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City stays firm on splash park location

By Elaine Della-Mattia, Sault Star
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City council reaffirmed its commitment to building a splash pad at Bellevue Park Monday despite a plea from the Downtown Association that Clergue Park location would be boost the downtown economy.

Downtown Association board chair Bryan Hayes said the association was not part of a public or stakeholder consultation process before council made its decision to build a splash pad at the city's east-end premier park.

As a partner in the community, Hayes said the downtown association should have been invited to provide input into the project's location and demonstrate how a splash park could be an economic driver for the downtown and the association's members.

Hayes said he believes council's priority should be the downtown and several reports adapted by council would align the project with a Clergue Park location, including the downtown improvement plan, the downtown strategy and the city's own corporate strategy.

Hayes, a former city councillor, said the project has been in the making for a number of years.

“At one point it was always going to be Clergue Park and driven by Rotary,” he said.

A Clergue Park splash pad location could increase opportunities for existing downtown businesses and bring additional investment to the area he said.

He dismissed the report conclusions that there are substantial cost differences to the two locations.

“I believe a splash pad should be in Bellevue Park too but the inaugural location should be Clergue Park,” he said, adding that synergies could be developed with other facilities in the downtown including the library, art gallery and bushplane museum, among others.

“The downtown needs the splash pad more than Bellevue Park needs a splash park. The inaugural splash pad needs to be downtown,” Hayes stressed.

But Ward 1 Coun. Paul Christian countered that a committee completed extensive research into both sites and the final report by city council resulted in a unanimous decision.

“This is not good leadership, good governance. It shows indecisiveness,” Christian told council.

He noted that the debate has continued on social media and the public understands why the Bellevue Park location was selected.

“They are the constituents,” he said.

A splash pad, or splash park, is an area for water play that has no standing water. The nozzle spray system eliminates the need for a paid lifeguard and there is practically no risk of drowning. The showers and ground nozzles are often controlled by hand-activated motion sensors to run for a limited time. Equipment can be used by all ages and is also handicap accessible because it is at ground level.

The city's plan includes 22 splash and nozzle features for users.

Initial costs of the projects, including all the amenities, were pegged at \$575,000.

If the entire funding is not found, the project may be divided into two phases with the first phase being the splash pad itself and the second phase the addition of ancillary buildings and extra amenities.

Christian told city council that the splash park is a place for children and families and not an economic entity.

“It doesn't mean we don't support the downtown redevelopment. In my opinion that is completely unfair,” he said.

While Hayes said a Thunder Bay waterfront development has created four times the participation rate as what was originally anticipated and increased activity in the downtown area, Christian countered that that development is a multi-million development that includes an arena, a skatepark and other features.

“We as civic leaders are playing ping pong with this while children are waiting,” Christian said. “As a community we need to start pulling in the same direction.”

Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker agreed that council made its decision on the issue and revisiting that decision was not good governance.

Mayor Christian Provenzano agreed. “We made our decision. It was a good decision. We put a shallow wading pool in a park where the kids go.”

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