

From: Lehla Irwin [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, July 22, 2026 12:36 PM
To: City Council <citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov>
Cc: Mary Gourley <mgourley@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Emi Theriault <etheriault@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Erik Billing <ebilling@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Oriana Hart <ohart@cityofsebastopol.gov>; Laurie Felciano [REDACTED]; Liz and Lee Johnson [REDACTED] Anika Trockel [REDACTED]; Noemi Macias-Homich [REDACTED]; Courtney Ratto [REDACTED]; Christopher Warner [REDACTED]; Bridget Ross [REDACTED]
Subject: Ives Pool Article - Guest Opinion submission to Sebastopol Times

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Members of the Sebastopol City Council,
I hope you are all doing well.

I am writing to share the attached guest opinion that I have submitted to the Sebastopol Times following its [recent article](#) regarding recreational swim at Ives Pool.

As Executive Director and Head Coach of the Sebastopol Sea Serpents, I felt it was important to provide additional perspective on the discussion surrounding access to the pool. While the article focused primarily on recreation swim, I hope this piece broadens the conversation to include the many ways Ives Pool serves our community—including water safety, swim lessons, recreation, lap swimming, youth athletics, fitness, and the development of future lifeguards, instructors, and coaches.

My intent is not to argue that one user group should receive more pool time than another. In fact, the Sea Serpents support expanding recreation swim opportunities. Rather, I hope we can begin a broader community discussion about whether our aquatic facilities are meeting the needs of today's Sebastopol and West County residents.

Ives Pool has faithfully served our community for more than 80 years. During that time, demand for aquatic programs has continued to grow, while the size of the facility has remained the same. Swimming is not only a recreational activity—it is a life-saving skill, an important component of youth development, and a lifelong form of exercise that benefits residents of all ages.

The Sea Serpents are proud to be one of the many organizations that call Ives Pool home, and we remain committed to working collaboratively with the City of Sebastopol, Western Sonoma County Swimmers, and all pool user groups to explore opportunities that strengthen aquatics for our entire community.

I hope this letter can serve as the beginning of a broader community conversation about the long-term future of aquatics in Sebastopol. I would welcome the opportunity to participate in any future discussions regarding the needs of Ives Pool and how we can continue to serve our growing community. Thank you for your continued support of this important public asset and for taking the time to consider this perspective. I appreciate all that you do for our community.

Please note that I will be coaching athletes at the Speedo Sectional Championships over the next four days, so my email responses may be delayed. I will respond as soon as I am able.

Respectfully,
Lehla Irwin

Head Coach
Sebastopol Sea Serpent
[REDACTED]

www.seaserpents.swimtopia.com



Sea Serpents & Building the Future of Aquatics in Sebastopol

The recent [Sebastopol Times article](#) about recreational swim at Ives Pool highlights an important conversation. As Executive Director and Head Coach of the [Sebastopol Sea Serpents](#), I share the community's desire to see Ives Pool serve as many people as possible. Recreation swim, lap swimming, swim lessons, school programs, water fitness, and competitive swimming all have an important place at our community pool.

However, because the Sea Serpents were discussed throughout the article but were not contacted for comment, I would like to provide some additional context.

The article may leave readers with the impression that the Sea Serpents are responsible for the reduction in recreation swim hours. In reality, our afternoon practice schedule has remained somewhat the same since I started coaching here in 2003. During that same time, the Sea Serpents have also experienced reductions in pool access and a dramatic jump in facility fees. Throughout the summer, our athletes train with fewer lanes and limited water space. Throughout the summer, we share our practice time with the swim lesson program, resulting in fewer lanes and fewer practice hours. Losing adequate lane space has become increasingly stressful. As Head Coach, I am responsible for ensuring safe training conditions for swimmers of all ages and abilities. Like every other user group, we have adapted to meet the growing demand for pool space.

The discussion should not be about dividing Ives Pool among users; it should be about whether a community of more than 50,000 West County residents can continue to rely on an aquatic facility that was built more than 80 years ago for a much smaller population.

The Sea Serpents are much more than a competitive swim team. We are a year-round nonprofit organization committed to teaching swimming, promoting water safety, and helping young people develop confidence, discipline, leadership, and lifelong healthy habits.

Our athletes begin as young children learning the fundamentals of competitive swimming and progress at their own pace. Some simply enjoy being part of a team and staying active. Others advance to regional, sectional, and national-level competitions. Over the years, Sea Serpent athletes have continued their swimming careers at junior colleges and NCAA Division I universities, earning opportunities through the sport that began at Ives Pool.

The impact of our program extends far beyond competition. Many of the lifeguards, swim instructors, and coaches who serve our community today first learned to swim as Sea Serpents. They developed strong swimming skills and leadership through our program. These athletes help the next generation become safe and confident in the water by teaching swim lessons, lifeguarding, and coaching. Sea Serpent athletes don't simply graduate from the program—they continue to contribute to the life of Ives Pool. Many become adult community members who

continue to enjoy lap swimming, water fitness, and other aquatic programs. In many cases, we are now coaching the children and grandchildren of former Sea Serpent swimmers.

We are also proud that the Sea Serpents provide opportunities for every child, regardless of financial circumstances. Our team currently serves more economically disadvantaged athletes than any other USA Swimming club in [Pacific Swimming](#). Through our donors, sponsors, outreach and financial assistance programs, we work to ensure that cost is never the reason a child cannot participate. Every child deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and belong, regardless of their family's financial situation.

The Sea Serpents have also played an important role in helping sustain year-round operations at Ives Pool. For many years, our consistent rental of pool time has provided reliable revenue that has helped support the facility during seasons when maintaining an outdoor pool year-round is especially challenging. We are proud to have been a longstanding partner in keeping this valuable community resource available.

Every program at Ives Pool contributes something important. Recreation swim provides families with opportunities to enjoy the water together. Swim lessons teach life-saving skills. Lap swimming promotes lifelong fitness. Competitive swimming develops discipline, confidence, teamwork, and resilience. These programs are not competitors—they are complementary parts of a healthy aquatic community.

Ives Pool has served our community faithfully for more than 80 years. As our community has grown, so has the demand for recreation, swim lessons, lap swimming, water fitness, and competitive aquatics. Swimming is more than recreation—it is a life-saving skill, and drowning remains one of the leading causes of accidental death among children. Rather than continuing to divide the same amount of water among more and more users, I hope we begin a community conversation about how to expand aquatic opportunities for everyone. If Sebastopol truly values water safety, youth development, recreation, and lifelong health, then we should invest in aquatic facilities that meet the needs of today's community and future generations. The Sea Serpents stand ready to work with Western Sonoma County Swimmers, the City of Sebastopol, and all pool users to help shape that future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this additional perspective. I welcome the opportunity to continue this conversation with community members and all Ives Pool user groups as we work together to strengthen aquatics in Sebastopol.

Sincerely,

Lehla Irwin
Executive Director & Head Coach
Sebastopol Sea Serpents


www.sea-serpents.swimtopia.org