

'Eight is great!'

City, YMCA promise six lanes, but local residents want eight

By JAIME ANTON
The Post staff writer

It has become the battle cry.

Residents in the community have been urging officials to consider an eight-lane pool for the proposed YMCA facility. Eight lanes would be more conducive to the high school swim team's training efforts and make North Royalton a sought-after locale for competitive events.

Plans for the proposed facility were originally drawn up with a four-lane pool.

City and YMCA officials said at Tuesday's committee of a whole meeting, which meets once a month to discuss the project, that the pool would be a minimum of six lanes.

"We do believe we have firmed up the project budget with the six-lane pool, and at this point, that will be incorporated into the project," said Tom Jordan, community development director for the city.

Several high school swimmers, like Jill Caggiano, were in attendance and spoke up at the meeting. Most said that six lanes are better than four but are still very cramped.

"We really believe eight lanes is ideal," Caggiano said. "Eight lanes would be more spacious, more comfortable and make it a really competitive venue."

Eight lanes would allow for invitational meets that would naturally draw crowds and generate revenue at nearby businesses. But it means much more than that to the team without a home pool.

"I know for a fact that us North Royalton swimmers would really love to hold our first home swim meet. And, though I won't ever be a swimmer at this new YMCA, I know kids down the road would really want that," she said.

A resident said eight is great, but six is better than nothing.

"If we can afford eight, great, but we need something. We have got to get people behind this to make it work," he said.

The more lanes, the more the pricetag.

Jordan said six lanes is raising costs as it is. Another issue that affects price is the project's size. The YMCA is in talks with Parma Community General Hospital. Their participation would affect costs, as they would need 5,000 square feet of space to operate at the Y. Several other YMCA facilities have a medical partner, which usually contributes monetarily to offset costs. Nothing is definitive with Parma General yet.

Before anything can happen, council must first adopt an operating agreement with the YMCA, followed by the purchase agreement for the Avalon Event Center. Law Director Tom Kelly said the

city and YMCA are still in talks and are making steady progress on the operation agreement. However, there are two "sensitive" legal issues they are currently unable to agree upon. Kelly could not publicly divulge these at the meeting.

"We are confident that we will reach an agreement with the Y on these matters," he said.

The purchase agreement must be approved before the month's end.

Though the pool has become such a sticking point with residents, Ward 1 Councilman John Nickell said not to forget that the Y is about more than just a pool. It's about premiere programming and activities.

"So spread that, too when you're talking about the YMCA," he told residents.

The North Royalton Family YMCA is expected to house not only a pool, but a state-of-the-art gym, meeting rooms and offer several programs for all age groups under the center's roof and out and about in the community.

The city plans to purchase the Avalon for \$2.1 million. It is funding this with dollars from a capital improvement fund and a capital recreation fund. It is also fronting the estimated \$6.5 million the YMCA needs to renovate the facility. The YMCA is currently in the midst of fundraising efforts to raise this money to repay the city. The Y has a method for raising dollars that has proved successful at its other sites.

They are identifying contributors, which will primarily be individuals and corporations. No doubt the economy has made it challenging for businesses to donate, however, the city is reaching out to them.

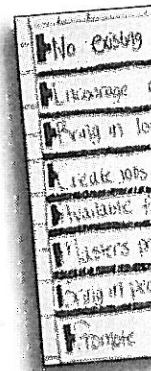
But Jody Shy, campaign coordinator for the YMCA of greater Cleveland, said anyone can make a difference. "If there's this much passion for these eight lanes, then I encourage you to get involved in the capital campaign to help us identify those dollars. That's what it comes down to for us. We have to be able to raise the money to pay for those additional lanes," Shy said. "You don't have to write a check today. All I need are pledges."

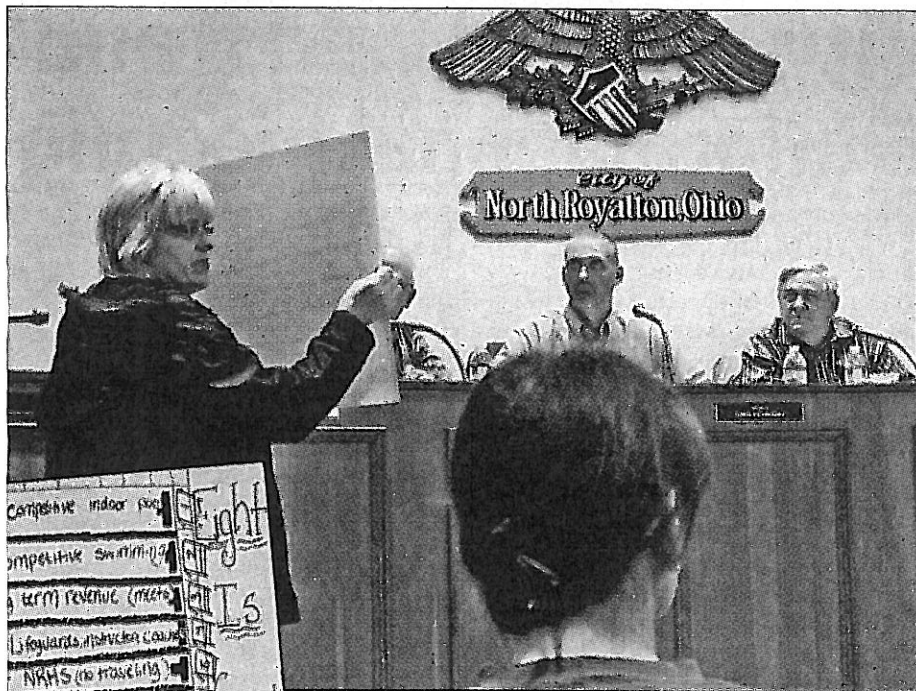
Council President Vince Gentile said if each household donated just \$50, the YMCA would have \$475,000 in a year.

"If every household were to do that over a couple of years, that is a significant amount of money for the construction and not a whole lot of money for each household. That's done, the building is built, the loans are paid back, and we have a big, beautiful YMCA," he said.

Nickell said not to underestimate the power in numbers.

"Tell the story to everyone you come in contact with because you never know who may be interested. It can't just be on





Photos by JAIME ANTON

As former NRHS swimmer Alyssa Kmet spoke before council, her mom Karen held up an "Eight is Great" sign that demonstrates eight reasons to council and residents why the city needs an eight-lane pool. Ward 2 Councilman Gary Petrusky and Ward 3 Councilman Don Willey are pictured in the background.



Gary Guzy, executive director of the Ridgewood Y; Jody Shy, campaign coordinator for the YMCA of greater Cleveland; and Mayor Bob Stefanik are pictured while Guzy talks about various program offerings and activities that the Y will be able to provide to the community.

the Y and us. To have this many people (at the meeting) really shows that we are interested in Royalton," he said.

But, the Y has only five months to identify pledge dollars, so time is ticking.

A swim mom said she wanted to see a more concerted effort made to include businesses, which will benefit directly from large events hosted at the pool.

"I don't think this is about what the school swim team wants, and I don't think it's about what the elected officials want. This is about the relationship we all have together – the schools, the community, the residents, everybody, including the businesses," she said. "They have a huge amount to gain, just as the swim team does. I wish I saw some of those folks out in the audience tonight."

Mayor Bob Stefanik said the city has been engaging the business community through semi annual business breakfasts it hosts. The YMCA gave a presentation at the last one, and the YMCA, he said, would be pitched again the next morning

at another business breakfast.

"Myself and members of council have given the YMCA several leads of businesses owners in North Royalton, wealthy residents of North Royalton, that we think might want to be a part of this YMCA. So we are out there knocking on doors, kicking in doors. We want to make this happen and want this to be one of the premiere YMCAs in all of northeastern Ohio," the mayor said.

Later, another student asked the mayor if businesses would be told specifically of the community's wishes for an eight-lane pool.

"Rest assured, we know we want eight lanes," Stefanik said. "It all comes down to dollars and cents. We understand the eight lane concept and we really want this to be one of the best YMCAs in the area. We're committed to that, this council is committed to that, so we hear you, we get it, and we want it."

The next committee of the whole meeting to discuss the Y is scheduled at 7 p.m. June 8 in council chambers.