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Maria Mendez has undergone an amazing recovery since her stroke, in part because of water therapy.

Colleen Armstrong photo

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One lap a time – Lopez Island Pool is making headway

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The Lopez Island Pool project has gained momentum, and the dream of a community pool is getting closer everyday.

The Friends for Lopez Island Pool (FLIP) recently received an important donation: land.

Local builder John Sorenson donated a portion of his land near Lopez School, behind Kevin's Mechanical, for the pool building.

Sorenson, who has been in the islands for 40 years, saw the benefit of a community pool and really wanted to help. "This is something he believes in. He's a nice guy," said Linda Barton, a founding member of FLIP. Because of zoning, the pool will be built behind Sorenson's new complex, which is slated for construction soon.

FLIP has mapped out seven phases for the project. Phase 1: support, education, research; Phase 2: land acquisition. Phase 3: feasibility study, county requirements, vision and drawings; Phase 4: a designed facility; Phase 5: dig; Phase 6: build; Phase 7: fill.

With this land donation, they have progressed to phase 3, attaching a \$21,000 price tag to the feasibility study (which includes ecological impact, insurance coverage, health issues, and more), grant research, county requirements such as storm drain management, and working on drawings.

“We don’t have a total amount for the entire project, but we will have a better idea after the feasibility study,” said Barton. “The two biggest issues are water and money.” FLIP is looking into desalination, rain catchment, and grey water.

The concept of a community pool is not new. It was proposed 15 years ago but never got off the ground. Linda Koenig revived it a year ago, and along with Barton, Robin Bergstrom, and Raiti Waerness they have put in hours and hours of research and fundraising. “We talked to all the recreation programs on the islands. We’ve done a lot of research,” commented Barton.

Some of the input for the pool has included the desire for water park attractions like waterfalls and a diving board. The site will have at least two pools (one therapeutic pool and a heated lap pool), showers, and “any bells and whistles” that the budget will allow. “It’s going to be doable and small. It’s going to be expensive, but it’s going to be unique. It’ll be Lopezian,” said Barton.

“In our research we are finding that we need a certain amount of attractions for families in order to provide revenue,” she said. There will be fees associated with the pool, but a main goal of the project is to provide accessibility to everyone: from kids all the way to the elderly. Lopez Island Pool is a non-profit and is tax exempt, which decreases some of the costs of operation.

FLIP holds monthly community meetings and the schedule is available on its website, www.lopezislandpool.org. “And we (the core group) meet every Tuesday for the rest of our lives! We’re dedicated to doing this,” laughed Barton.

“This is the nicest group of people. We have the best time. We’re completely passionate about this. And so many people are coming forward to help,” she added.

LOPEZ POOL WILL MEET NEED FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY

When Maria Mendez had a stroke two years ago, doctors initially told her she would never walk again.

This Lopez mother of two is now walking with a cane, and says she owes her profound recovery to swim therapy – and a big dose of determination.

“Therapy in the water was so important. One exercise in the pool was like doing two or three on land. You have more movement and can repeat more exercises without getting tired.”

When Mendez received her prognosis, she says, “I never believed it! I put the maximum I could into getting better. I did this for my family, my kids, for myself. I wanted to be the woman I was before. And I know one day I won’t need my cane.”

Mendez has done physical therapy every day since her stroke, and began therapy in the pool while in a wheelchair. She went regularly to the public pool in Anacortes, and worked with Berta Vaughn in the Islander Resort’s hot tub on Lopez. Mendez says she received a lot of help from the community, including volunteers from Lopez Hospice and local churches. “If it wasn’t for all these people I wouldn’t be where I am today. Lopez is the best place to go through something like this. Everyone is so, so kind.”

Mendez is looking forward to using a community pool on the island. “When we have a pool, people will enjoy it and really use it. Especially for older people, who need the company of group exercises. This will help fill a necessity – for kids, seniors, everyone. It is one of my dreams to have a pool here.”

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