



# Westbrook Water Talk: Your Voice Matters!

## Meeting Three - Craig's Notes

### Survey Findings and Analysis

November 14, 2024

6pm to 8pm, The Gym, Westbrook Community Center, 426 Bridge Street, Westbrook

## About the Meeting

### Context and Objectives

This was the third of three meetings to inform the public and collect public opinion about the future of our public outdoor aquatic amenities.

The objective of the first meeting on August 15 was to understand why the Cornelia Warren Outdoor Pool was decommissioned in 2020 and the options and opportunities going forward. The objectives of the second meeting were to learn new information gathered as a result of Meeting One, discuss what Westbrook values in terms of outdoor water recreation, and to hear public input about how the City should proceed.

The objective of this third meeting was to for everyone to understand the survey findings and analysis, and emerging decision criteria.

### Water Talk Public Engagement Process

Meeting One	August 15	Where We Are Now
Meeting Two	August 28	What Do You Think?
Survey	Aug 28 – Sep 29	What Do You Think?
Meeting Three	November 14	Survey Findings and Analysis

## Agenda

6:00 **Opening**

- Westbrook's Assistant City Administrator Angela Holmes will welcome everyone and kick-off the meeting.
- Facilitator Craig Freshley will explain the public input process to date and the format for this particular meeting.

6:15 **Survey Findings**

- Angela Holmes and Westbrook Senior Planner Rebecca Spitella will provide an overview of the recent public opinion community survey, including findings by question and overall analysis.

- Angela and Rebecca will also provide survey takeaways, including decision considerations and recommendations.

7:25           **Questions and Clarifications**

- This is a chance for questions and clarifications of any type.

7:55           **Closing Comments**

- Angela and Rebecca will offer final comments and adjourn the meeting.

8:00           **Adjourn**

## Ground Rules

- This first meeting is all about understanding. Opinions later.
- Let's assume best intentions and demonstrate respect.
- We want to hear all questions and all views.
- Please be recognized before speaking and honor the process.
- Neutral facilitation and notes.

## Presentation

Westbrook's Assistant City Administrator and City Clerk Angela Holmes, along with Westbrook Senior Planner Rebecca Spitella, presented a slide show that summarized Survey Findings. They also presented Decision Criteria and Recommendations.

See the slide show separately. Below are some highlights jotted by Craig on the spot.

- Introduction
  - We are going to present:
    - Why did we ask these questions
    - What were the results
    - What do these answers tell us
  - Angela is going to provide overall summaries and Rebecca will explain the details of each question.
- Survey Findings
  - Demographics
    - 634 total respondents
    - 455 know how to swim independently
    - We know that not everyone has access to water
    - A need is represented for water safety
    - This is not a child-focused issue
  - Preferences
    - There are a variety of water amenities that people access or not in a variety of ways
    - Dundee Park is most popular

- Interacting with natural bodies is valued
  - Swimming is the preferred method
  - Small wading pools don't seem to be preferred
- Priorities
  - Recreational non-programmed swimming is most preferred
  - Rank Choice voting results
    - Recreational swimming: 50%
    - Swim lessons and no water amenity: 25%
  - Recreational swimming is preferred over swim lessons
- Water amenity vs other recreational amenity
  - Most people think that other amenities are as or more important than a water amenity
    - Many alternatives were suggested
  - There are many competing recreational amenities
  - There is concern about adding to the burden of maintaining public facilities
- Trade offs
  - Most people favor sports fields over water amenities
  - Most prefer that a water amenity take up not-already-used space
- Financials
  - Most people support a \$5m investment if the City could get half of that paid for with grants.
- Attributes
  - Many people prefer a central location that's walkable, with parking.
- Prioritizing known options
  - Most preferred is an outdoor pool of some sort
  - The least preferred option for most respondents was no investment
  - Rank choice voting results:
    - 43% prefer outdoor pool with enclosure
  - Majority of respondents support moving forward with some sort of amenity
- Timeline
  - For those who support an outdoor water amenity, they want it within three years
- Decision Criteria and Recommendations
  - Intro
    - We are suggesting a rubric for how to evaluate future water amenity
  - Criteria
    - A water amenity should be in any future plan for Westbrook and should increase access to swimmable water, particularly recreational (open swim) opportunities.
    - A water amenity should provide opportunities for all age groups.
    - Priority should be given to a project that can be phased.
    - A new amenity should not cost more than \$5m-\$10m with no more than 50% covered by tax funds.
    - Priority should be a for an extended season

## Clarifications and Comments

- It was clarified that a riverfront plan was not looked at very much. It just didn't seem likely to be feasible.
- It would be good to have an explanation of why the old outdoor pool was decommissioned.
  - An explanation was provided
  - It was also explained that a video is available from the first water talks meeting where the whole history was explained.
- We want to make sure that if we cite an outdoor pool in the future, we put it in a place and build it in such a way that it won't have to be decommissioned.
- A question was raised about how the survey was distributed, and it was clarified that postcards were mailed to all Westbrook residents.
  - Although there's some concern that some postcards seem not to have been received.
  - It was also clarified that anyone could call City Hall and complete a survey by phone and that.
  - The city staff made extra efforts to try and include all types of survey respondents
- It was also clarified that both taxpayers and renters are encouraged to give their input. The city sees all residents as equal for purposes of giving a public input
- It was clarified that this will likely go to a council workshop and probably before the council workshop, the survey findings, decision criteria, and recommendations will go to the Rec&Con committee to perhaps add details to the recommendations.
- There seemed to be favor for "centralized" location, although this was not defined in the survey.
- Similarly, there seemed to be favor for a "walkable" location, although walkable was not defined.
- It's nice to see city councilors invested tonight.
- This process should have happened a few years ago.
- Did the survey explore tradeoffs and were people educated about the tradeoffs?
  - It was clarified that we did our best to educate people in Meeting One, although we can't make people get educated before filling out the survey.
- Did people know about the potential sources of funding that might be available when they answer the financial questions?
  - We can't assume that they did, so the answer is probably no.
- In the future, let's explore more about the public's appetite for fundraising
- It will be fascinating to see the results of the survey conducted by the Cornelia Warren Friends group.
- The response rate was questioned with some concern that, for a city with Westbrook's population, there should have been more responses.
- A concern was raised about biases in the survey, such as against Deering Oaks Park.
- We recognize that this is not a perfect survey.
  - It is not based on a stratified random sample. Participation was completely voluntary.

- Yet it's the best we could do with the budget that we had and we believe that the Council will benefit from this information.
- How is the Council going to balance priorities for our community?
  - And does it have to be water amenities versus other amenities? It's not a Zero sum game.
  - It's not one thing versus another
- Really appreciate this whole process. Thanks for the time and effort. This was a good process to reach a lot of people.
- I was surprised by how many people wanted something in the river.
  - Please help us envision what a river amenity might look like and what the trade-offs would be.
- Let's determine how to maximize use of the current pool.
- We need to continue to collect information and continue this process.
- Thanks to all elected officials for supporting this process.
- Staff is planning to publish a report in early 2025.

## Closing Comments

- Thank you for coming
- We really appreciate everyone's input