

Brooks Family YMCA on schedule, will expand YMCA's offerings
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After breaking ground in November, the Brooks Family YMCA in McIntire Park is taking shape and offering a glimpse of the future functions of the facility.

"There's a lot of progress that we've made in seven months," said Jessica Maslaney, CEO of Piedmont Family YMCA, a nonprofit. "We actually are on schedule to the day of where we should be. We're exactly on budget."

The 79,000-square-foot facility will be home to several amenities, including a 10-lane competition pool, a warm-water family pool, two basketball courts, an indoor walking track, a mind and body studio and a fitness room.

The facility initially was projected to be 77,000 square feet, but due to a well-managed contingency fund, Maslaney said, they will be adding a 2,000-square-foot mezzanine.

The mezzanine's use is still being determined, but it could provide for more fitness floor space or specialized programs, such as physical therapy.

In addition to the new center, the YMCA will be adding 158 parking spaces in front of the facility and relocating the traffic circle to the front of the new building.

Kurt Krueger, chairman of the Piedmont Family YMCA board, said the various offerings of the facility

are part of a larger goal of building community.

“We’re not a gym and swim. We’re not here to provide an alternative fitness facility for folks,” Krueger said. “What we’re here to provide is a community-building experience where you can volunteer, you can coach people, you can meet new people, you can interact with people from all economic parts of the community.”

The concept of building a YMCA in McIntire Park dates back to around 2002, but the current plan started with community meetings that began in 2006. The city granted a 40-year ground lease to the Piedmont Family YMCA in 2008 for \$1 per year.

The Brooks Family YMCA facility faced a lengthy and contentious approval process after receiving the ground lease, however.

It had to overcome two lawsuits that were filed against Albemarle County and Charlottesville by the Charlottesville Fitness Club Owners Association, which argued that county and city donations for construction of the site — which were \$ million and \$ million, respectively — violated the public bidding process required by state law.

The Virginia Supreme Court dismissed the suits in 2013 and found the city and county’s actions to be legal.

The YMCA also faced financial hurdles, but secured final funding for the project in October and broke ground Nov. 5.

“I think a lot of people in the community ... have been anxiously awaiting for us to be able to get this done because they really want to see it happen,” Krueger said.

The project will cost approximately \$19 million. The YMCA has raised about \$8 million for the project and has access to a \$12 million loan from Sonabank, although the organization is anticipating it will only need to draw \$11 million of the loan.

The group is hoping to raise an additional \$6 million to reduce the loan balance and expand its scholarships and program offerings.

Maslaney said the facility’s major focuses will include improving community health, teaching children how to swim, preventing summer learning loss for students, diabetes prevention and “togetherness,” which will involve facilitating community service projects.

“The fitness center is important to us, but the fitness center is a vehicle to deliver the quality programs that the Y is known for,” Maslaney said.

The competitive pool will become the home pool for the Charlottesville High School swim team and the warm-water family recreation pool will be named the Benjamin Hair Just Swim For Life Pool.

Hair was an Albemarle High School graduate and competitive swimmer who passed away in 2009.

“We’ve partnered with the Ben Hair Just Swim For Life Foundation and our shared vision is to provide swim lessons to every second-grader in Albemarle and Charlottesville City schools,” Maslaney said.

Charlottesville High School students will not only be swimming at the facility, but they will be helping to design it. Students in the AVID program will be designing the Y's teen space.

Other potential partners for programming at the facility include the Senior Center, the Boys and Girls Club, the Charlottesville Free Clinic and International Neighbors.

The new facility will move the local YMCA toward becoming a membership-based organization, Krueger said.

"We've never really been a membership-based organization — we've been a program fee-based organization," Krueger said. "Because we're going to be able to offer all of these amenities now, we'll really be able to be a member-based organization, which is where we've been trying to go."

Financial assistance will be available to ensure community members have access to the facility.

"No one is turned away from the Y for economic reasons," Krueger said. "Anyone who wants to be a member of the Y — irrespective of their ability to pay — can be a member of the Y and participate in our programs."

The YMCA estimates it will have about 1,000 membership units — which includes both families and individuals — when the facility opens next year.

The Crozet YMCA, by comparison, is 6,800 square feet and has 930 membership units, so Maslaney labeled the estimate for the Brooks Family YMCA as conservative.

At the McIntire Park facility, the concrete foundations and walls are completed, the structural steel skeleton is almost finished and the pools have been excavated, with concrete slabs for each pool being set.

In its most recent construction report, the Brooks Family YMCA said it expects significant progress within the next 90 days on exterior and interior masonry, in addition to work on the roof installation and pool construction.

Construction is on schedule for a completion date of May 1, and Krueger said they hope to have the facility open within 30 days of completion.

The Piedmont Family YMCA's current offerings, such as childcare at the Jefferson School and the Crozet YMCA, will continue to operate when the new facility opens.

"The bottom line is we really want to be focused on a volume of programs that meets all ages, all demographics, all income levels and provides services for all," Maslaney said.