

Eye on the Prize

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Hampton Council is considering building a major youth sports facility to boost tourism...an aquatics center...not particularly for our youths but to boost tourism.

Newport News has an aquatics center – Midtown Community Center – that boasts of having the “only 50m competitive indoor pool in the Hampton Roads region.” The facility has one 3-meter and two 1-meter diving boards, seating for 500 and oodles of other amenities. Seems like an inviting center for tourist. Having been open for more than five years, Newport News’ aquatic center offers a wonderful comparison as to what kind of dollars Hampton can expect to generate from a similar venture and clientele.

According to the 2017 Newport News budget, the aquatic facilities are expected to generate \$262,913 through admissions, memberships and rentals. Employees to operate the aquatic facilities and run the programs are projected to cost the city of Newport News \$266,656 plus benefits. Therefore, Newport News expects manpower alone is likely to cost the city over \$4,000 more than the estimated revenue. What is not broken down in the Newport News budget is the cost to operate separate facilities (gas, electric, water, garbage, etc.), but we already know the aquatics program will be operating in the red.

Why would this be any different in Hampton? Will sporting events be that lucrative here? Will our youth be able to afford the \$70 to \$100 annual membership dues? Will they have transportation to this center? The prize is not the tourist who may or may not visit Hampton, but the communities that exist throughout the city that have lost Hampton’s focus.

According to the Hampton City Schools budget, last school year, 64% of our students received free or reduced lunches. A 6% increase over the 2013 school year. Our composite index dropped because of lower property value resulting in additional assistance from the state for our schools. Schools are unaccredited, graduation rates lower than reported and the climate in the schools is less than comfortable.

Hampton’s eye is definitely on the wrong prize!