

## **Haverford Township Community Center – it's time to decide**

*By State Representative Greg Vitali, D-Delaware*

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On May 14, the results of a study of different community center options for Haverford Township were presented to the township board of commissioners by the architectural firm hired to do the study, Kimmel Bogrette. It's now time for commissioners to decide on one of these options, and for residents of Haverford Township to let their commissioners know which option they favor. I continue to support construction of a community center at the former Haverford State Hospital site that includes a leisure pool.

Township commissioners ordered the study in December of last year to develop and price various options for the construction and operation of a community center at the former state hospital site. The study, which was funded by a \$30,000 state Community Revitalization Program grant I was able to obtain, analyzed the construction and operational costs of several potential designs.

The study presents four community center options: a community center with no pool at an estimated cost of \$6 million; a community center with a leisure pool at an estimated cost of \$12 million; a community center with a competition pool, also with an estimated cost of about \$12 million; and a community center with both a leisure pool and competition pool at a cost of about \$15 million. Commissioners also have the option of not building a community center at all.

The study strongly recommends that "any community recreation center that is being built in most settings should include a swimming pool as part of its facility components," with a leisure pool as the best option. A leisure pool -- a warm-water pool that includes zero-depth entry points, water slides, fountains and other features designed for use by swimmers of all ages and abilities -- would attract more community use than a competition pool and provide a greater return in the form of increased membership in the community center. The study reports that a leisure pool can generate as much as 30 percent more revenue than a comparable conventional pool.

A competition pool, on the other hand, would not provide a similar return. While a cold-water pool designed for competitive swim meets and lap swimming might benefit some segments of the community -- the school district, for instance, which doesn't have its own competition pool -- those benefits would not be as great as one might think. A competition pool at the community center could not be incorporated into the school district's physical education classes, and swim team members would still have to be bused to their swim meets and practices. Nevertheless, if the school district desires a competition pool at the community center, it needs to let township commissioners know that now, as well as how

much it is willing to contribute toward the cost of the pool.

In addition to the pool issue, commissioners must still decide on a location for the community center itself. I believe the best location is the former Haverford State Hospital site. A community center with a leisure pool and gymnasium would complement the other recreational amenities that will be offered there, such as the ball fields and nature trail. Suggested alternative locations, such as the old chewing gum factory, would require the township to purchase more land, raise potential problems associated with the Superfund site and increase traffic congestion on Eagle Road.

Development on the Haverford State Hospital site will provide \$17 million in revenue for the township. The construction of a community center with a leisure pool on the site is the best use of this revenue for the township's long-term benefit. Not only would a community center at that site improve quality of life for township residents by providing centralized, first-class recreational opportunities, but the experience of other communities shows that it would also increase the appeal of the community and, thus, increase property values.

So what happens now? The township board of commissioners must select one of the community center options included in the study. After that, the board will have to hire an architect to design a building and a construction firm to build it, a process that will take about 1-1/2 to 2 years.

None of this will happen unless the Haverford Township Board of Commissioners makes it happen, so it's time to give your commissioners a call and let them know your views on these issues.