

City's pool site known tonight

By DI THOMAS

WODONGA Council makes its decision tonight as to where it will site the city's multi-million aquatic centre development.

The decision comes eight months after the council announced it would build a \$26 million indoor pool centre at Willow Park.

That unleashed a wave of community furore that later forced the abandonment of the site as an option for the development.

The council has not included a recommendation regarding the pool site in its agenda for tonight's council meeting.

But chief executive officer Peter Marshall has said a report will be tabled at the meeting, which begins at 6pm.

Since February the council has considered a shortlist of four options for the aquatic centre: a greenfield site at Whitebox Rise; a redevelopment site at the racecourse; an expansion of the existing Stanley Street pool towards Elgin Boulevard; and, redevelopment of both the Stanley Street pool and the Wodonga Sports and Leisure Centre.

The last option had emerged as the overwhelming preference among more than 400 respondents who made submissions to the council before Christmas.

However, there also appeared to be strong support for the retention of the existing Stanley Street outdoor pool and its expansion to a combined outdoor-indoor facility.

Yesterday, Wodonga Mayor Rod Wangman gave no hint of which site may be preferred, but said the council was looking forward to providing the best facility to serve the community's growing needs.

"Given the level of community interest in this project to date, we would expect that many people will turn out on Monday night to see which site is selected," Cr Wangman said.

"It has been a valuable process of community conversation and we have appreciated the residents of Wodonga providing their views to us."

The pool debate has created more disquiet among Wodonga residents than any other issue in recent years, with the formation of a lobby focused on discouraging the council from pursuing its original preference to site the development at Willow Park.

The anti-pool lobby members collected signatures for a petition and were a strong presence at public meetings held by the council in the wake of concerns expressed about the location and cost of the proposal, which grew to \$33 million.

The council ruled out Willow Park as an option in early February.

The council is also now looking to an initial budget of between \$10 million and \$15 million for the first stage of the aquatic centre project.

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