



neighborhood swim and fitness clubs

by Nan Ellin

If you wish to swim/workout in Phoenix, you can go to public pools for a nominal fee, join a YMCA and pay slightly more, or join an expensive health club or country club. Or you might have your own apartment, condo, or private pool and fitness equipment. Among the existing options, there is a significant gap between the Y and the fancier clubs. We have an opportunity to bridge this gap while offering an important community amenity that none of these offer.

If a few acres of land were set aside on sites scattered throughout Phoenix for neighborhood swim/fitness clubs, they could strengthen our neighborhoods while improving physical health and conserving water and money. Featuring indoor/outdoor environmentally-responsible ("green") design, these clubs could be developed through private-public partnerships and charge a fee comparable to or perhaps higher than that of a Y, but still significantly lower than a country club.

Though not fully "public" due to membership fees, these clubs would nonetheless remain affordable and would welcome people of all ages, ethnic groups, and walks of life. In addition to an Olympic-size swimming and diving pool, state-of-the-art fitness center, and an indoor/outdoor café, these clubs would include playgrounds and childcare services. They would be a safe place for teens to go after school and for seniors to congregate. They would be a fun and relaxing place for adults to go alone or with others.

If this kind of amenity were widely available, people might be more willing to live in urban housing (without yards), and new developments would not be obligated to include pools and fitness centers. In addition, those living in single-family houses could forgo the money- and water-consuming private pools. As well as being environmentally-friendly and urban-friendly, this amenity would help Phoenixians stay physically-fit while nurturing a sense of community and combating social isolation. In sum, providing such a quality amenity throughout Phoenix would contribute greatly to the health and well-being of individuals, the community, and the larger environment.