

**SELZER & COMPANY
CITY OF URBANDALE
POLL ON COMMUNITY RECREATION COMPLEX**

In January of 2022, SELZER & COMPANY conducted a poll to assess voter reaction to a proposed community recreation complex. The proposal calls for a vote to be held as part of the 2022 general election or in a special election in 2023. The goals of this poll were:

- To learn about voter knowledge of and interest in a community recreation complex;
- To explore comparative interest in an aquatic center as part of the plan;
- To determine the likelihood of voting in the election; and
- To quantify views of the implications for property taxes.

Of particular interest is whether an aquatic center is a necessary element of any proposal. To ascertain this, we looked at the interest versus the unmet need of people who use indoor or outdoor aquatic centers.

Using the state’s voter list, 502 active registered voters were interviewed, with calls lasting approximately 12 minutes.

The following discussion summarizes the key findings. The appendix includes a technical appendix describing the methodology, a tabulated questionnaire, and a set of statistical tables.

A note on language. This poll asked about three visions for a recreation complex, including four components. Below is the way these elements were worded in the questionnaire and how they are commonly short-handed in this report.

Poll question language	Shorthand phrases
An indoor pool open year-round with lap lanes, a leisure pool and multiple water slides.	Indoor pool, indoor aquatic center/facility
Gymnasiums, fitness areas, a walking track, indoor playground and courts for sports	Large recreation center/facility
An outdoor pool open three months a year with lap lanes, a leisure pool, multiple water slides, and a lazy river tubing course	Outdoor pool, outdoor aquatic center/facility
Multi-purpose meeting and event rooms for youth and senior classes, recreation programs, meetings and rentals	Community center, small indoor community center

OVERVIEW

The idea of an Urbandale recreation complex tests well. Without knowing details (and few report having any knowledge of what is in the works), 76% say it is a good idea. This question made clear the proposal might or might not include an aquatic center. With a bit more knowledge by the end of the interview, it is 77%, so there is no meaningful change.

Both an indoor pool facility and a large recreation center are perceived as valuable to similar proportion of active voters—61% say the recreation center would be very or fairly valuable to their households; it is 59% for the indoor pool. Both facilities draw stronger than average interest from parents of children ages 12 and under and people who report visiting pools and/or recreation centers in the past three to four years. The recreation center also draws a greater than average share of those under age 35, while the indoor pool draws a greater than average share of those age 35-54.

A forced-choice question shows the indoor pool option to be important to a larger share of Urbandale voters, with 41% saying it is the most important element. That compares to 29% for the large recreation center.

More than half of our sample (54%) say they would definitely vote if the question of building a community recreation complex were on the ballot. Their answers to key questions do not differ much from the overall average. In addition, past election participation does not reveal a substantive divide in opinions on the proposals; there is no difference we can see in these data to holding a special election or adding a referendum to a general election ballot.

The range of a property tax increase to support whatever facility is built is acceptable to a solid majority. Six in ten (60%) say an increase of \$80-\$120 per year for a home valued at \$200,000 seems about right, with 3% saying it might be too little. That is twice as many as say this increase is too much (29%).

The overall finding is solid voter support for the idea and for two of the components tested, with little resistance to cost.

KEY FINDINGS

Here is more detail to explain the findings in depth.

A strong majority of Urbandale active registered voters think a community recreation complex is a good idea. Few Urbandale voters know much about any proposal for a new community recreation complex (**Q.1**). In a cold read of the concept (**Q.2**), the proposal of a new community recreation complex that might or might not include an aquatic center is deemed a good idea by two in three voters (76%). Just one in 10 (10%) say it seems to be a bad idea, with 13% saying they don't know enough to say (10%) or are unsure (3%).

Those most likely to say it is a bad idea include disproportionate numbers of those who report having not used a public or private pool or aquatic center in the last three to four years (25%) and those who have not used a public or private recreation facility in the past three or four years (20%).

It's worth noting that 56% of those who say initially the idea is a bad one are aged 55 and over, compared to 40% of active voters overall.

Few know much about the concept (Q.1). A full 81% say they know nothing much at all, with most of the rest, 16%, saying they know just a little bit. So, with most hearing of the concept for a first time, a large majority reacts positively.

Vote timing seems unimportant. There's little difference in perception of the project's merit based on vote history. Majorities who vote in presidential, mid-term, and city/special elections all say this is a good idea.

That said, people who vote in city/special elections are more likely to say they would vote if this proposal were on the ballot (**Q.10**). They are just slightly less likely to deem the project a good idea on first hearing of it, but it's still two in three voters (69%, versus 76% overall in **Q.2**). Still, two in three in favor of the project is a big number.

76% Overall saying it is a good idea for the City of Urbandale to build

- 76% Voters in presidential elections
- 74% Voters in mid-term elections
- 69% Voters in city/special elections

This measure of voter support shifts just a little from the beginning of the interview (76-10%) to the end of the interview when they have more information about the proposal and the question is re-asked (77-16%). Much of that growth in the proportion saying bad idea is among those who report no visits to recreation centers in the past few years (35%, up from 25% at the start) and those who report no pool visits in that same timeframe (27%, up from 20%).

Cost appears not to be a barrier (Q.7). After hearing an explanation of how the three proposals could affect property taxes, a majority of 60% say what is proposed (between \$80 and \$120 per year on a home valued at \$200,000) seems about right. Most of the rest (29%) say it is too much. Those most likely to say the proposed tax hike is too much are those who have not visited a recreation center (46%), have not visited a pool (40%) and those age 55 and over (41%).

Perceived value (Q.3). Asked about value of the components of the recreation complex individually, three of the four are rated very valuable by at least one in three voters. The multi-purpose meeting and events room community center was perceived as very valuable by just 23%. Here is how the other components break by key subgroups answering each would be very or fairly valuable:

61% Gymnasiums, fitness areas, etc.: Very or fairly valuable

- 77% Children 12 or under in household
- 76% 20+ pool visits in past few years
- 72% Lived in Urbandale less than 10 years
- 71% Under age 35
- 71% 20+ recreation center visits

59% Indoor pool open-year round: Very or fairly valuable

- 83% Child 12 or under in household
- 77% 20+ pool visits in past few years
- 73% Visited Clive/WDSM pool
- 70% Age 35-54

51% Outdoor pool open three months a year: Very or fairly valuable

- 78% Child 12 or under in household
- 70% 20+ pool visits in past few years
- 67% Visited Clive/WDSM pool
- 64% Age 35-54
- 61% Lived in Urbandale less than 10 years

Parents with children ages 12 and under make up about one in four voter households (27%). They show outsized interest in pools.

Those seeing the least value in the components are older and report no visits to pools or recreation facilities. Here is how the other components break by key subgroups answering each would be just somewhat or not that valuable:

58% Multi-purpose meeting and event rooms: Just somewhat or not that valuable

72% No visits to recreation facilities

49% Outdoor pool open three months a year: Just somewhat or not that valuable

73% No pool visits

69% No visits to recreation facilities

63% Respondent age 65 or older

62% Someone age 55 or older in the household

41% Indoor pool open-year round: Just somewhat or not that valuable

66% No pool visits

63% No visits to recreation facilities

38% Gymnasiums, fitness areas, etc.: Just somewhat or not that valuable

65% No visits to recreation facilities

56% No pool visits

53% Age 65 or older

A majority of voters see value in indoor and outdoor aquatic options. However, an indoor facility garners more support among those who report visiting a pool in recent years (80% say this would be valuable in **Q.4b**) than an outdoor options (67% in **Q.4c**).

Responding to a forced choice, an indoor aquatic center gains more support than a large recreation center (Q.8). Even though the two were rated about the same value independently, if choosing the one they say is most important, more voters (41%) say the indoor aquatic center than the recreation center (29%). An outdoor pool has fewer voters saying it's most important, with just 16% opting for that proposal.

Urbandale is home to slightly more recreation center users than swimming pool users. About one in four (27%) of Urbandale voters say no one in their households has visited a private or public pool in the past three or four years (**Q.4a**). The same can be said for 20% with regard to recreation centers (**Q.6**). The bigger difference is in how many use each type of facility the most. It's 23% who report visiting pools 20 times or more, compared to 39% who report 20 or more visits to recreation centers.

A majority of all pool users report using pools in Clive or West Des Moines. Here is where these Urbandale voters are visiting pools:

- 60% to public pools in Clive or West Des Moines
- 40% to private pools at YMCAs
- 35% to private pools at homes of people they know
- 32% to private pools at health clubs
- 30% to public pools in Des Moines

In summary. This initial test of the idea of city-built and -managed recreation complex wins strong support, with three in four saying this is a good idea. A majority (60%) say the potential property tax increase (\$80 to \$120 per year for a home valued at \$200,000) seems about right. The 29% who say this is too much include disproportionate numbers of those who have not used a Des Moines area pool (40%) or recreation center (46%) in the past four years, as well as those age 55 and over (41%).

Two potential configurations test best: 1) an indoor pool open year-round and 2) a large recreation facility. Each is perceived of high value (very or fairly valuable) to solid majorities of Urbandale voters (59% and 61%, respectively). And, each appeals in greater numbers to the same demographic groups: those who have used pools and/or recreation facilities 20 or more times in the past three to four years, and parents of children ages 12 and under.

When forced to choose which one of these projects is most important, the indoor pool garners more support, with 41% compared to 29% for the large recreation facility. That is the lone marker in this poll indicating a difference in what voters would welcome more.

Those who say the overall proposal to build some sort of community recreation complex is a bad idea (10% of voters in the cold test early in the interview) include disproportionate numbers of those who report no pool (20%) or recreation facility (25%) visits in the past three to four years. These groups are also more likely than average to say the proposed property tax increase is too much (46% of non-recreation center visitors and 40% of non-pool users). Also showing more concern about the tax increase are 41% of voters age 55 and over.

All this is to say the data support either option in terms of perceived value. One of the goals of this study was to determine voter interest specifically in an indoor or outdoor pool as part of the recreation plan. These data rule out the outdoor pool, which has lower support. These data do not rule out an indoor pool facility, though we do not have evidence it is a deal-breaker if the city proposes a non-pool recreation facility.