

From: [Jaime Ries](#)
To: [City Clerk](#)
Subject: Public Comment- City Council Meeting 10/23/23; Agenda Item 7B
Date: Monday, October 23, 2023 12:51:14 PM

Dear Councilmembers,

Thank you for your continued service to our community. My comment is concerning the Proposed Fee Schedule for 2023-24 for the C.V. Starr Community Center (Agenda Item 7B); specifically the increased fee for “Swim Team Lane Hourly Rental.” I’ve met with various members of the C.V. Starr ad hoc committee four times in the past month as a board member for the Mendocino Coast Sea Dragons. I appreciate that the City has been working to find an increase that will not be catastrophic for our organization (and others) and I can see that the proposed fee for hourly lane rental has decreased from \$15/lane/hour to \$13/lane/hour. We appreciate that.

If the City Council votes to pass these fee increases, it will still pose a great financial hardship to our membership—a 53% increase is a significant increase by anyone’s standards. We will, of course, work to find a way to continue to operate our program. But we are now looking at increasing our dues by 20-25% to meet the demand of the new C.V. Starr fees, and unfortunately it may mean that many of our low-income families will no longer be able to afford the swim team.

As you know, Fort Bragg is a low-income community. About 20% of our current swimmers qualify for and pay discounted dues rates as part of our club’s financial assistance program. Since the team started operating in 2009, we have worked hard to make sure that the swim team is accessible to all kids in our community, regardless of income. We have never wanted swimming on the coast to become exclusive and to ensure that it doesn’t we have kept our swimming dues low for all swimmers. In fact, the cost to participate in our entry level swim group is less than the cost of C.V. Starr swimming lessons—with twice the time in the pool.

We would hate for swimming to become the exclusive sport that we have worked so hard to keep it from being. And when families are no longer able to afford the swim team, that impacts our revenue making it even more challenging to pay our operating costs—including fees to the Center.

We’re very aware of the Center’s financial crisis. And we’ve been informed many times that raising fees is the only way for the Center to become financially viable and remain open. I also know that there has recently been discussion about bringing in a consultant to evaluate the Center’s fee structure next year. If that’s the case, then why not engage a consultant now, before adopting this fee increase so that the new fee schedule can be based on expertise rather than well-meaning speculation. I would urge councilmembers to consider this option before voting to adopt the proposed C.V. Starr fee schedule for 2023-24.

Thank you,
Jaime Ries
Mendocino Coast Sea Dragons