

MERRIAM PARKS & RECREATION FACILITIES UPDATE



The photo above shows Merriam residents laying the cornerstone for Merriam School in 1911. After serving as Johnson County's first K-12 school, then as home to other public institutions (including Johnson County Community College), the structure became part of the current Irene B. French Community Center (IBFCC) in 1989.

Through multiple additions and modifications, floods, systems failures, and expensive repairs, the city struggles to keep the old school building in service, and now the facility is at the end of its useful life. The IBFCC was originally designed for use as a school, and not meant to support the traffic and constant activity of a modern community center where people come to exercise, learn, enjoy art, celebrate, and more.

The Merriam Aquatic Center (MAC) also faces serious age-related issues. The pool and filter house are more than 30 years old, while the bath house is 55 years old. The city commissioned maintenance studies on both facilities to better understand the extent of failing structures and systems. Findings indicate that neither facility provides adequate access to people with disabilities, and extensive, costly repairs are needed to continue safely operating the IBFCC and the MAC.

There are several different ways to make an informed decision about the future of these recreation facilities. During the past year, city staff worked with consultants to develop various scenarios for moving forward. Residents were given opportunities to express what they want for their recreation

facilities, and how the city should provide these services to future generations. The results of these activities made it clear that existing facilities do not meet the community's needs.

Merriam residents deserve and expect high quality recreation services and amenities in safe, durable, modern facilities that are cost-effective to maintain and operate over time. The city cannot meet these expectations if it continues the practice of making expensive, unplanned repairs to the IBFCC and MAC.

Fortunately, there are options...

