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## Palm Coast residents weigh in on recreational needs

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PALM COAST -- Every week, Muriel Solomon makes the 45-minute drive to Daytona Beach College so her gold-medalist daughter Alexis can practice synchronized swimming.

Though the 12-year-old -- who's on the 25-member Flagler County Synchro Belles team - - hones her moves at local pools, a deep water pool is what the nationally recognized group really needs, Muriel Solomon said.

"We live in Florida and we don't even have a dive team here," she said. "That's not good enough."

A vocal Solomon joined about 100 residents Wednesday to weigh in with city-hired consultants on Palm Coast's first ever long-term recreational plan -- prompted by City Manager Jim Landon.

"We need to have some road map on how to get us where we need to be from a recreational standpoint and how we're going to fund that," said John Jackson, recreation and parks director.

Topping the list of recreational needs identified at the meeting were an aquatic center, marinas and boat ramps and a youth and community center.

Consultants Glattig, Jackson, Kercher Anglin -- no relation to John Jackson -- were hired in April at a cost of just under \$100,000, funded by park impact fees paid by new home builders.

The team, which has developed plans for several cities in Florida including Fort Myers and Oviedo, met with the City Council, officials and the leisure services committee this week for input.

They also toured existing facilities, interviewed focus groups culled from regular facility users and will spend the next six months doing telephone surveys and developing a budget and plan to pinpoint the city's recreational priorities, said Carlos Perez, landscape architect at Glattig.

"It's an important part of the city, an important bone structure," Perez said Wednesday.

Attendees filled out a 12-question survey to determine resident needs like recreational activities and facilities needed, and voted on their top three choices.

Residents also noted how they'd be willing to see these paid for. Popular choices were through user fees, grants and public/private partnerships.

But some residents questioned the mostly middle-aged to elderly make-up of meeting attendees and the chance that the area's youths --more than 7,200 between 5 and 15 years old and roughly 11,000 enrolled in school in 2006, according to the U.S. Census Bureau - were not being heard.

Those under 18 were not allowed to vote Wednesday on what they'd like to see in place.

"We're here for the children," said Becky Mitchell, regional vice president of Flagler County Youth Soccer. "We don't need another golf course, we need to provide for the future of this community."

Resident suggestions ranged from making the city more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly with connected trails and leaving school facilities open during the summer, to including young people in the survey.

The city will try to steer Glattig toward more input from older elementary, middle and high school students, Jackson said.

Glattig, Jackson, Kercher Anglin expect to deliver a plan to City Council and the public by Oct. 14, Perez said.

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