



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: David Gill, Parks and Recreation Director.
DATE: February, 25, 2026.
SUBJECT: The History and Operations of the City's Outdoor Aquatics Facilities

Recommendation:

Accept this report.

Background:

The first community public pool in New Hampshire was built in 1926, by 1930 Concord had its first public wading pool at Rollins Park. Concord built and renovated our neighborhood pools during the 1930s as a response to the Great Depression. The primary catalyst for the 1930s pool boom was federal funding from agencies like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA), job creation, increase public safety and improving social awareness.

By the end of the 1930s, the success of pools led to a city-wide demand for more parks, open spaces and structured swimming facilities, solidifying our seven municipal pools and parks as a staple of Concord summer life.

Economic Relief and Job Creation:

- The most direct reason for the construction boom was the availability of federal funding through New Deal programs. WPA and PWA Funding: Agencies like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Public Works Administration (PWA) aimed to alleviate mass unemployment. Projects centered on recreational infrastructure provided local jobs and income for struggling families.
- Between 1933 and 1938, the federal government built nearly 750 to 800 new pools and remodeled hundreds more across the U.S.

Social "Americanization" and Escape:

- The Progressive Era influenced Concord's leaders to see pools as tools for social stability.
- Escape from Poverty: For children of the Great Depression, the newly built pools offered a "means of escape from poverty, if only for a brief time".

Improving Public Safety and Sanitation:

- Before the 1930s, Concord's children and adults typically swam in natural, unmonitored "swimming holes," ponds, and rivers.
- Moving Out of Natural Ponds: In places like White Park, children frequented the spring-fed "Upper Pond" for swimming. Converting these into concrete, chlorinated pools with lifeguards was a deliberate move to improve public health and reduce drownings.
- The "Large Bathtub" Concept: Nationally and locally, municipal pools served as essential hygiene facilities for working-class families who often lacked indoor plumbing.

Concord's commitment to this legacy remains unique today; while many cities closed their neighborhood pools in the late 20th century, Concord continues to maintain and operate seven outdoor municipal aquatic facilities for its residents with no daily or seasonal membership fee.

Timeline of our pools

Rollins Park – 33 Bow Street

1930 Northern end of Rollins Park was turned into a wading pool by the work donated by Veterans of Foreign Wars and Concord Post #1031. The northern end of the body of water in the park has been transformed into a pool 30 feet wide and 60 feet long and 18 inches deep.

1936: The Civil Works Administration (CWA) enlarged the park's wading pool.

1936: The Public Works Administration (PWA) completed a new "bathing pool" and bathhouse.

1941: A 75-foot addition was added to the pool to accommodate more swimmers.

1998: Renovation - The current facility features an L-shaped design with a zero-depth ramp entrance and a deep end.

In the FY26 approved CIP the Rollins Pool is scheduled to be re-plastered and pump replacement in FY27.

White Park – 1 White Street

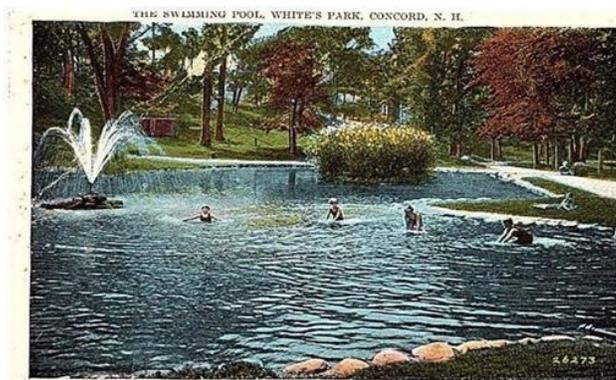
1919: The Park Commissioner checked on feasibility and cost of concreting the bed of the upper pond at White Park, so that said pond may be used as a wading pool for small children.

1936: This was the city's first concrete swimming pool. It was constructed on the site of the former "Upper Pond," a spring-fed basin originally designed in 1888. To build the pool, the WPA filled in the smaller of the park's two ponds and replaced it with a cast-in-place concrete structure.

1998: The original 1930s pool was renovated in part by using a "pool inside a pool" method, where a new reinforced concrete liner was sprayed inside the old shell. This method allowed the city to bypass the higher costs of a full excavation.

2023: The original White Park pool was replaced with a modern splash pad; bath house and bathrooms were updated.

White Park Upper Pond before the 1930's



White Park Pool 1948

Kimball Park – 171 North State Street

1937 Pool was built (45ft by 100ft).

1996 "Pool-in-a-Pool": To address structural leaks in the 1930s shell, the city used a "shotcrete" methodology, spraying a new 5.5-inch reinforced concrete liner directly inside the original pool. This method allowed the city to bypass the higher costs of a full excavation while keeping the pool operational for another 25+ years.

2017 The city completed a major renovation to modernize the facility. The upgraded pool now features: ADA Accessibility: A beach-style zero-entry ramp. Enhanced Safety, A new deck with increased floor traction and drainage, fresh paint, and gusher jets. Efficiency: Improved lighting and new filtration media and bathrooms were updated.

Kimball Park Pool 1948



Rolfe Park – 79 Community Drive, Penacook

Rolfe Park Pool 1948

1937: Pool was built.

1939: The Joseph Guyette Swimming Pool – was dedicated to Private Joseph Guyette, Company E, 103rd infantry – died June 16, 1918 – first son of Penacook to lose his life in WW1.



1940: Wading pool added to Rolfe Park. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) helped construct a new wading pool at the site. Municipal reports from that year noted the pool reached depths of 3.5 to 4 feet and addressed a "long felt need" for the Ward One section of the city.

1996: The original 1930s pool was renovated using a "pool inside a pool" method, where a new reinforced concrete liner was sprayed inside the old shell. This method allowed the city to bypass the higher costs of a full excavation.

2016: The city completed a major renovation to modernize the facility. The upgraded pool now features: ADA Accessibility: A beach-style zero-entry ramp. Enhanced Safety, A new deck with increased floor traction and drainage, fresh paint, and gusher jets. Efficiency: Improved lighting and new filtration media and bathrooms were updated.

Merrill Park – 25 Eastman Street

1939: East Concord was equipped with a swimming pool and bath house.

1996: Renovation – using pool inside the pool method, where a new reinforced concrete liner was sprayed inside the old basin. This method allowed the city to bypass the higher costs of a full excavation.

2021 Full Pool Renovation removing the old basin. A beach-style zero-entry ramp for ADA accessibility, Improved energy efficiency through new lighting and filtration systems and bathrooms were updated.



Merrill Park Pool Swim Lessons 1958

Garrison Park – 31 Hutchins Street

1938 Pool was built.

1997 Pool Renovation – using pool inside the pool method, where a new reinforced concrete liner was sprayed inside the old basin. This method allowed the city to bypass the higher costs of a full excavation.

Replacement Status: The 1997 structure at Garrison is currently the last of the "old-style" pools scheduled for a complete modern overhaul. City Council has yet to decide on future plans for Garrison Pool.

Keach Park – 2 Newton Ave

1939 New Wading Pool at Plains (heights) added.

1996 Reconstruction: Along with several other city pools, Keach Pool was renovated using a "pool inside a pool" method. This involved spraying a new 5.5-inch thick reinforced concrete liner directly inside the original 1933 shell. This method allowed the city to bypass the higher costs of a full excavation.

2005 Repairs: Walls that had shown signs of deterioration were reconstructed in 2005 to maintain the pool's integrity.

2018 Rebuild: This project completely replaced the aging structure with a modern facility featuring: A beach-style zero-entry ramp for ADA accessibility, Improved energy efficiency through new lighting and filtration systems and bathrooms were updated.

Annual Operations and Expenses

Successful pool operations depend on two city departments working together:

- General Services - ensuring facilities are safe, functional, and properly maintained.
- Parks and Recreation ensuring adequate staffing, programming, and communication.

General Services Department – Public Properties Division; Facility Maintenance & Infrastructure

Pre-Season (Late April–May)

- Wash and clean pools and bathrooms
- Prepare filtration and pump systems
- Fill pools with water
- Balance water chemistry (can take 1–2 weeks before safe for public use)

In-Season (June–August)

- Maintain pumps and filtration systems
- Monitor and adjust pool water chemistry
- Clean pools and surrounding areas
- Manage trash removal

Post-Season (August–September)

- Drain pools
- Winterize facilities
- Complete seasonal shutdown (typically through end of September)

Parks and Recreation Department - Primary Responsibility: Staffing, Communication & Daily Operations

Hiring begins annually in mid-February and continues into June. Recruitment efforts include:

- Outreach to former employees, interview new applicants
- Attendance at high school and college job fairs
- Promotion through the city website, social media, seasonal brochures

Workforce Challenges

Over the past several summers, staffing has become increasingly complex:

- Approximately 55 lifeguards are now needed to operate six pools (compared to about 35 lifeguards twenty years ago for seven pools, splash pad does not require lifeguards)
- Inability to staff all pools since before COVID
- Fewer lifeguards available for 40-hour workweeks
- Increased scheduling complexity due to vacations, camps, and multiple part-time commitments

These trends reflect broader workforce shifts among teens and young adults and are not unique to Concord.

In-Season Operations

- Hire, train, and schedule lifeguards and seasonal pool staff
- Manage daily pool operations
- Coordinate swim lessons and pool rentals
- Sell nonresident pool passes
- Communicate weather, staffing, or maintenance closures via website and social media

Annual Operating Expenses.

<i>General Services Department: Public Properties Division (FY26 budget estimate)</i>	
Maintenance Staffing	\$98,586
Electric	\$21,264
Water and Sewer	\$17,654
Chemicals	\$17,800
Consumables	\$2,950
Supplies	\$8,760
Regulatory	\$300
Total General Services Department Expenses	\$167,313

<i>Parks and Recreation Department (FY26 budget estimate)</i>	
Lifeguards/Water Safety Instructors/Pool Supervisor	\$198,645
Supplies/Uniforms	\$5,000
Background Checks (all staff 18 and over)	\$2,000
Reimbursement for certifications	\$10,400
Total Parks and Recreation Expenses	\$216,045
Revenues from pool operations	
Swim Lessons	(\$24,160)
Rentals	(\$4,850)
Non-Resident Pool Passes	(\$25,000)
Total Revenues	(\$54,010)

<i>Current Bond Costs (FY26)</i>	
Rolfe Pool: \$365,000 Bond 2016, paid off 6/30/2031	\$28,050
Kimball Pool: \$425,000 Bond 2017, paid off 6/30/32	\$33,920
Keach Pool: \$535,000 Bond 2018, paid off 6/30/33	\$44,100
Merrill Pool: \$550,000 Bond 2022, paid off 6/30/42	\$36,812
White Park: \$750,000 Bond, 2022, paid off 6/30/43	\$62,862
Current Total Bond Costs	\$207,744

<i>Annual Operating Costs (FY26)</i>	
General Services Department: Public Properties Division	\$167,313
Parks and Recreation Department	\$162,035
Bond Costs	\$207,744
Net Tax Support	\$537,092

Discussion

When Concord opened its first wading pool in 1930, our city had a population of 25,228. At the time, few NH communities offered public recreational water facilities, Concord's leaders made a forward-thinking decision: invest in neighborhood pools to improve quality of life. That decision made an immediate positive impact — one that has lasted for generations. Today, our outdoor neighborhood facilities remain a cherished summer tradition.

Now a community of approximately 44,000 residents, Concord is extremely fortunate to have operated seven community pools for more than 90 years. These pools are woven into the fabric of our city and reflect a long-standing commitment to accessible, neighborhood-based recreation.

As our community has grown, so too has private pool ownership. In the 1930s, there were few — if any — private pools in Concord. As of April 1, 2025, there are 435 private in-ground pools in Concord and Penacook. This number does not include city-operated pools, commercial pools (such as hotels, YMCA or swim schools), nor does it include the many above-ground residential pools now common throughout the city. While private pools have increased, public pools remain the only equitable, accessible option for many families.

In the early to mid-1990s, Concord faced a similar question to the one we are discussing today: Should the city continue to maintain and operate seven outdoor aquatic facilities? After several community meetings, the decision was made to renovate all seven pools. By 1998, each had been updated. At that time, the community agreed that modest investments in neighborhood pools generated outsized returns. In the event the City decided to reduce the number of aquatic facilities we would need to work with Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) staff as all parks that have an aquatic facility is encumbered by LWCF rules.

In 2016, the city began another round of renovations. As part of this effort, the smaller wading pool at White Park was transformed into a state-of-the-art splash pad, expanding accessibility and modernizing the experience for families. The final two pools scheduled for this round are Garrison and Rollins.

In the FY24 CIP, Garrison Pool was scheduled for renovation in FY25 budget at \$650,000. The Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee at their December 21, 2023, meeting discussed the upcoming scheduled renovation of the Garrison Park Pool and voted to recommend the city consider making it a splash pad rather than keeping it as a pool. This decision was based on success of the new splash pad at White Park, lower staffing expense and possible longer operating season. The committee also agreed the splash pad should be staffed when open to ensure safe operation, rules are being followed, and resident residency is being checked.

On March 19, 2024 there was a Garrison Pool Community Meeting to discuss converting the existing pool to a splash pad or renovate and keep as a pool. Those present at the meeting did not like the concept of a splash pad and wanted to keep as a pool. In the current FY26 CIP63 the Garrison Pool replacement is listed as a FY27 project (\$701,132) and Rollins Pool re-plaster is also listed as a FY27 project (\$350,000).

In the fall of 2025 the Parks and Recreation Department sent out a survey to other communities in New Hampshire who operate outdoor season pools. The survey information is listed as an attachment to this report. Overall the survey results confirmed what we already knew. Concord has the highest number of outdoor pools/aquatic facilities; our season is similar to other communities and our lifeguard pay is also similar to other communities.

While financial information outlined operational costs and capital investments, it is equally important to recognize the many benefits that cannot be directly measured in dollars.

Protecting the Tax Base

- Public amenities influence where families choose to live.
- Strong parks and recreation systems support property values.
- Property values drive Concord's primary revenue source: property taxes.
- Municipal pools contribute to making Concord a livable, family-friendly city.

Building a Workforce Pipeline

- Pools create meaningful summer jobs for Concord teens and adults.
- Certifications such as CPR and lifeguarding build employability, responsibility, and leadership skills.
- Seasonal pool employment is one of the city's most accessible entry points into the workforce.

Prevention Is Cheaper Than Crisis

- Heat-related emergency room visits cost far more than seasonal pool operations.
- Pools reduce heat-related illness and provide safe water access in a state filled with lakes and rivers.
- Structured youth programming helps reduce vandalism, petty crime, and police calls.
- Swim education reduces drowning risk — prevention saves lives and public dollars.

For nearly a century, Concord's neighborhood pools have provided recreation, safety, opportunity, and community connection. They are not simply amenities; they are long-term investments in public health, economic stability, youth development, and quality of life.

History shows that when Concord invests thoughtfully in its community aquatic facilities, the returns extend far beyond the balance sheet — and last for generations.