



Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B

By Electronic Mail

November 25, 2024

Thennie Freeman, Director
District Department of Parks and Recreation

Delano Hunter, Director
District Department of General Services

RE: Raising Concerns regarding Takoma Aquatic Center Management and Maintenance

Dear Director Freeman and Director Hunter:

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B, at a duly noticed public meeting, with a quorum being the "majority of the total number of commissioner positions currently filled in Commission 4B," at its November 25, 2024, meeting voted with _ Yeas, _ Nays, and _ Abstentions to send this letter expressing concerns regarding management and maintenance at the Takoma Aquatic Center, located at 300 Van Buren Street, NW, within Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B and Single Member District 4B03.

The Takoma Aquatic Center is a beloved community asset, providing a space for recreation, health and fitness, and connection for neighbors of all ages. It has long been a vital resource for our community. Over the years, however, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B has repeatedly raised concerns regarding the management and operations of the Center, which has led to frustration and diminished trust in the Center's ability to serve the public effectively. Despite consistent feedback from the community and formal communications from the Commission, the problems persist. Specifically, the Commission highlights the following ongoing issues:

- **Inconsistent Schedule and Lack of Communication About Closures:** Many neighbors, including those with full-time jobs, rely on a predictable schedule to plan their visits to the pool. Unfortunately, the ongoing lack of a posted schedule has led to significant frustration. Inquiries are often met with vague responses like "the schedule

changes every day," leaving swimmers uncertain about lane availability. Additionally, random pool closures, with no advance notice, exacerbate the issue, leaving residents confused and disappointed. A consistent, well-communicated schedule, along with clear communication regarding closures, would allow residents to better plan their visits and reduce frustration.

- **Chronic Staffing Shortages:** Inconsistent staffing and lack of communication regarding when the pool is open have left families without access to this important amenity. The children's pool, a vital resource for families with young children, in particular, has been subject to irregular hours and sudden closures. This has been an ongoing issue for over a decade, with reports from neighbors indicating that the facility was often closed despite being listed as open on the schedule.
- **Operational and Facility Management Issues:** There have been recurring reports of operational challenges, such as involving non-functional equipment, like pool heaters, needed upgrades to equipment like children's lifejackets, and cleanliness issues. These ongoing issues highlight deeper concerns regarding the management and maintenance of the pool. The continued lack of reliable staffing and properly maintained equipment undermines the pool's ability to consistently meet the needs of the community and maintain its role as a dependable recreational resource.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B has previously raised concerns regarding general maintenance and programming at recreation centers within Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B, including the facilities at Takoma. See [Letter of Inquiry](#), Concerning ANC 4B Recreation Centers (June 25, 2019) ("Some common complaints noted about the Takoma pool and playground areas include locker room cleanliness and frequent thefts from lockers, pool temperature, lifeguard staffing and unavailability of the children's pool, other facilities that are locked during posted open hours (like playground bathrooms), non-functioning splash park, and litter."). In that letter, the Commission noted issues related to cleanliness, inadequate staffing, and pool closures during scheduled hours. Unfortunately, these issues persist at the Takoma Aquatic Center, particularly regarding the inconsistency in the hours of operation and the lack of effective communication with residents.

In light of the above concerns, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B urges the District Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of General Services to take immediate action to address these operational issues. To assist in ensuring the Takoma Aquatic Center can meet the community's needs, the Commission requests the following:

- **Clear Communication, Timely Closure Notices, and Points of Contact:** The Commission requests a reliable and consistent daily schedule for the Takoma Aquatic Center, including information on scheduled maintenance or closures, with updates posted in advance at the Center and on the Department's website, as well as through any available email, social media, or other alert systems. In addition to posting a daily schedule, management should clarify when the open swim area (the large space not demarcated by lanes) is unavailable due to aquatic classes. The Commission also calls for a more transparent policy for notifying the public about unexpected closures,

including clear signage at the Center and use of other communication platforms to notify the community well in advance. Additionally, the Commission requests clear points of contact for the community and Commission to communicate directly with the Aquatic Center, ensuring prompt and accurate responses to inquiries and concerns.

- **Staffing and Lifeguard Coverage:** The Commission urges the District Department of Parks and Recreation to prioritize efforts to maintain adequate staffing levels to keep the Takoma Aquatic Center fully open and accessible to the community. This includes ensuring a consistent and reliable system for staffing lifeguards, particularly during peak hours, to guarantee the safety of all pool users. See [Resolution 4B-23-0902](#), Calling for Extended Outdoor Public Pool Season & Hours (Sept. 26, 2023) (“The Commission recognizes the challenges presented by a national lifeguard shortage, originating in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and appreciates the District Department of Parks and Recreation’s efforts to recruit lifeguards, including a new Junior Lifeguard Academy Program and free lifeguard training and certification for those who intend to work for the Department. Consideration of efforts in other jurisdictions provide additional possible tools for recruitment and retention, including wage increases, bonuses, and other hiring and retention incentives; increased recruitment efforts (including among first responders); bringing lifeguards within the rubric of first responders; and making more efforts to teach swimming to younger children.”). The Commission also requests that there be always adequate staffing for District Department of Parks and Recreation classes and that the class makeup policy be clearly communicated to the public, both in person and online.
- **Maintenance and Facility Management:** The Commission requests that the District Department of Parks and Recreation and the District Department of General Services prioritize regular and proactive facility maintenance at the Takoma Aquatic Center. This includes addressing long-standing issues that have been affecting the Center’s operation and safety for years. Historically, there have been prolonged HVAC repairs that have impacted the comfort and air quality of the facility, as well as delays and disruptions to updates in the weight room and other Center facilities. These issues, along with ongoing concerns about the general upkeep of the pool and surrounding spaces, including the need for new children’s lifejackets, have significantly hindered the Center’s ability to serve the community effectively. The Commission urges both the District Department of Parks and Recreation and the District Department of General Services to work collaboratively to ensure that these maintenance and equipment issues are resolved promptly and consistently, improving the overall quality and safety of the Center for all users.

The Takoma Aquatic Center is an essential part of our neighborhood, and it is vital that it be managed in a way that ensures reliability, safety, and accessibility for all residents. The Commission believes that the issues outlined above need to be addressed with urgency to restore trust and ensure that the pool can once again serve the community effectively.

The Commission appreciates your prompt response to this letter detailing next steps and actions to address the concerns raised. The Commission has voted with _ Yeas, _ Nays, and _ Abstentions to appoint the Commissioner for Single Member District 4B02, Erin Palmer; the Commissioner for Single Member District 4B03, Zurick T. Smith, the Commissioner for Single Member District 4B04, Evan Yeats; and the Commissioner for Single Member District 4B08, Alison Brooks, to be authorized to communicate this letter and represent Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B in communication with you or any DC government entity regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02 Commissioner
Zurick T. Smith, ANC 4B03 Commissioner
Evan Yeats, ANC 4B04 Commissioner
Alison Brooks, ANC 4B08 Commissioner

cc: Marcus Coates, Deputy Director of Recreation Services, District Department of Parks and Recreation
Tommie L. Jones, Jr., Chief of External Affairs, District Department of Parks and Recreation
Deon Moore, Aquatics Division, District Department of Parks and Recreation

Wayne Gore, Community Outreach Coordinator, District Department of General Services

Councilmember Janeese Lewis George (Ward 4)
Emily Cassometus, Senior Counsel, Office of Councilmember Janeese Lewis George

Councilmember Matthew Frumin (Ward 3), Chair, Subcommittee on Recreation and Community Affairs
Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie (At-Large), Member, Subcommittee on Recreation and Community Affairs
Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau (Ward 1), Member, Subcommittee on Recreation and Community Affairs
Joe Dweck, Legislative Assistant, Subcommittee on Recreation and Community Affairs