

HYBRID TASK FORCE REPORT FOR CITY STAFF

We members of the task force feel that it is a symbolic exercise, a ‘check the box’ initiative with minimal tangible impact.

City Staff has consistently told us that the Task Force lacks defined milestones, formal oversight mechanisms, or any authority. At most, we can offer suggestions to the Operator who, at his sole discretion, may accept or reject our proposals.

To date, the Operator has either rejected our requests or implemented them in ways not set up for success, as further detailed below.

1) City Staff initially acted unilaterally in determining the future of our facility, making decisions without resident input based on the Operator’s proposed vision for the pool under the Hybrid Model. The Operator has since refused to accommodate our requests regarding operational hours, program offerings, and established communication protocols.

At the first Task Force meeting, City Staff informed us that it plans to increase the Pool Operator’s hourly rate from \$133/hr for 5 resources (2 lifeguards, CPO, Reception and Manager) to \$284.71/hour (\$199/hr for 2 lifeguards and 1 Manager + \$600/week for CPO). This rate increase corresponds to our receiving fewer resources and services. No justification was provided for this significant cost increase, which residents found alarming. Equally significant, the number of staff at Belle Haven is typically three (3), not the (5) resources required under the contract, and the number of lifeguards on deck is typically one (1), even when both pools are occupied. Where is the money going?

Our inquiries about finances have been shut down because “finances are outside of the scope of the Task Force”; however, the City brought up this issue as an agenda item at the first Task Force meeting. Under the Public Records Act citizens are entitled to details regarding City expenditures and City Staff are fiduciaries when it comes to the use of Menlo Park tax dollars. We have the legal right to ask questions and receive meaningful responses.

We have been told that the 33 hours are “ours” to determine; however, the timing of hours and availability of programs are at the Operator’s sole discretion. In practice, the pool hours and programs have been provided at the hours selected by the Operator, not the hours requested by Belle Haven residents. The Pool Operator has further restricted Belle Haven’s access to the same programs and services that are available at Burgess. The Operator has declined to offer an Adult Swim Program (Masters Swimming), Aqua Fit or Water Polo at Belle Haven. Swim Lessons are only available at hours the Operator deems appropriate—again, not the hours requested by the residents.

In an additional insult to our multilingual community, communication about these programs is limited to the Menlo Swim & Sport (MSS) email list or website, which are English-only, despite Belle Haven’s significant Spanish-speaking population. The MSS website is difficult to navigate and it is challenging to find details on available programs and schedules. These problems have significantly hindered residents’ ability to access information or register for programs.

While repeated discussions with the Operator and City have highlighted these concerns, both parties have maintained that the Operator retains sole discretion over communication strategies. Consequently, no modifications to accommodate residents’ language needs or improve accessibility have been implemented.

2) The City and Operator have refused to include finances in the Task Force discussions.

Belle Haven Pool will bear more financial obligations than Burgess, including funding our own programs, and covering the Operator pool rent. All of the hours for any programs must be approved by the Operator before we can proceed. Since the Operator has control over our money, the Task Force should have the right of financial oversight, including the right to request an independent, comprehensive audit of the Operator's finances. This would justify the increase of costs for everyday operations and make planning possible by clarifying the costs of our own programs.

3) The City and Operator have asked Belle Haven residents to propose programs without providing any information about the sport of swimming and pool activities. This is like asking Belle Haven residents to "talk underwater."

Belle Haven residents do not have their own residential swimming pools and have historically only had 8 weeks of access to the BHCC pool per year, leaving this community without swimming knowledge, experience, or expertise. Now, Belle Haven residents have been tasked with advising the City on pool operations through this Task Force. The City has not provided any guidance or information about pool programs or operations, which is much-needed for future Task Force meetings.

Furthermore, despite the significant Spanish-speaking population in Belle Haven, interpretation services were not provided until we asked. This is a multilingual neighborhood. Providing access to Spanish speakers is the City's responsibility. Language barriers hinder meaningful participation, and the absence of interpreters undermines the community's ability to engage effectively. We have had one meeting with a translator, which was a good start. We hope and expect to have a translator available at all future meetings.

4) It has been extremely and unnecessarily difficult for people to sign up for Task Force meetings

Despite this, attendance and participation by Belle Haven residents has been consistent.

The Task Force is requesting the City include a link to sign-up for future Task Force meetings on the Aquatic page.

Currently, details on future Task Force meetings are not on the Aquatics web page, but in the Library section of the government website. It is unreasonable to expect us to go to a Library website to sign up for a Task Force about swimming pools.

There has been inconsistent email distribution, including the City's most recent request for Task Force members to contact City Council. This has been a constant issue that has caused key stakeholders to miss Task Force meetings, despite their intent to attend, and we have raised this issue to City Staff and the City Manager.

Despite these challenges, Belle Haven residents have consistently demonstrated strong engagement with the Task Force. Attendance at meetings has exceeded 10 participants per session, with recent meetings drawing up to 15 Belle Haven residents. This sustained interest underscores the community's active participation and commitment to addressing issues related to swimming pools and recreational programs. Belle Haven residents are activated about this issue.

5) We acknowledge the City's efforts to improve the Task Force/BHCC Pool.

City Staff have scheduled 1-1 meetings with attendees; brought in a BHCC front desk employee to act as interpreter to our last meeting; and purchased fins for BHCC. I believe the City is responding to our request to have a section in the Staff Report via this email process. We appreciate this opportunity to formally express our experience with the Task Force.

6) Recommendations for the “Aquatic Task Force”

The work for this Aquatic Task Force is far from being done. The Task Force should be elevated to an Aquatic sub-committee or commission, like the Complete Streets Commission which is able to submit their own package of recommendations to the City Council and collaborate with city staff. This constitutes a meaningful way to achieve change.

More granular discussions with respect to program costs, feasibility, scheduling and how each program would operate are needed.

Task Force work needs to continue with a focus on:

- a. Education about pools and the sports of competitive swimming, water polo, water aerobics, and games;
- b. City researching and presenting what other city pools are doing operationally;
- c. Establishing an escalation path to the City for current pool Operator issues;
- d. Creation of an adult competitive swimming program/Bridge Program;
- e. Education on social events that can be hosted at the pool such as movies at the pool, music activities, floating meditation, and other ideas proposed by Task Force attendees;
- f. Making lifeguard, CPO training and jobs available to Belle Haven residents;
- g. Exploring the ideas proposed by Task Force attendees such as local events involving food, summer swim team, etc.;
- h. Financial aspects of operating a public pool and programs;
- i. Alternatives to the current operator - pros and cons.