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Pool Remodel Begins at Acalanes High School

By Helen Wang



Photo Natalie Chan

Small tremors shake the earth and nearby classrooms as concrete crumbles, giving way to dirt and leaving Acalanes' very own \$2.37 million dustbowl at the center of campus. The long anticipated remodel of the Acalanes pool has begun.

The remodel by Western Water Features, Inc. will update the Acalanes pool, as it was the oldest in the district with leaks and brittle lane lines to prove it. By this time next year, however, the dust will clear, hardhats will disappear, and a brand new pool will sparkle as the campus' centerpiece.

The need to repair the pool surfaced a few years ago when Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Associate Superintendent of Business Services Chris Learned caught wind of some of the pool's problems.

"I went down to the pool to see what was going on, and there were a couple of leaks inside the large pool at Acalanes, which was making the plaster come off the bottom.

Learned began drafting plans to repair the pool, and now a few years later, the pool was drained and ground has been broken.

"Now it's going to be up to par with the other swimming pools, which is really nice. We do use it quite a bit, not just for the school, but also for the city, so I think it'll be nice for the city of Lafayette," said Acalanes High School Principal Aida Glimme.

Although some have voiced concerns about paying for a pool remodel during a recession, the pool construction is financed by Measure E, a 2008 bond that raised money to improve AUHSD facilities.

"This bond was put together prior to the collapse of the markets, and regardless of the markets, there's always going to be facilities improvements that need to be done ... Bonds have one purpose only: you can only use the bonds for school capital improvements projects at the school," said Learned. "It's a different source of revenue, and it's very targeted and can only be used for that purpose, which is capital improvement projects."

After discussing the length extensively with another board member and AUHSD Aquatics Coordinator Andrew Morris, who is also a swim coach and chair of Pacific Water Polo, Inc., Learned proposed and the AUHSD Governing Board approved putting a proposal to build a 40-meter pool on the Measure E ballot. Once Measure E passed, a pool design committee comprised of representatives from Acalanes aquatic programs, local aquatic programs, Learned, Morris, and Acalanes Athletic Director Randy Takahashi formed to discuss other aspects of the pool, such as the pool's depth and scoreboards.

Acalanes' new 40-meter pool will be much longer than its former 25-meter length, but 10 meters short of a 50-meter-long Olympic-length pool, such as Campolindo's Soda Aquatic Center pool. According to Learned, installing a 50-meter long pool would not have been possible, as the vote mandated a 40-meter pool and the site could not accommodate a 50-meter pool.

"A 50-meter pool would have encroached out significantly onto the outdoor basketball courts, and obviously the P.E. members on the [design] committee were not interested in losing their basketball courts to a bigger pool," said Learned.

Some believe the 40-meter length of the pool, among other features, do not take swimmers' needs into account. When asked why the pool was not lengthened another two meters or more, Learned indicated that maximizing the pool's size comes at a price.

"You could have squeezed in a bigger pool, but the cost of that is the deck space. So the [design] committee, especially for athletics and afterschool communities, was very interested in having adequate deck space for events that are happening out on the pool," said Learned.

Another issue was deciding how much of the pool would be shallow. Acalanes girls' water polo coach Misha Buchel, the pool's few shallow lanes represents a compromise between the swimming and water polo teams.

"For a water polo coach, it would be ideal for it to be all deep, but there's going to be a few shallow lanes. For a swim team, it's going to be less than ideal because the swim team would like to have a shallow end along the entire length of it," said Buchel.

Acalanes swimming coach Jeff Miller also coaches the L.M.Y.A. swim team in the summer. To him, less shallow water means

exhausted swimmers won't have the relief of standing after a long race and new swimmers will flounder in deep water.

"Especially for the younger kids learning to swim, having shallow water space to teach the kids how to swim is very necessary. There's only about half as much shallow water space as before," said Miller.

"Our focus as a design committee was designing a pool that is, first and foremost, best for what the high school's needs are and then what the community needs are after that," said Morris.

Despite the pool's shortcomings in the eyes of some, a new pool is a new pool. "In all of my experiences, a new aquatic facility will help the local aquatic programs as well as the high school programs, so I would expect out of this a fair amount of excitement in the summer of 2011," said Morris.

Helen Wang was co-editor of the award-winning Blueprint, the Acalanes High School newspaper.

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