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## STAFF FOCUS GROUP, COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP & STAKEHOLDER SUMMARY

Community stakeholder, focus groups and Merriam City Staff interviews were held on May 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> at the community center. A total of 62 people participated in the two days of interviews and represented a cross section of people across the city. PROS Consulting, Confluence and SFS conducted the interviews.

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### COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER SUMMARY

It appears funding options that there are good funding options available that the city can be considered should there be an interest among community members to pursue such a large endeavor to create a new pool and determine what takes place with the existing community center as it applies to reinvention or replacement. There are many questions to be asked and responded to as this planning effort moves forward. The city appears to be open to reasonable alternatives to financing with good economic modeling.

There are mixed emotions in the community as to how progress toward facility development might take place. Some in the community have strong feelings toward retaining the existing community center while others realize it has reached operational obsolescence. To avoid unneeded conflict community stakeholders will need to be kept “in the loop” as discussions proceed to ensure they understand the rationale that takes place when recommendations are offered.

The reflection of some community members is that there are people in the community who like the status quo and the idea of using existing resources as they are improved or reinvented.

People who have a compassionate link to the community center often identify inventive ways to recreate the use. While these are helpful, it will be important that when determining methods to create new use, they recognize the limitations of post construction operational funding. Operation costs in the facility that is determined to be the best fit for the community and the location of placement will have an impact on the city budget. Many feel ease of access for all ages is a critical consideration in the community which may determine the ultimate location of a new facility if developed.

It is important to respect the history of the center. However, the City may need to move on. The use that is currently there isn't perhaps the highest and best use of the location/site. It appears the community would gravitate to something exciting, new, and progressive that is right sized/priced for Merriam that meets the needs of a variety of resident demographics. Something that the people want. The facilities that are created or reinvented need to be designed to attract more families. What is needed in design that will make the facilities more attractive to them...so they get what they are paying for with their tax dollars.

Some community members offered ideas about reinventing the facility into alternative spaces such as office incubators, older adult meeting spaces or as a trail connector. It is important to remember that if a new facility is created it needs to have a focus toward being a true multipurpose community center. The current facility was not initially considered a community center until after the city made the purchase. It was not designed as a community but as a school which limits its program capability.

## STAFF AND COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Focus group participants hold the City of Merriam administration and park and recreation department with high regard. Particular attention was given to the ability of the staff to attend to the needs of the program participants. Customer service skills were rated high among respondents. Community members enjoy the creativity and diversity of programs for young and older residents. While the pool and recreation center are acknowledged to be dated, users hold them in high regard. Residents equally recognize the importance of open space and useful indoor spaces for year-round activity. Aquatic experiences are an important commodity.

Much concern is centered on the aging recreation center and the pool. Users love the benefits these facilities offer to the community however there is significant recognition that they need to be upgraded or replaced. Many feel a similar facility to Matt Ross Community Center in Overland Park would be welcome.

While there is a sincere interest in the creation of a new pool and more functional indoor facilities, focus groups and staff would like to see attention given to financial sustainability with new development. It is important to consider wisely the reinvention of the use of existing spaces and considerations for new creative program spaces when developing new facilities. Economic feasibility is of critical importance. Respondents recognize the importance of the survey and its contribution to knowledge moving forward. Partners need to be selected carefully to ensure they have like interests in the success for those relationships to work in Merriam.

There is an interest in an increase of programs in the arts and expanded opportunities for evening classes. Improved awareness would be beneficial.

Community responses toward facility needs in the community centered on an interest in retaining tennis courts in the neighborhoods. The farmers market is an important element in the community that residents would like to see grow. Some feel there is a need for ball fields of varying types. The availability of varying fitness facility memberships was also mentioned.

Operational and maintenance issues centered on the current pool and community center. Issues most discussed include the gaseous odors, poor water pressure, undersized gym and meeting rooms. Due to the apparent appreciation for the facility, respondents offered comments of possible reinvention of the spaces for other uses.

Responses implied there is a shortage of funding and a desire for new funding from non-residents. There is an awareness that other neighboring communities reap the benefits of expatriate funding and the City of Merriam needs to consider the same. Increased solicitation of the business community to facility memberships would also be a beneficial economic strategy.

While respondents recognize there are costs associated with operating a pool, it is felt as a necessary facility in the community. Should a new aquatics facility be created, choosing the right amenities will be a critical consideration to enhance its use among many demographic interests.

With respect of programs and services addressing changes in Merriam in the future it will be important to ensure priorities exist for the resident and forward thinking takes place when creating new space to avoid regional replication.

There is a strong feeling for creating a new facility, however, continued interest exists when trying to save the existing facility for a practical use. Studies need to take place to understand inherent costs for each strategy.