



Outdoor Aquatics Park Survey Results for



July 2025





Executive Summary

The City of Marion conducted a community survey in the summer of 2025 to gather resident input on the design, amenities and funding for a proposed new aquatic center. The survey received 3,240 responses, representing a 17.5% response rate from invited households, with a +/- 1.76% margin of error. Respondents represented a broad range of ages, with the largest participation from residents aged 65+ (40%), followed by those 55-64 years old (18%) and 35-44 years old (17%).

Key Findings:

- Strong community interest in replacing the existing pool with a new aquatic facility.
- Highest support for core amenities: recreation pool, lazy river, lap pool, and dive pool.
- Conditional support for funding through user fees and discounted season passes for Marion residents; mixed opinions on tax-based funding.
- Varied views on the proposed location and on higher-cost features such as the wave pool and ninja course.

Comment Themes:

Comments reflected both strong support and significant concerns about the project. Many residents expressed enthusiasm for a modern aquatic facility, noting the need to replace the aging pool and provide updated recreational options. Others raised cost concerns, especially the potential impact of property tax increases on residents - particularly seniors with fixed income. Some questioned the scope of the project, suggesting a simpler, less expensive facility would be preferable. The proposed location drew mixed reactions, with supporters citing accessibility and detractors expressing worries about traffic, walkability and distance from central neighborhoods.

Comment Analysis:

Of the 3,240 total survey respondents, 1,073 participants (33%) left at least one comment. The prevailing themes are included within this report. A major theme is identified when participants reference similar suggestions, ideas or concerns. Because these themes represent diverse opinions, they may not align with each other.



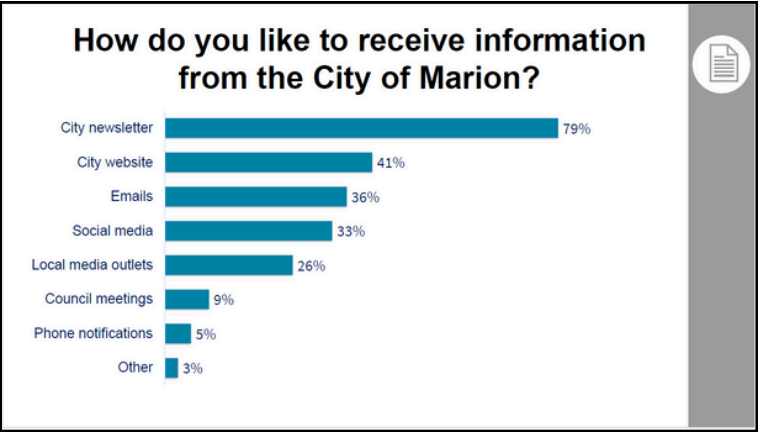
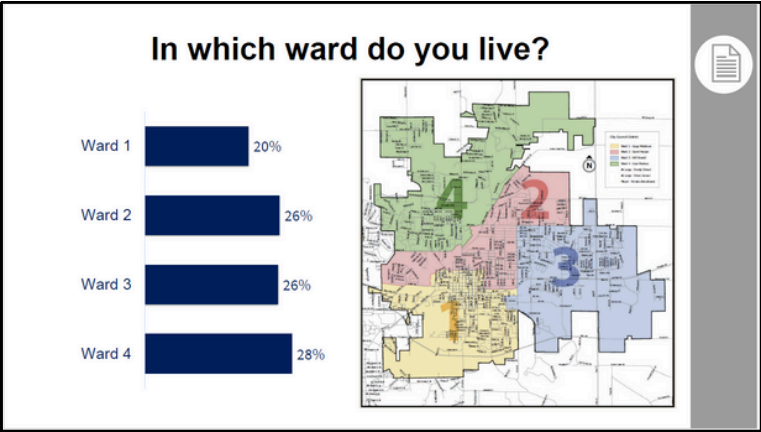
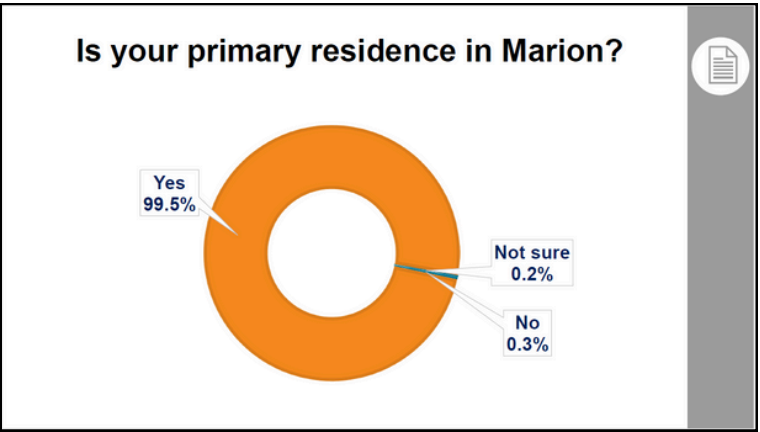
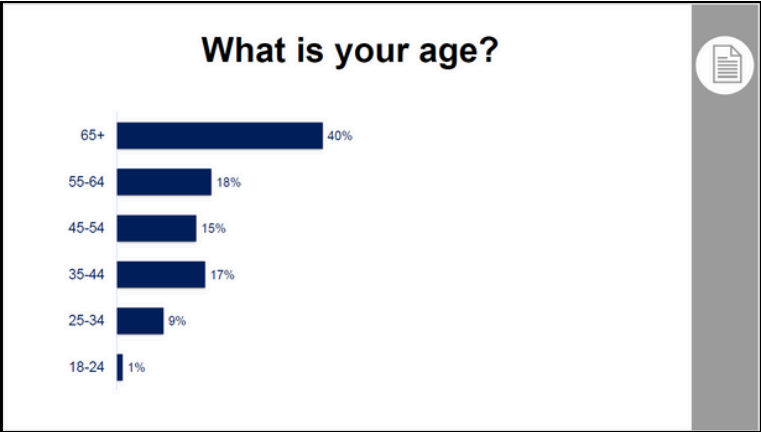


Methodology

The City of Marion partnered with Community Perceptions, an independent research firm, to gather confidential feedback through a series of questions. A paper copy of the survey was mailed to 17,638 Marion households during the second week in July 2025 and residents had until July 28, 2025, to respond by mail or online using a unique survey code.

The results were compiled by the research firm and will be used to help inform the City Council as they determine whether or not to pursue a referendum in November 2025 to fund the construction of an outdoor aquatics park.

Respondent Information



The survey provided the following overview of pool challenges.





The Marion Pool opened in 1987 with a lap pool, shallow wading pool, and shallow training pool. The City added a splash pad in 2001.

An outside consultant evaluated the pool facilities in 2021 and found issues including:

- Concrete failure inside the pools and in walking areas
- Broken pipes
- Outdated mechanical and filtration systems that are difficult to maintain and service
- Skylight panels in the locker rooms that break
- Outdated entryway
- Worn lighting and finishes

These issues are making it more expensive to operate the pool. In recent years, the pool's revenue has only covered half of its expenses, with Marion taxpayers covering the difference. As our facility ages and neighboring communities invest in new aquatic centers, the use of the Marion Pool has declined.

Expanding or replacing the pool at the current location is not possible due to its proximity to homes in the Willowood neighborhood and parking limitations.

For all of these reasons, the City does not believe continuing to invest in the Marion Pool at Willowood Park is a good use of taxpayer dollars. As a result, the City will likely have to close the pool permanently the next time there is a major equipment failure.

After the pool closes, the City intends to remove the pool and replace it with a playground, splash pad, and parking area funded through the normal capital improvement process.

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to share comments/suggestions/questions.

Comments, questions, and/or suggestions about pool challenges

General Positive Feedback: Respondents express support for the City's plan to move forward with a new aquatics park. They state that a new or updated pool is necessary for the community.

Cost Concerns: Commenters express concern over the financial burden of the project on taxpayers. They state that property taxes are already too high and oppose further increases to fund the facility. These responses argue that the cost of the project is excessive and unaffordable for residents.

Planning Criticism: Respondents suggest that a lack of proper maintenance on the current pool created the current situation and question the City's spending priorities. The comments also mention a perceived lack of transparency and a failure to listen to residents.

Location Concerns: These comments focus on the proposed location for the new aquatics park. Respondents argue the new site is not centrally located, making it difficult or unsafe for children to walk or bike to. They value the accessibility of the current neighborhood pool location.

Fees, Revenue, and Affordability: Respondents ask for clarity on how the facility will be funded long-term and what user fees will be. They express concern that high admission fees will make the new facility unaffordable for some families. Commenters question the financial sustainability of the new aquatics park, including its projected revenue and operational costs.

Suggestions for Amenities: Respondents provide suggestions for features to include in the project. The most common suggestions are for a splash pad and a new playground and for pickleball courts at the old pool site. Other ideas include community gardens and picnic shelters.

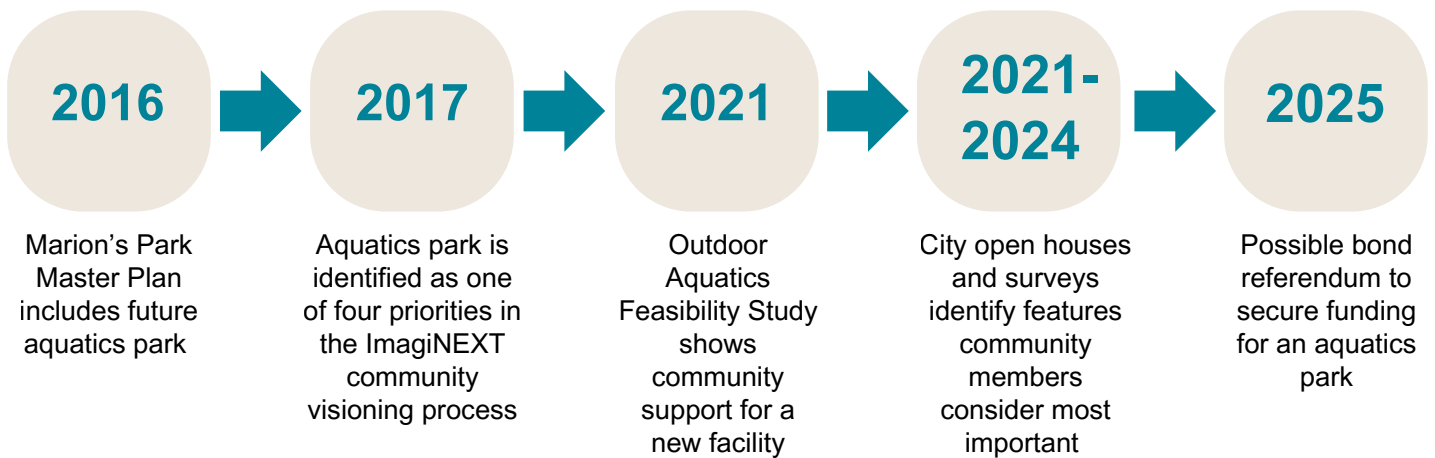
Maintaining the Existing Pool: Some comments advocate for keeping a pool at the current Willowood Park location. Respondents suggest that repairing, renovating, or completely rebuilding on the existing site is a better and more cost-effective option than building a new facility elsewhere. They question the assertion that rebuilding in the same spot is not possible.

Opposition to Having a Pool: These responses state that the City does not need a public pool. They suggest closing the current facility without building a replacement. The commenters argue that a pool is an unnecessary luxury and that other options for swimming exist in the area.

Desire for More Information: Respondents request more detailed information from the City before they can make an informed decision. They ask for a clear comparison of the costs to repair the old pool versus building a new one. Commenters also want to see data on projected operational costs and attendance.



Planning Background



Proposed Aquatics Park

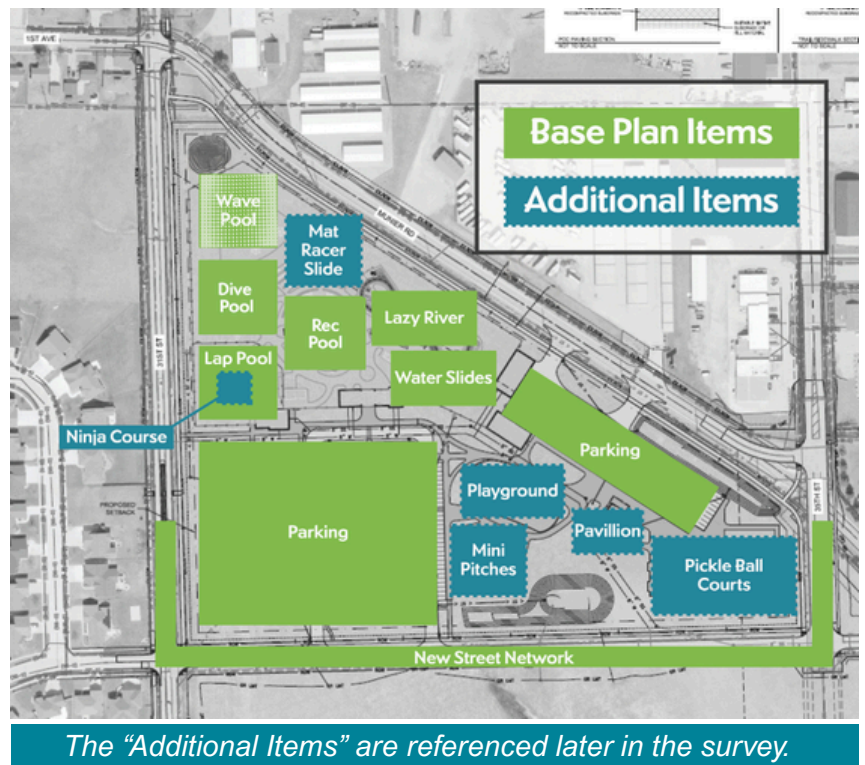
Based on the last four years of community input, the City created a plan for an aquatics park. The base project would include the following amenities:

- Recreation pool
- Lazy river
- Water slides
- Lap pool
- Dive pool
- Wave pool*
- Parking
- Street network

To read more about each of these features, visit www.cityofmarion.org/aquaticspark.

Marion residents would pay a discounted rate for season passes to the new aquatics park.

*The City asked residents to consider two options for the base project - one with the wave pool and one without.



Location

The 2021 study indicated the best location for an aquatic facility would be on land bordered by 31st Street, 35th Street, and Munier Road (north of Highway 100). The City has an agreement to purchase this land.

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to share comments/suggestions/questions.

Comments, questions, and/or suggestions about the City of Marion's planning and proposed aquatics park

Funding Concerns: Respondents express concern about the project's high cost and the impact of increased property taxes on residents, particularly those on fixed incomes. These commenters question the use of public funds for what they perceive as an extravagant facility and desire fiscal responsibility from the City. Some suggest that Marion should find alternative funding sources or stay within its existing budget.

Proposed Location: Respondents share divided opinions on the proposed location. Some view the site as good and accessible, while others criticize it for being inconvenient and poorly situated for a city that is expanding northward. Overall, the location is a significant point of debate among commenters.

Scope and Scale: Commenters express that the proposed aquatics park is too large, expensive, and excessive for a city pool. They compare the proposal to a private amusement or water park and suggest that a simpler, less elaborate facility would be more appropriate and affordable. A recurring sentiment is the desire to simply replace the existing pool with comparable, updated features.

Wave Pool: The wave pool is a polarizing feature. Opponents raise concerns about the feature's safety, liability, and high operational and maintenance costs. Supporters see the wave pool as a standout attraction that would draw visitors and make the project worthwhile.

Traffic and Infrastructure Concerns: Commenters are concerned that the new facility will create significant traffic congestion on nearby roads, particularly 31st Street and Highway 100. They question whether the current road network can handle the increased volume and ask about plans for turning lanes, stoplights, or other infrastructure improvements. These concerns extend to the impact on the daily commutes of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Pedestrian and Bicyclist Accessibility: There is concern that the proposed location is not safely accessible for children and families who walk or bike. Respondents question how people, especially younger residents, can navigate busy streets to reach the park without a car. They advocate for the inclusion of sidewalks, trails, and safe crossings to connect the facility to residential areas.

Role of Government vs. Private Enterprise: Respondents question whether a project of this scale is an appropriate venture for a municipal government. They suggest that such a facility is more suitable for private investment and operation. The comments argue that the City should not use taxpayer money to build or compete with commercial water parks.

Ongoing Operations: Commenters express concerns about the long-term operational viability of the proposed facility. They question the City's ability to cover ongoing costs for staffing, insurance, and maintenance, especially given the project's large scale and seasonal use. The potential for future deferred maintenance and continued taxpayer subsidization is a key point of apprehension.



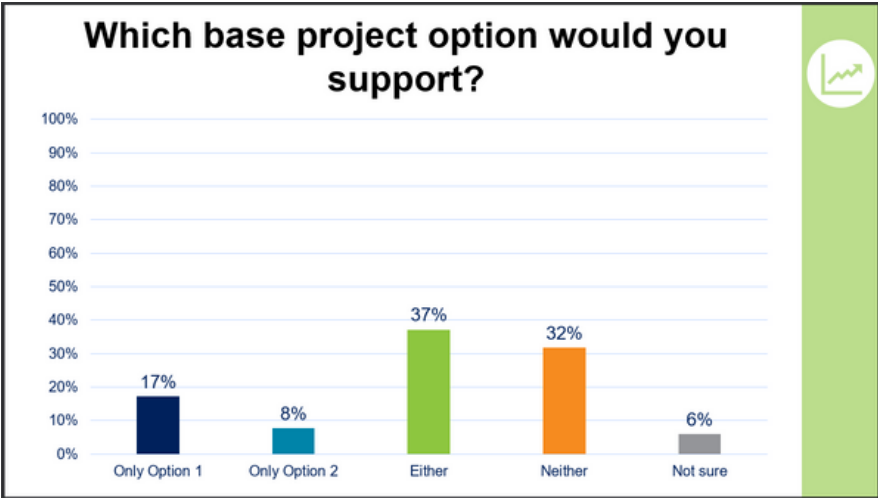
Funding Support

The cost of including the wave pool is approximately \$3.6 million. To pay for the **base project**, the City of Marion would need to secure funding through a voter-approved bond referendum. The City will also pursue other funding opportunities like grants and sponsorships.

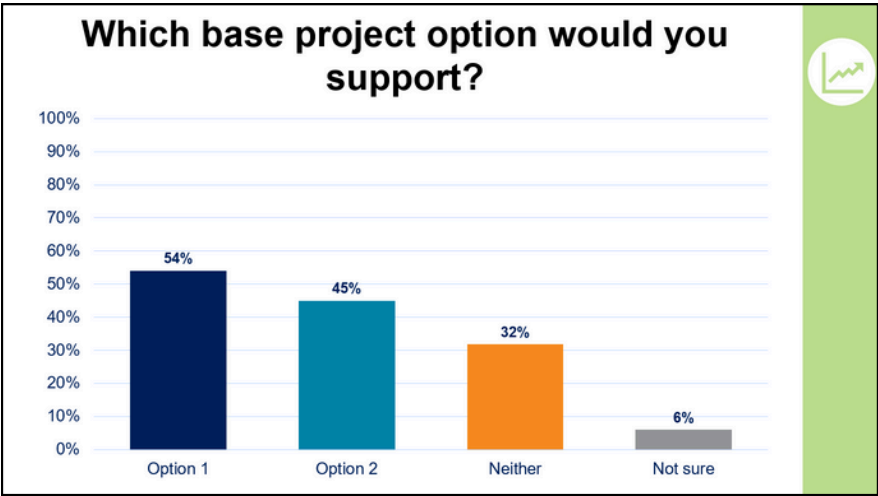
The table at the right shows the tax impact of both versions of the **base project**. The bond financing assumes repayment over 20 years.

Respondents were asked which base project option they would support.

Estimated <u>Annual</u> Tax Increase			
Type of Property	Assessed Value	Option 1 (Base Project without Wave Pool) \$42.4 million	Option 2 (Base Project with Wave Pool) \$46 million
Residential	\$100,000	\$75	\$81
	\$200,000	\$150	\$162
	\$350,000	\$262	\$284
	\$500,000	\$374	\$405
Commercial	\$350,000	\$396	\$429
	\$550,000	\$679	\$737
	\$850,000	\$1,104	\$1,198



When combining the 37% of respondents who were in support of either option, the breakdown is as follows.



Survey respondents were asked to elaborate if they were undecided or would not support the referendum. In addition, they were asked if they needed additional information.

If you are undecided or would not support the bond referendum, what are the main reasons?

Opposition to Tax Increases: This tax burden is a primary source of opposition and makes residents unwilling to support the bond. Respondents express that property taxes are already too high, and they oppose any further increase to fund the project. The sentiment is that the City should operate within its existing budget rather than asking for more from taxpayers.

High Project Cost: Respondents believe the overall cost of the proposed aquatics park is too expensive and unreasonable for a community of Marion's size. The price tag is seen as excessive, leading to concerns that the project is not a responsible use of funds. This objection to the total cost is distinct from the objection to using taxes as the funding mechanism.

Project Scope: Respondents feel the proposed plans are too elaborate and contain unnecessary features, such as a lazy river, multiple separate pools, and ninja courses. A simpler, more basic pool replacement is a more acceptable alternative for these individuals. The project's scale is viewed as an attempt to be a regional water park rather than a community pool. More specifically, respondents cite the wave pool as being unnecessary, too expensive, and a potential safety and liability risk. Removing this single feature is seen by some as a way to make the project more acceptable.

Lack of Personal Use: Some respondents state they will not use the facility, often because they do not have children, their children are grown, or they have no interest in public pools. Because they do not anticipate personal or family benefit from the aquatic center, they are unwilling to contribute financially to its construction through taxes.

Location Concerns: The location of the proposed aquatic center is a concern. Some respondents describe the site as not centrally located, inaccessible for children to walk or bike to safely, and poorly situated in a remote area. Some nearby residents also share concerns about traffic and noise.

Financial Burden for Fixed-Income Residents: Seniors and residents on fixed incomes state they cannot afford an increase in their property taxes. They note that rising costs are already a strain on their budgets and that they will not personally use the facility. This group feels the project does not consider their financial limitations.

Alternative Funding Sources: Respondents suggest that the project should be funded through sources other than a property tax bond. These suggestions include private developers, grants, corporate sponsorships, or user fees that place the financial burden on those who will actually use the facility. The belief is that, if the project is viable, it should not rely solely on taxpayer money.

Distrust: Respondents express a lack of trust in Marion's ability to manage finances responsibly. They cite past projects, a perceived pattern of wasteful spending, and a lack of transparency as reasons for their skepticism.

Ongoing Costs: Respondents raise concerns about the long-term financial viability of the aquatics park. This includes the ongoing costs of maintenance, staffing, and insurance liability. They question whether the facility will be self-sustaining or will require continuous tax subsidies to operate.

Is there any other information you would need before making a decision?

Financial Details: Respondents request more information regarding the long-term financial plan for the proposed aquatics park. They ask for details on annual operating and maintenance costs, projected revenue from admission fees, and profit and loss statements. A core part of this theme is the desire to know if the facility can operate without being a continuous financial burden on taxpayers.

Taxation Concerns: Respondents express opposition to an increase in property taxes to fund the project. These comments argue against using taxpayer money for what they see as a non-essential amenity.

No Additional Information Needed: Respondents indicate that they do not need any more information to make their decision. This category includes simple “No” or “Nope” answers as well as statements that their mind is already made up, typically in opposition to the project. These responses suggest that further details will not change their position.

Cost Reduction: Respondents suggest the City explore less expensive or different options. Common suggestions include repairing or upgrading the existing pool, building a smaller and more basic facility, or reallocating the funds to higher-priority city needs like roads or schools. This theme reflects a desire for a more fiscally conservative approach to the project.

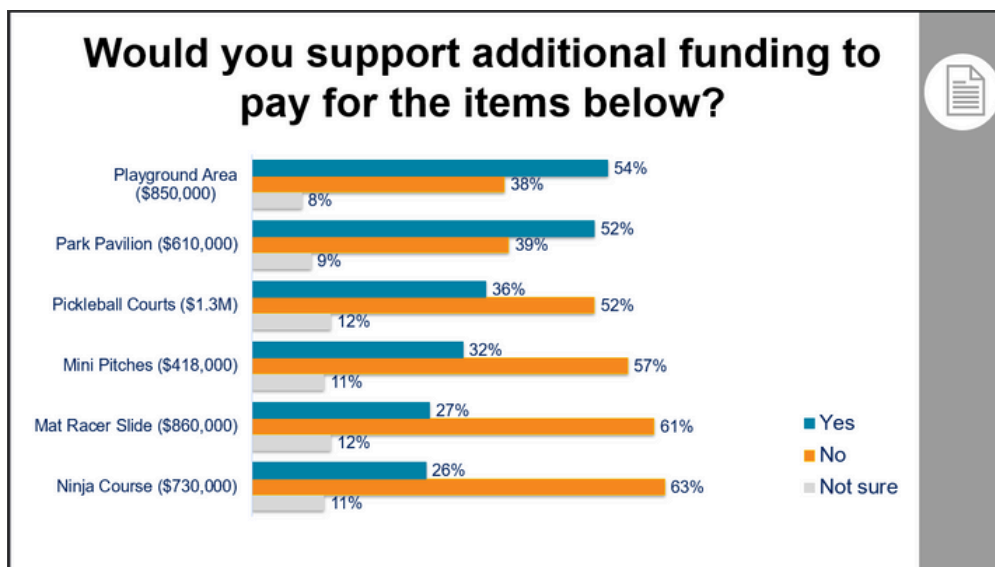
Admission Fees: Respondents ask about the proposed cost for admission, season passes, and other user fees. A prominent point within this theme is the expectation that Marion residents receive free access or a significant discount since they are funding the construction through their taxes. They want to ensure the facility remains affordable for the residents who pay for it.

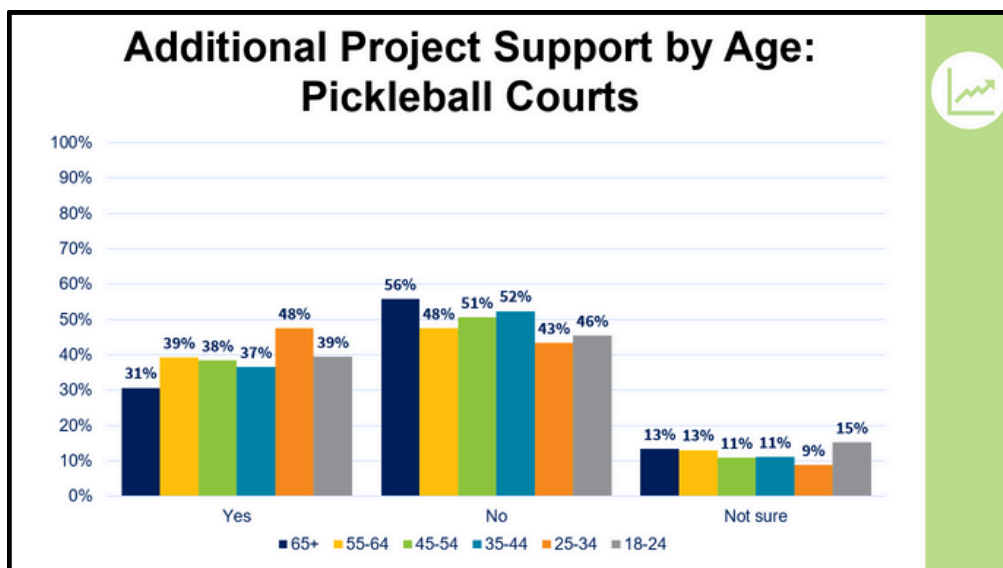
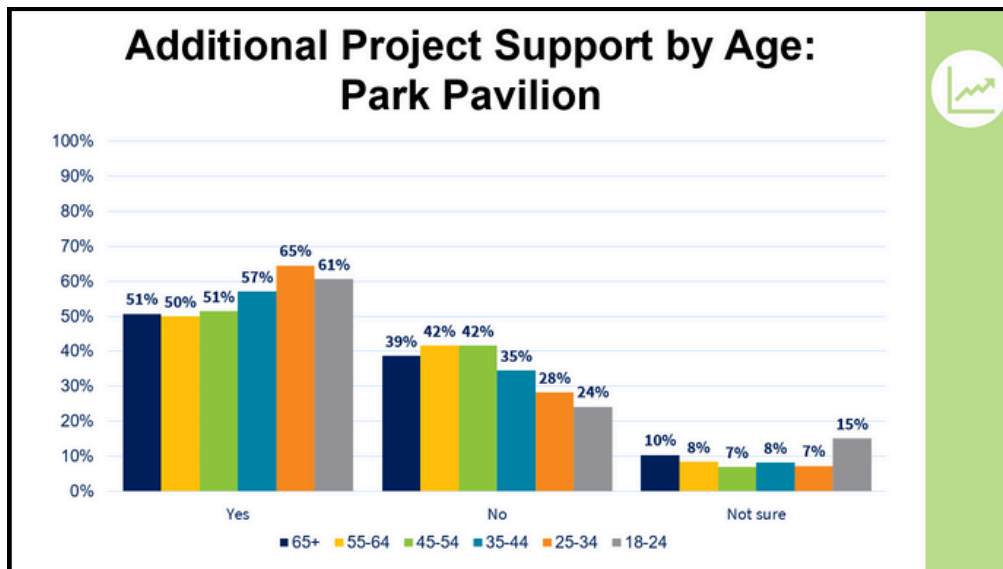
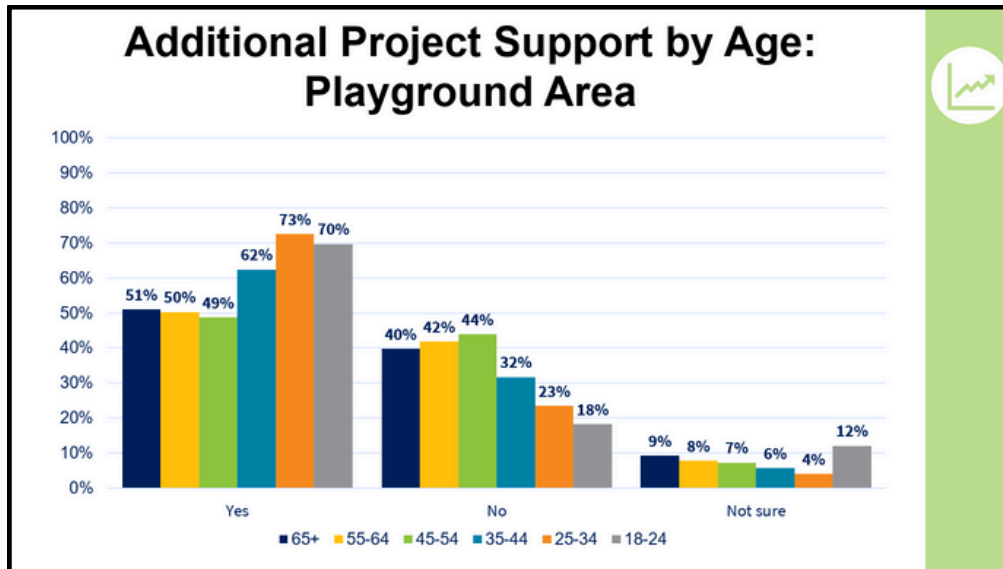
Concerns about the Wave Pool: Respondents voice specific reservations about including a wave pool. The concerns center on safety risks, particularly for children, as well as the potential for increased liability, insurance costs, and long-term maintenance expenses. Some respondents feel the risks and costs of this specific feature outweigh its benefits.

Additional Items

In addition to the base aquatic facility features, residents were asked to share their level of interest in several optional amenities that could be included if budget and space allow. These items included pickleball courts, a playground area, a park pavilion, mini pitches, a ninja course and a mat racer slide.

<p>12 Pickleball Courts (Estimated cost: \$1.3 million) Build 12 dedicated pickleball courts with shade, seating, nearby restrooms, and a drinking fountain. <i>This would add \$2.32 to property taxes annually per \$100,000 of residential property.</i></p>
<p>Playground Area (Estimated cost: \$850,000) Build a playground designed for children ages 2-12 with a rubberized surface. <i>This would add \$1.52 to property taxes annually per \$100,000 of residential property.</i></p>
<p>Park Pavilion (Estimated cost: \$610,000) Build an open-air pavilion with tables and grills. <i>This would add \$1.09 to property taxes annually per \$100,000 of residential property.</i></p>
<p>Mini Pitches (Estimated cost: \$418,000) Build two mini-fields designed for soccer and basketball. <i>This would add \$0.75 to property taxes annually per \$100,000 of residential property.</i></p>
<p>Ninja Course (Estimated cost: \$730,000) Build an "American Ninja Warrior"-style obstacle course over the lap pool with interchangeable parts. <i>This would add \$1.30 to property taxes annually per \$100,000 of residential property.</i></p>
<p>Mat Racer Slide (Estimated cost: \$860,000) Build two side-by-side "racing" slides. <i>This would add \$1.54 to property taxes annually per \$100,000 of residential property.</i></p>





Survey respondents were also given the opportunity to share comments/suggestions/questions.



Comments, questions, and/or suggestions about the additional items

Cost Concerns: Respondents express significant concern regarding the project's cost and its impact on property taxes. The comments question the project's affordability for residents, particularly families and seniors, and suggest Marion find alternative funding sources rather than raising property taxes.

Redundancy of Proposed Amenities: This theme reflects the view that many of the proposed non-aquatic amenities are unnecessary because similar facilities already exist within Marion or the surrounding area. Respondents point to existing parks, playgrounds, soccer fields, and pickleball courts as sufficient for the community's needs.

Opposition to Pickleball Courts: A group of comments specifically questions the proposal for 12 pickleball courts. Respondents label the sport as a fad, question the demand, suggest a smaller number of courts, or state that the amenity is not a good use of space and money. These comments indicate a belief that the investment in pickleball is disproportionate to its long-term value.

Desire to Focus on Aquatics: Respondents in this group believe the project's primary focus needs to be on aquatic features. They state that if the City is building an aquatic center, the non-water-related amenities like sports courts and extensive playgrounds are a distraction from the main purpose. The comments suggest that non-aquatic features belong in other City parks, not as part of this complex.

Longevity Concerns: Respondents question how ongoing upkeep will be funded and managed, and they raise issues about the potential for high insurance and liability costs, especially for features like the Ninja Course. There is also concern that some amenities are trends that will not be utilized in the future.

Specific Critiques: These comments single out the ninja course and mat racer slide as unnecessary, expensive, and a potential liability. Respondents feel these features are extravagant "add-ons" that interfere with the primary function of a community pool, such as lap swimming. The feedback questions the practicality and safety of these specific attractions.

Project Logistics: Respondents raise logistical questions about how the facility will operate. These questions relate to the project timeline, potential revenue generation, staffing needs, and what the admission fees or access rules will be for residents. The comments show a desire for more detailed operational and financial planning information from Marion.

Alternative Amenities: This theme includes specific suggestions for different amenities or improvements, including features like mini-golf, a splash pad, year-round indoor facilities, more shade structures, or different types of sports courts like tennis.

Project Location Concerns: These comments criticize the proposed location of the facility. The location is described as being on the edge of town, inconvenient, and inaccessible for children and residents who cannot drive there. The feedback points to a lack of pedestrian and bicycle access, which limits its use as a true community resource.



Project Cost Summary

The total cost of the **base project with the wave pool and all additional features** is approximately \$50.8 million. Understanding that doing all of this at one time may not be realistic, respondents were asked to provide input to determine how much, if any, can be done at this time.

Projects	Cost
Base project	
Aquatics Park without Wave Pool	\$42.4 Million
Aquatics Park with Wave Pool	\$46 Million
Additional items	
12 Pickleball Courts	\$1.3 Million
Playground Area	\$850,000
Park Pavilion	\$610,000
Mini Pitches	\$418,000
Ninja Course	\$730,000
Mat Racer Slide	<u>\$860,000</u>
Combined total cost	\$50.8 Million

Tax Impact for Additional Features

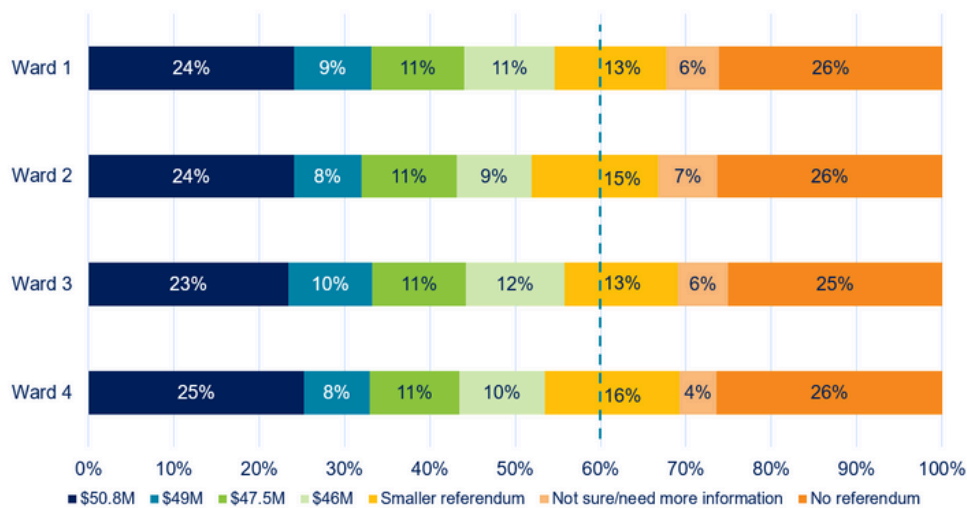
ESTIMATED ANNUAL PROPERTY TAX INCREASE FOR EACH BOND REFERENDUM AMOUNT					
Type of Property	Assessed Value	\$46 million	\$47.5 million	\$49 million	\$50.8 million
Residential	\$100,000	\$81	\$84	\$87	\$90
	\$200,000	\$162	\$168	\$173	\$180
	\$350,000	\$284	\$293	\$303	\$314
	\$500,000	\$405	\$419	\$433	\$448
Commercial	\$350,000	\$429	\$443	\$458	\$474
	\$550,000	\$737	\$760	\$786	\$814
	\$850,000	\$1,198	\$1,236	\$1,278	\$1,355

Respondents were asked which bond referendum amount they would support, assuming the projects were acceptable to them. They also had an opportunity to provide comments/questions and suggestions.

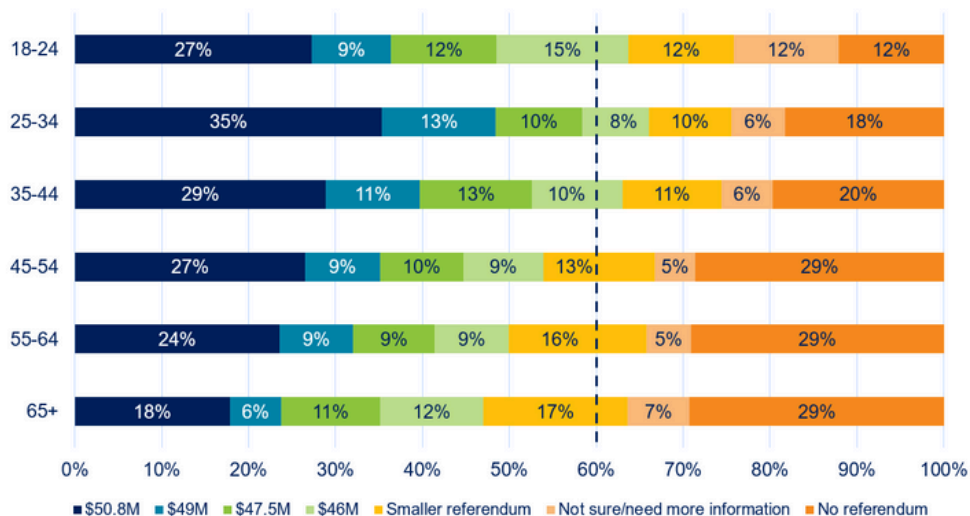
Support by Referendum Amount



Referendum Support by Ward



Referendum Support by Age



Comments, questions, and/or suggestions about funding support for the additional features

Opposition to Tax Increases: Respondents express that property taxes are already too high, and they are unwilling or unable to pay more. They state opposition to any bond referendum or project that results in a tax increase. This sentiment is linked to the current economic climate and the existing tax burden on residents.

Request for More Information: Respondents request more detailed information before they can support the project. They ask for specifics on operating and maintenance costs, revenue projections, admission fees, and the data used to make financial assumptions.

Project Scope Concerns: Respondents believe the overall cost of the proposed project is too high and the scope is too extravagant for the community. The comments describe the plans as overpriced, wasteful, or unnecessarily large for Marion.

Desire for a Smaller or Phased Project: Respondents suggest that the City pursues a smaller, more modest, or scaled-back version of the project. They recommend building the project in phases or focusing only on a basic replacement for the existing pool without extensive additions.

Suggestions for Alternative Funding: Respondents propose funding the project through methods other than a property tax increase. Suggestions include using sales tax, grants, corporate sponsorships, private donations, or implementing a user-pay model where admission fees cover the costs.

Support for Community Amenities: Respondents express support for the project as a valuable investment in the community's growth and quality of life. They see the proposed aquatics park as a necessary amenity that attracts families and keeps Marion competitive.

In Summary

Key Findings:

- Strong community interest in replacing the existing pool with a new aquatic facility.
- Highest support for core amenities: recreation pool, lazy river, lap pool, and dive pool.
- Conditional support for funding through user fees and discounted season passes for Marion residents; mixed opinions on tax-based funding.
- Varied views on the proposed location and on higher-cost features such as the wave pool and ninja course.

Comment Themes:

Comments reflected both strong support and significant concerns about the project. Many residents expressed enthusiasm for a modern aquatic facility, noting the need to replace the aging pool and provide updated recreational options. Others raised cost concerns, especially the potential impact of property tax increases on residents - particularly seniors with fixed income. Some questioned the scope of the project, suggesting a simpler, less expensive facility would be preferable. The proposed location drew mixed reactions, with supporters citing accessibility and detractors expressing worries about traffic, walkability and distance from central neighborhoods.

Next Steps:

Marion City Council will determine whether or not to pursue a referendum in November 2025 to fund the construction of an outdoor aquatics park.

