenities.

“It is a special day,” Mayor Dick Heaton said Friday as they laid out the plans under the City Pool pavilion.

“This is kind of ground zero for where this is going to be built.”

The new facility will be 80,000 square feet and is estimated to cost between \$35 million and \$40 million. The city has raised about \$6 million in private donations for the project, and Heaton noted that private fundraising efforts are ongoing — including opportunities for naming rights for the facility. The city has budgeted \$500,000 in each of the last two budget cycles for the project, and Heaton said the city has about \$10 million in unrestricted budget funds that can go toward funding. He said the city has the bonding capacity to complete the project with forecasted incoming revenue.

Heaton noted the current 80-year-old rec center has served the city well since they took it over from the old St. Joe Prep school, but it has outlived its usefulness and is becoming expensive to maintain.

Friday served as an especially big day for Daniel Jeffries, the city's recreation director. He noted the current rec center and the outdoor pool don't have the space to host all the various programming his department would like to provide for the city's residents.

"It's unbelievable to finally see it come to fruition," Jeffries said. "Just having the opportunity to expand the programming that we've had to hold back on for so many years, going from these facilities that we've band-aided and made work for as long as we could. We made it work for what we had, but we still couldn't give everything to the community that we wanted to give to the community. Now this is going to open so many doors."

Jeffries noted the facility will have a chance to make some money back through entry and usage fees, as well as for hosting large tournaments in various sports that the city never could before.

The facility's front — when viewed from the St. Joseph School and Church campuses — will feature an outdoor 4,000-square-foot splash pad and green space on the left, with the indoor pool also to the left, and the gym will be on the far right. Between the gym and pool there will be a large, 2,000-square-foot community room on the second floor that the city will make available to the Nelson County Public Library to help host some of their programming. The back side of the facility will face Broadway, and part of the main grounds of the facility will be where the current Don Harned Field sits.

Huston said there will be a “beautiful donor wall” thanking all those in the community who stepped up to support the project. Heaton noted many of those donors are individuals and businesses that have been in the Bardstown community for several generations.

Chief sponsors include Jack and Bill Newcomb of Newcomb Oil, Susan Elmore of Buzick Lumber, Donna and Tommy Blincoe of Buzick Construction, Heaven Hill, CHI St. Joseph/Flaget Memorial Hospital, Dr. Stan Block and Physicians to Children, Mago Construction, Town and Country Bank and Trust and Wilson and Muir Bank.

Huston also noted that Patrick Hayden of Kentucky GunCo has also been heavily involved in the project as a donor and in providing ideas, as well as Belinda Gates, who has been involved at the grassroots level, as well as Steve Tarver of the Louisville YMCA, who helped consult on the project. Pinnacle Sports in Louisville also consulted, and Lockett and Farley were contracted for the design and building of the project.

City officials expect to be moving dirt on the project in early 2025, with a targeted completion date of late 2026.