

Frequently Asked Questions: Future of Banta Activity Center & Senior Programming

What is the plan for senior programming?

The City of Valparaiso and Valpo Parks are dedicated to providing exceptional senior programming. We believe relocating our senior programs to a more modern and accessible facility will enhance the quality and scope of offerings for our community.

Why is the Parks Department considering selling the Banta Activity Center?

For several years, we've explored relocating senior programming to a more accessible and efficient space. This remains a priority. Additionally, the 100-year-old Banta Activity Center faces significant structural and cosmetic issues, creating a considerable financial burden on the Parks Department's operating and capital budgets. A 2019 assessment estimated over \$3 million in necessary renovations.

What happened to the Adult Center for Enrichment (ACE)?

The Adult Center for Enrichment (ACE) was a component of the prior "Valpo for All Generations" campaign. Recognizing the significant cost associated with new construction and the potential for a more multi-faceted use of space, the team is exploring renovation of existing facilities as an alternative. This revised approach allows for fiscal responsibility while maintaining the Park Board's strong commitment to high-quality senior programming.

Why did the Valpo Parks Board return the donated land near the YMCA to the Urschel Development Corporation?

The Valpo Parks Board returned the donated land near the YMCA to the Urschel Development Corporation due to the terms of the agreement approved in April 2023. This agreement stipulated the transfer of 4.78 acres for the construction of an Adult Center for Enrichment, with the project to be completed within sixty months of the closing date. Given these terms and the Park Board's revised position on the project, the land was deemed no longer necessary for Valpo Parks' current strategic direction.

Why weren't the \$10 million rePLAY funds used to renovate the Banta Activity Center?

The decision regarding the allocation of the unprecedented \$10 million rePLAY funds for park improvements involved several key considerations. While the Park Board, staff, and stakeholders greatly appreciate the opportunity to reinvest in our park system, it was determined that allocating these funds to address broader, more critical needs would have the greatest impact on most residents and visitors, while maximizing the reach of the investment. These priorities included playgrounds, shelters, restrooms, parking, ADA accessibility, ballfields, and pickleball courts. Investing in the Banta Activity Center would have had a limited impact, given the substantial cost required to address the significant issues identified in the 2019 assessment. Furthermore, this allocation strategy aligned with the anticipated relocation of senior programming.

What is an RFP process?

A Request for Proposal (RFP) is a formal process in which Valpo Parks solicits detailed proposals from potential buyers for the Banta Activity Center. This allows us to clearly communicate our requirements, evaluate proposals based on various factors (not just price), ensure a fair and transparent process, and understand each buyer's vision for the property.

Who will decide which proposal is selected?

Submitted proposals will be opened, and public input will be received at the Park Board meeting on July 29th. Parks staff will review all proposals and provide a recommendation to the Park Board on August 26th. The Valpo Parks Board ultimately reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals.

What other commissions or councils are involved in the decision-making?

Any awarded Real Estate Purchase Agreement will be contingent upon the purchaser obtaining approval to rezone the property from its current Public Space (PS) designation by both the Plan Commission and City Council to accommodate their proposed use. Therefore, the Park Board, Plan Commission, and City Council will all have a role in the outcome.

How soon could an ownership transition occur?

A transition of ownership is contingent upon several factors, including:

- The proposed project will not negatively impact the Banta neighborhood's residential character.
- The existing building will not be demolished.
- Valpo Parks will retain ownership of the northern park, playground, and green space.
- Senior programming will continue uninterrupted in the current building for a minimum of three years, and up to five years, or until a suitable alternate location is established.
- The property will be successfully rezoned to align with the buyer's intended purpose.

What will happen to the playground and green space?

Valpo Parks will retain ownership of the park, playground, and greenspace located on the northern portion of the property. Any proposal must ensure these areas are not negatively impacted.

What opportunities will there be for public comment on this matter?

The public is welcome to share comments at any Board of Works, City Council, or Park Board meeting. You can also email Park Director Kevin Nuppnau at knuppnau@valpo.us. Specific agenda items related to this topic will be discussed at the Park Board meetings on Tuesday, April 29th, Tuesday, May 27th, Tuesday, July 29th, and Tuesday, August 26th. Additionally, public comment will be available at subsequent Plan Commission and City Council meetings if/when this item is placed on their agenda.

Are there any individuals or groups that have shown interest in the building?

Valpo Parks has had preliminary discussions with various government entities, non-profits, and private developers who have expressed interest in acquiring the Banta Activity Center, each with unique ideas for its future use. All interested parties will be required to follow the established Request for Proposal (RFP) process and present their proposals to the Park Board for consideration. Valpo Parks is hopeful that several strong proposals will emerge.

What will the Parks do with the funds from the sale?

Funds generated from the sale of the property will be dedicated to future park improvements.

How many Banta Activity Center members are there? How many attend daily?

The Banta Activity Center has 247 members and welcomes an average of 65 daily visitors. Approximately 30 individuals (members and non-members) participate in the daily lunch program. The center is open to those 50 and over Monday through Friday (9 AM - 3 PM) and serves as a Northwest Indiana Community Action Nutrition site for seniors.

What are the annual revenues and expenses of the Banta Activity Center?

In 2024, the Banta Activity Center had revenues of \$35,949 and expenses of \$124,991, resulting in a net loss of \$89,042 (excluding capital expenditures). The projected net loss for 2025 is approximately \$100,000. Major expenses include utilities (NIPSCO), HVAC maintenance, elevator service, and staff. The center's cost recovery was 27% in 2024, significantly below the park system's lowest performing entity target of 50%.

Where will the neighborhood association host their monthly meetings?

Valpo Parks will collaborate with neighborhood leaders to identify an alternative location for their monthly meetings.

What are the steps to this process?

- April 29 – Park Board Senior Programming Presentation by Park Director Kevin Nuppau
- May 27 – Park Board Resolution Vote & RFP Announcement
- July 29 – Park Board Proposal Openings & Project Presentations
- August 26 – Park Board Project Recommendation & Vote
- TBD – Plan Commission
- TBD – City Council

Where can I find more information on this matter?

You can find more information on the Valpo Parks website at www.ValpoParks.org.