



SCOPE CREEP – or “how I had all the good intentions in the world and still did not get it done.”

It’s not your fault!

It happens hundreds of times a year all over the world. It is as inevitable as Death and Taxes.

Here’s what happens....

Someone has an idea that a swimming pool is needed and for all the right reasons. A local business or philanthropist steps forward and agrees to donate a certain amount of \$ if the “project” comes up with fundraising for matching \$. The local school likes the idea and offers to donate the land if they can use the pool. The local USA Swim Club gets excited because they need room to grow and places to hold meets.

A meeting is held to see what is possible or probable based on wants and needs. The current “keeper of ideas” for the potential project has done some research and realizes that a pool is easier to build than it is to financially maintain. For this reason, they have identified a beginning scope for the project. What comes next is the dagger in the heart of most projects and why they end up on the back burner and a discussion for another year. Here we go....

This moderate size community - let’s call it Modern Day City– has 60,000 people and wants a pool. Through research the project leader has identified that most communities this size need an 8 lane 25-yard community pool with a smaller warmer water teaching and exercise pool. The preliminary estimate for these pools to be indoors with appropriate land supporting areas is **approximately \$7.5 million**.

A local entity steps forward and professes to know for a fact that water slides and lazy rivers are the craze now-days so this will be a necessity for recreation for the community. **Add \$3 million**

The local school wants diving so they can participate in school events. They need a 1 meter and 3 meter diving board in a separate diving pool. **Add \$2 million**

The local water polo enthusiast wants the pool to be stretched out and deepened so they can do official water polo competitions. **Add \$1.5 million**

The USA Club and coach exclaim that their swimmers need to train like Olympians, so the community pool needs to be a 50-meter pool rather than a 25 yard pool. **Add \$2 million**

Since we have this great facility planned now, we need to have EVENTS since they bring Economic Impact to the community. We need much more spectator seating and parking and a very large scoreboard. **Add \$2.5 million**

The local medical group/hospital would like to have room and the appropriate water temp to conduct water rehab/therapy. **Add \$500K**

Since the school will donate the land and has a specific architectural look, they want the new building to match the others as closely as possible. **Add \$3 million**

You get the idea! What was a **\$7.5 million dollar great idea** has become a **\$22 million fantasy** for almost any size community. *(Note – we have seen an \$8.5 million dollar plan creep up to a \$65 million dollar plan and commit virtual suicide.)*

The only cure for scope creep is to understand what the community needs rather than wants. After that, every additional want must bring with it the “up-front funding” or it cannot be considered. That way the core objective for the project is protected. It is easier than it sounds but unless this happens, the new swimming pool project will usually remain a daydream.

AND

Beware of Scope Creep’s first cousin – Project Price Gouging (PPG)

The cure for PPG is to do the project as **Design Build** but most cities and many schools do not currently have that option. They must put the project “out to bid” every step of the way. Let’s take for example a city that is known for progressiveness and having funds to spend on recreation. Again, we will call it Modern Day City with no reference to any existing city intended; although we have real examples of this happening many times.

Modern Day City and its collaborative partners want to explore the possibility of an aquatic center for the community.... Because they have a reputation for spending high dollar to get best services, they are already a target.

After many council meetings Modern Day City sends out an RFP (Request for Proposal) or an RFQ (Request for Quote) for a Feasibility Study. Most of larger national feasibility firms will recognize the cities name and quote their highest priced and most extensive study. What could have been a good study for \$25,000 to \$30,000 ends up being priced as an over-board study at \$75,000 or higher. This is a good indication the project is not on a practical path.

The city then decides to explore this further and hires an Architectural firm to create some conceptual designs for the community and the committees to view and discuss. Architecture firms usually have a creative flare which is great for project esthetics but hard on the pocketbook. What should be a relative reasonable expenditure ends up costing 6 figures.

The Architect gives a cost to build estimate for the project the city now envisions. This estimate may be for fundraising purposes and for a budget reality check. What happens next can be defined in the Scope Creep section above. What should have been a \$50K to \$75K total investment for project planning ended up being a \$250K+ exercise.

Down the road - the project goes out for bid and the firms who will build the project also perceive Modern Day City as having “deep pockets”. They bid as high as they feel is possible without excluding themselves from consideration. What they bid may also have a lot to do with how busy they currently are. The more projects they have on the drawing table the higher their price for a new project.

In real life we have recently seen 3 projects that

Should have cost \$9 million bid was \$14 million
Should have cost \$30 million bid was \$64 million
Should have cost \$40 million bid was \$92 million

The best solution we know of for this project killer is to allow certain projects to be Design Build and hire a great Project Manager or Construction Manager that has extensive aquatic facility and structural design experience. This may be impossible in many “public sector” cases but at least they can know why they failed to get it done.

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