

Rec Center Numbers Don't Add Up

To the Editor:

Recently, the Reston Association held a community meeting at Lake Anne Elementary School about the proposed Recreation Center. A consultant from Brailsford and Dunlavy presented their market analysis for indoor recreation, and a major contradiction immediately became apparent. The presenter insisted that there was "great demand" for indoor recreation in Reston, but at the same time, he noted that a rec center of the type proposed for Brown's Chapel Park would operate at a loss of about \$800,000 per year. In my view, there is self-evidently insufficient demand for a facility that operates at a significant annual financial loss. If private fitness centers can't provide indoor tennis and swimming in Reston because the numbers don't add up, why should the taxpayers subsidize a facility whose artificially low membership fees will make it even harder for private fitness centers to operate? Here we should also note that the plan for a "comprehensive" facility includes weight rooms and programs that directly compete with existing privately operated fitness centers.

The consultant's analysis of demand and economics, available on

the RA Web site, assumes substantial growth in the number of residents and businesses in Reston and the surrounding areas in the immediate future. If this growth does not materialize due to prolonged recession, then the demand for indoor recreation will be even lower than the RA assumes, and the annual losses for operating the proposed facility will be even greater.

The presenter demonstrated that Reston could, at fairly reasonable cost, enclose existing tennis courts and pools rather than spending tremendous sums to build a "comprehensive" facility at Brown's Chapel Park. This approach would meet the alleged demand for indoor tennis and swimming without incurring tremendous debt or destroying Brown's Chapel Park. After participating in the roundtable discussion held with approximately 200 attendees, my sense was that the vast majority of residents at this community meeting favored a more cautious approach that preserves Brown's Chapel Park.

James Perry

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