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Medford city officials think they have a formula that will finance construction of an aquatics center and event and recreation facility on the Wes Howard property without asking voters for a bond levy. It's a similar to the combination of tourism taxes and utility fees that funded construction of the U.S. Cellular sports park, and that has been a financial benefit to the entire community. This project could do the same.

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Medford voters turned down a \$14.5 million bond request in 2012 that would have replaced Hawthorne and Jackson pools, both of which were reaching the end of their useful lives. Hawthorne is gone now, and Jackson is barely functional.

An ambitious plan endorsed by the City Council two weeks ago would build two indoor pools, one of them competition-sized and the other larger than Jackson, two water slides and a massive event and recreation center capable of hosting trade and auto shows and other large events.

The price tag of \$57 million to \$60 million would be covered by an increase in hotel lodging taxes from 9% to 11%, expanding car rental fees that now are charged only at the airport to apply city-wide, and increasing the park utility fee paid by city residents from \$2.95 a month to \$5.35. That works out to less than \$30 a year per household.

U.S. Cellular Community Park, also built with money from hotel taxes and car-rental fees, has generated \$100 million in increased local spending by visiting sports teams since it opened in 2008. A year-round, competition-sized aquatics center would certainly draw swim teams and other visitors, not to mention trade shows and other events that need a large indoor space.

Much of the cost would be borne by out-of-town visitors, as well. It's worth noting that the local hotel industry is supportive of the idea, because the sports park has filled hotel rooms.

The most important reason to support a project like this, beyond the benefit to the local economy from increased visitors, is the unmet need for public swimming facilities for city residents.

In 1988 — 31 years ago — Medford was the only Oregon city over 20,000 population without at least one regulation-sized, indoor swimming pool. It still is.

It won't be long before Jackson Pool can no longer be kept operational. The Howard property offers the opportunity to build a facility that will serve this city for years to come.