

From The Morning Call

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## Survey says Forks would like to splash

**A pool or water park tops a wish list of recreational facilities.**

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

Forks Township's first survey in 20 years to measure the recreational pulse of its residents shows a swimming pool remains a popular idea, just as in the last canvass.

Whether the township goes ahead with building a municipal pool, or water park, is uncertain. For now, township officials intend to investigate the idea, including its potential costs.

A pool ranked high on people's wish list in the last survey, but was also something a lot of people at that time said they didn't want. The township eventually built a community center, also high on the list in the 1986 survey. That facility opened in 1995 and was expanded in late 2003.

Neighboring Easton, along with Palmer and Bethlehem townships, have municipal pools. Bethlehem Township has both indoor and outdoor pools as part of its new \$10.3 million community center complex that opened earlier this year. Palmer Township took over the Olympic-size Palmer Lions Pool in 1993. Easton has long had two pools, Heil and Eddyside, and recently disclosed it may team up with the Family YMCA of Easton, Phillipsburg and Vicinity to have that agency staff and manage the facilities, which operate at a deficit.

Forks Supervisor Donald Miller said all suggestions from residents, including big ticket items like a pool, will be investigated.

"I know I'd like to see a pool in Forks Township," said Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas.

The township has about \$1.6 million in a recreation fund from fees charged to developers and Miller said some smaller items, like a band shell, may be able to be tackled right away.

Walking or jogging paths were listed as the most used recreational outlet, according to this year's survey, followed by the community center and playgrounds. Walking, biking and jogging paths were also listed at the top of suggestions for improvements or expansion.

The survey also asked residents to pick their top five from a list of 13 possibilities for additional recreational facilities. A pool or water park topped that list, followed by a walking/bicycle bridge over Sullivan Trail near Mecco Road, summer movies, additional playground equipment, and summer concerts. Miller said federal money may be available for the Sullivan Trail bridge project, but Nicholas said she preferred a system that would control traffic lights to allow safe crossings across Sullivan Trail, the township's main north-south road.

Township officials said they got a healthy 21 percent return rate on the surveys. Of the 5,196 surveys sent out, the township got 1,078 back. Not surprisingly, most of the responses came from the township's heavily populated southern half.

Most respondents weren't interested in forming a township garden club to help maintain the community park. Miller said the township was surprised there were more than 150 who supported the idea.

Supervisor David Howell said he originally envisioned that volunteers could help maintain the area around the log cabin near the community center, but said that could be expanded to other areas, like park entrances and the park fountain.

By a slim margin, those responding nixed the idea of a slight increase in property taxes to purchase open space or conservation easements.