



# The State of City Swimming Pools in Los Angeles



July 2004

Department of Recreation and Parks Jon Kirk Mukri, General Manager

## **Preface**

The City of Los Angeles, which innovated municipal recreation in the U.S. in 1904 with creation of the nation's first Playground Department, opened its first municipal pool in 1914. Over the last 90 years, Los Angeles Recreation and Parks has built a nationally-known Aquatics Division that provides recreational swimming, lap swim, team sports, lifeguard training, junior lifeguarding, adaptive swimming for the disabled, and swimming lessons, to 1.3 million Angelenos each year. In 2003, 572,000 of those swimmers were youth enjoying the Free Swim program, and another 27,000 were seniors attending under the Free Swim program.

City pools serve a greater purpose than instilling positive social and health values. In 2002, there were 71 drowning fatalities within the County of Los Angeles, of which more than one-quarter were children under five years of age, and in fact, drowning is the leading cause of death for children between one and five years of age. For every one drowning fatality, there are five near-drowning accidents. The supervised swimming activities provided at Recreation and Park pools can make a life-saving difference to the people of Los Angeles.

But the infrastructure of the City of Los Angeles swimming pools is failing. Over 63% of the pools are over 40 years old, and in many cases the only option is replacement. At many of these pools, maintenance or refurbishment efforts might only hold off deterioration for a few years, before the need to replace them is inevitable.

Today, the Department of Recreation and Parks has altogether 59 swimming pools: 54 throughout the City, 15 of which operate year round, and 5 more at camp locations. Six of the City pools are closed due to failure, and two camp pools are closed.

Given the failing infrastructure and the frail condition of some of the City's pools, it is likely that more pools will be closed at varying times and for varying reasons during the summer. There are areas of the City, where private residential pools are rare, yet City pools are equally scarce. The children and families of Los Angeles desire more pools,

they are interested in diversifying the aquatic play features available at their local pools, and they are looking to the City for leadership in meeting this need.

The City of Los Angeles
Recreation and Parks Department
Aquatics Division

offers families and community members many healthy, affordable and safe aquatic activities at their public pools, lakes and beaches.

# **Background: Pools in Recreation and Parks**

One hundred years ago, in 1904, the City of Los Angeles was the first in the nation to recognize the importance of providing recreation programs and services by forming a dedicated city department just for this task. Named the "Playground Department," one of the innovations introduced by this progressive body was to allocate funds for a series of public swimming facilities. Swimming pools or baths had previously been the domain of exclusive clubs or private organizations such as the YMCA. As early as 1912, the Playground Department announced the completion of wading pools, no more than a foot deep, at the Echo Park, Violet Street and Slauson Playgrounds, at a cost of \$2,147.

The acquisition of the Bethlehem Baths, originally operated by the Bethlehem Institutional Church, marked the official starting point for the municipal pool system familiar today. The City renamed the facility, which was located at Vignes and Ducommon Streets, as the *Vignes Municipal Bathhouse and Natatorium*, and after spending \$1600 on refurbishment, the City opened the pool on January 22, 1914.

In 1916, the Playground Department experimented with creating safe and supervised swimming holes along the Arroyo Seco to the Los Angeles River, following the existing practices of Angelenos who were in the habit of cooling off in naturally forming pockets of water in the River and its feeder streams. Two artificial swimming holes, roughly 20 feet wide and 30 feet long each, were created, one pool for men and the other for women, as they were required to bathe in separate pools. Between the two pools were dressing rooms made out of tents with wood planks for floors. The total cost to the Playground Department came to \$200 for canvas and lumber, however a winter storm swept everything down river just a few months after the swimming holes were built, and that was the end of supervised swimming holes.

By 1921, the City operated four municipal pools plus two pools in campgrounds.



Early Beach Lifeguard Station

Attendance from the four was 141,904, and they produced over \$5000 in revenue. A new division was formed, and in 1922, a Supervisor of Aquatics was appointed.

With the annexation of beach property in Venice and San Pedro in the early 1920s, the City undertook the challenge of open water lifeguarding. In the 1950s, the City supervised stretches of beach near Santa Monica and El Segundo in addition to Cityowned Venice and San Pedro, and operated

two Municipal Beach Bathhouses – the Sunset Pier Bathhouse and the Cabrillo Beach Bathhouse. In 1974, the County of Los Angeles began handling lifeguard services at all beaches except Cabrillo Inner Beach, which is Port of Los Angeles property.

By 1926, the City operated 11 pools, four of which were at camp sites, and Los Angeles was one of only two cities in the United States that had a separate swimming pool, beach, and bathhouse division. That year, the City's pools served 402,744 swimmers.

The growing City needed more public recreation services, particularly pools, and local electorates showed themselves willing to fund pools. In 1923, a municipal bond supplied

\$1.5 million for projects, including Yosemite Pool in 1925, Central Pool in 1926, and Griffith Park's *Municipal Plunge* in 1927. Community-based property assessment taxes for recreation projects built pools at Reseda, Evergreen, El Sereno, Sun Valley, and North Hollywood between 1929 and 1931.

The Los Angeles Swim stadium was opened for the Los Angeles 1932 Olympics. The stadium was built for aquatic competition and its design has been copied in water stadiums in many other countries. The swim stadium building closed in 1994 after the Northridge Earthquake caused



Griffith Park's Plunge remains a remarkable pool, measuring 225 x 50 feet, about twice the length of a typical municipal pool. It cost the City \$80,000 in 1927.

significant damage, but was rebuilt as part of the Exposition Park Intergenerational Community Center project and reopened in 2003.

Harvard Pool and 109<sup>th</sup> Street pool were built with the aid of the Federal Works Progress Adminstration (WPA) during the 1930s. WPA workers were also used for the Swim Stadium, Algin Sutton Pool (once known as Manchester Pool), and Stoner Pool, in addition to assisting with many other parks projects.

After World War II, there was a dynamic increase in the demand for recreational services. Local city and county agencies extended their services to meet all the expanding needs. A \$12 million bond issue for recreation facilities in 1946, coupled with consolidation of the Playground Department and Park Department into the



Pecan Pool opens in the early 1960s

Department of Recreation and Parks, allowed for better planning and use of resources, followed by development of 53 new playgrounds and 10 new swimming pools. Cheviot Hills, South Park, Hollywood, Lou Costello, Lincoln Park, Van Nuys-Sherman Oaks, Verdugo Hills, West Wilshire (now Pan Pacific), Green Meadows (shallow) and Harbor Park Pool were built during this period.

In 1957, 95% of voters expressed their continuing support for recreation facilities and pools with approval of a \$39.5 million bond, at that time, the largest recreation and

parks bond issue in the country. Over \$5 million dollars of the bond money was spent on municipal pools and 15 new pools were built over the next 10 years. Sepulveda,

Lanark, Mar Vista, Northridge, Van Ness, Richie Valens (formerly Paxton), Venice Pool, Rustic Canyon, Westchester, Pecan, Peck Park, Rancho Cienega, Sylmar, Woodland Hills, and Hubert Humphrey pools were built with this bond money.

The 1980s brought a decline in the use of municipal swimming pools as well a slowdown in the building of public pools. Some of this decline can be attributed to unfounded perceptions about disease transmission associated with swimming at public pools, as well as the increased building of backyard pools and installation of residential air



Hansen Dam Swim Lake Slide, which requires certification by the State under the Amusement Ride Inspection Program

conditioning. Only seven new pools have been built since 1979: E.G. Roberts indoor pool in 1979, Banning Pool built in conjunction with LAUSD, Echo Deep in 1982, Westwood indoor pool, 1988, and Cleveland Pool in 1995 in conjunction with LAUSD; Hansen Dam Swim Lake and Richard Alatorre Pool both opened in 1999.

Revenue from swimming pool operations has remained fairly steady over the last decade. In 1999, Mayor Richard Riordan instituted a program called Kid's Swim Free, under which youth (17 and under), and also seniors and persons with disabilities, were able to attend any pool for recreational swimming without charge. Where annual revenues had been about \$600,000 prior to this program, the total dropped to \$510,000 and an additional allocation of budget funds was provided to the Department to make up for lost revenue.

## ATTENDANCE UNDER FREE SWIM PROGRAM

TOTAL	626,143	607,203	539,601	559,658	606,171
SENIORS	<u>45,415</u>	<u>28,872</u>	24,157	25,774	27,271
DISABLED	3,499	3,624	5,040	5,899	6,881
YOUTH	572,229	574,707	510,404	527,985	572,019
	99-00	<u>00-01</u>	<u>01-02</u>	02-03	03-04

Rate increases for adults and for lessons and other pool uses were instituted in the 2003-2004 fiscal year, in response to continuing tightening of the overall budget of the City. The estimated revenue from all Aquatics activities in 2003-2004 was \$920,000.

As with many recreation activities and park amenties, the City of Los Angeles has been a national leader in public aquatics for a century. The City is positioned to continue that progressiveness into the new century through innovation in pool design and perserverance in identifying funds for new and rebuilt pools.

# Findings of the 2003 Infrastructure Report

Early in 2003, Mayor James K. Hahn convened a Blue Ribbon Infrastructure Task Force to look at the capacity and maintenance of the physical infrastructure of the City of Los Angeles, including the parks and recreational facilities. A key segment of the Recreation and Parks study offered insightful information on the conditions of the swimming pools.

The Task Force found that the majority of Recreation and Parks facilities of all types operate at or above capacity. Each type of Recreation facility has it own life cycle determining optimal repair and replacement timetable, and in addition a facility may, as time passes, require upgrades, renovations and/or replacement because of the changing needs of the community. Failure to keep up with optimal maintenance may shorten the life cycle of a facility, more so if the facility is used at maximum capacity. This is an especially enlightening issue with pools, where most have far exceded an expected life span, from both a basic repair perspective and from a community needs point of view. The longevity of the swimming pool system of the City is evidence of skilled maintenance and at least a minimal level of consistent annual funding.

The Infrastructure Report featured evaluations keyed to a letter grade – A,B,C,D, or F. Each of the pools was evaluated by a variety of professionals – architects, maintenance and construction personnel, and aquatics managers. The grades given the pools offer an assessment of the state of the swimming pool system of the City, and represent a first step in understanding the current and further conditions so as to consider meeting future needs.

Grades for Pools were based on the following criteria:



A – Very good. The pool, pool systems, bathhouse facilities, and deck are new or in good condition and provide adequate facilities for the usage needs of the site.



B – Good-Fair. The pool, pool systems, bathhouse facilities, and deck are NOT new but are in above average condition, providing adequate facilities for usage needs at the site.



C – Fair-Poor. The pool, pool systems, bathhouse facilities, and deck show ordinary wear and are in average condition. A few pool components need repair or replacement, however adequate facilities are provided for the usage needs of the site.



D – Very Poor. There is major visible damage, such as cracks in the deck and minor leakage in the pool and/or pool system and/or the bathhouse is in severe need of repair and upgrade. Many pool components need repair or replacement. Demand exceeds capacity at the facility and the pool, deck, and pool systems are not sufficient to provide

adequate operations for the usage needs of the pool. The last renovation was more than 20 years ago.



F – Failure. Pool, deck, and pool systems are hazardous and/or leak and need immediate repair or replacement and/or the bathhouse is in severe need of repair and upgrade. The pool, deck, and pool systems do not provide adequate operation for the usage needs of the pool.

The 2003 Infrastructure Report cited fifteen pools graded F that have failed and need to be replaced. The majority are over 50 years old and eight of them are currently closed.

A cross-section sketch of a pool showing the common deficiencies and failure points is shown on the following page, *Pool Repair* and *Replacement diagram*.

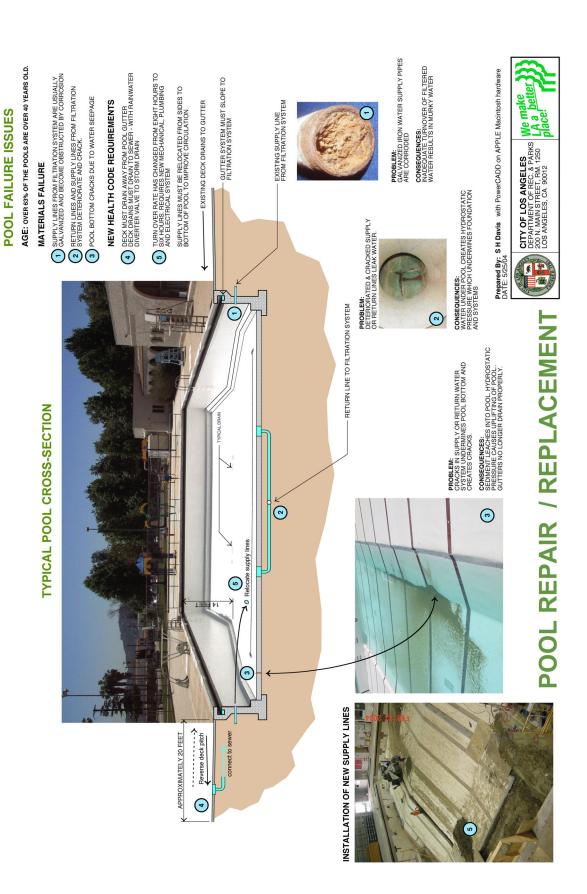
Of the 15 pools graded D, six are deteriorating because of age and condition,



Northridge Pool - Graded F - Closed since 2000

and need to be replaced. The other nine D pools may be refurbished, but this would be a "band-aid" approach, extending the lifespan of the pool for only a short period of time (a major pool refurbishment may extend the lifespan for five to ten years and a minor refurbishment, an extra two to five years).

In addition to the need to replace and repair existing pools, there is a need for new pools. A 1999 Community Needs Assessment study commissioned by the Department of Recreation and Parks, which surveyed residents city-wide, rated Swimming Pools as the most desired recreation facilities in the City.



# SPLASH (Swimming Pools in Los Angeles/Swimming for Health) A City of Los Angeles Pool Replacement and Management Program

During a recent annoucement on funding for rebuilding closed pools at Northridge, Lanark, and Harvard parks, the Mayor also announced the establishment of a Task Force to examine the state of the City's pools and to develop a pool program that integrates plans for maintenance, major repairs, replacements, and citing and building of new additional pools, with strategic funding concepts.

The first step in this important initiative is a thorough inventory of existing pools, their current use and programming, and known physical repair or replacement needs, building on the initial information in the 2003 Infrastructure Report. The attached Quick Looks (by Council District) and Condition Reports (by pool) begin that inventory and analysis process. Recreation and Parks, as managers of the City's system of pools, has undertaken this task, and is consulting with the Bureau of Engineering (BOE) for additional review of our renovation and repair suggestions, and information on pool replacement issues. From this study, current figures on the possible price tag of a comprehensive pool program can be verified.

Another major subject area for the Task Force will be enhancement of operating budgets for maintenance and for a pool component replacement program. For example, the budgeted funds for chlorine have increased between the 1993-1994 and 2003-2004 fiscal years only by a little over \$200,000, or about 43%--while the cost of chlorine itself on City contract has risen from \$0.56 to \$1.10, a 100% increase. This situation is further problematic because the large number of leaking pools require more chlorine replacement than pools which are not leaking. Circulating, chemical, and backwash pump replacements are another readily foreseeable maintenance need, and in fact the Department has a replacement plan, based on a typical five-year (recommended) life-cycle, of 12 circulating pumps (at \$12,000 each), 24 chemical feed pumps (at \$2,500 each), and up to 26 backwash pumps (average \$1,000 each) replaced new annually, for a total recommended budget of \$230,000 a year (2004 prices). Except for a few exception years in which the Department received small influxes of pool repair funds, the Department has not received regular pump replacement program funds in well over a decade.

Composition of the Task Force will need to be discussed further, but should include BOE along with Mayor and Council representation, the CLA and CAO, and community representation; this can be drawn from Park Advisory Boards, Neighborhood Councils, and aquatic or athletic organizations, such as the Amateur Athletic Foundation, which supports Recreation and Parks with annual swimming program grants.

The Task Force, once convened, will need to define in detail the objectives of their effort, but which must encompass an analysis of funding possibilities and steps to acquire sufficient funds for the task ahead. A methodology for informing communities about options in aquatic facilities, and in processing meaningful public participation in types and locations of pools, will need to be developed.

The current overlay of pool locations throughout the City is shown on the following page. The options for new, renovated, or replacement pools, include:

**Regional Aquatic Centers (\$6 million or more each):** Includes a variety of features such as a traditional deep pool, shallow pool, slides, fountains, water play features, zero depth (beach-like) entrance, wading pool, and splash pad.

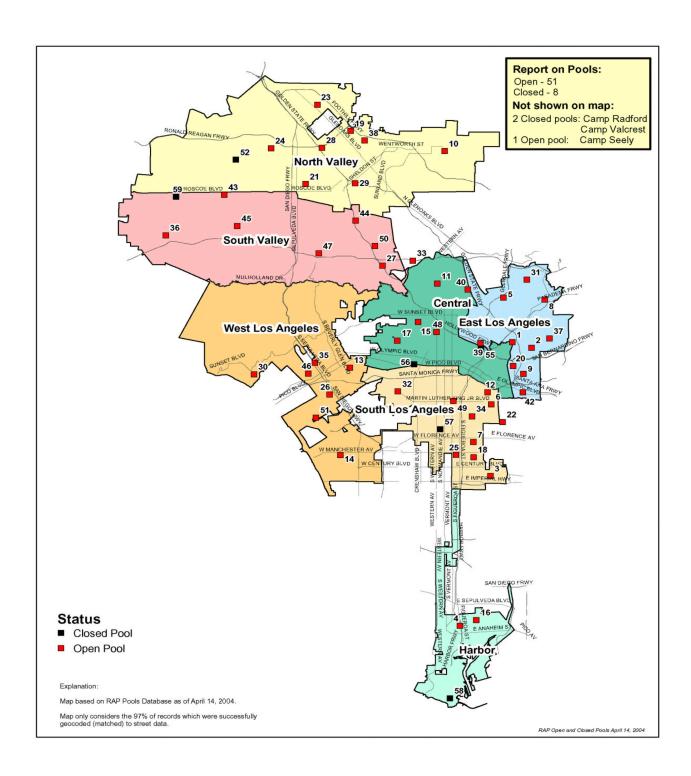
**Community Aquatic Centers (\$4 million or more each):** Includes a feature such as a deep or a shallow pool, slides or splash pad.

Small Neighborhood Pools, Splash Pads, and Portable Pools (\$500,000 to \$3 million or more): Includes smaller water features that are specifically designed to meet the needs of a neighborhood. Portable pools may be used in areas where a pool is closed or under construction or the community does not have a pool. These can be dismantled and moved from site to site, depending on where temporary pools are most needed; as currently designed, these temporary pools would be used primarily for swim lessons.

Recreation and Parks is ready to take the lead in continuing the work performed so far and participating in the Task Force.

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Map of the City showing distribution of existing pool locations.



# **Recent Experience in Pool Refurbishment and Construction Projects**

The Department has illustrative recent experience building and refurbishing pools and bathhouses. These current projects can be used to give examples to community members when garnering neighborhood input on new aquatic facilities. The projects also serve to confirm potential costs and timelines for public pool projects in Los Angeles in the 21st century.

Summary of Recent Pool Projects		
NAME	Const. COST	DESCRIPTION
E.G. Roberts Pool	\$1,420,500	Pool renovation & bathhouse rehabilitation work. Construction is a joint effort of GSD and RAP.
Harvard Park Pool and Bathhouse	\$5,068,000	Project is in design. Demolition of existing pool and bathhouse. Construction of a new family aquatics center. Scheduled design completion is October 2004, construction in mid-2006.
Northridge Park Pool and Bathhouse	\$4,854,000	Project is in design. Demolition of existing pool and bathhouse. Construction of a new family aquatics center. Scheduled design completion is October 2004, construction in mid-2006
Stoner Pool	\$3,834,000	A new pool facility. Demolition of existing pool and bathhouse. New family aquatic center consisted of a 75-foot by 80-foot pool with four swimming lanes and a water play area. The second water feature is a spiral water slide with a 20-foot by 20-foot landing pool that includes a water spray. In addition, a 6,000 square-foot multi-use building and bathhouse was built.
Van Nuys Sherman Oaks Pool & Bath House	\$4,253,000	New pool and refurbished bathhouse. The project budget was impacted by 30% because of unforeseen soil conditions caused by the years of pool leaking.
Addition of Splash Pad at North Hollywood	\$441,000	Replacement of small pool with a splash pad play area.

The projects now in detailed design for Northridge and Harvard pools were developed conceptually upon the Stoner Pool example; members of the Northridge and Harvard communities visited Stoner for inspiration. Stoner is a premier Family Aquatic replacement project, including pool and bathhouse. At current construction prices, the example of Stoner applied to other projects for estimating purposes confirms the \$4 million to \$5 million range as minimum for new construction. The Van Nuys-Sherman Oaks project reflects a scope in which the pool is replaced while the bathhouse is extensively remodeled rather than replaced, however, at that location years of leaking contributed to soil conditions that added significantly to the total project cost. In-house efforts are bringing a re-build and refurbishment project of smaller scope to successful completion at E. G. Roberts pool for a more modest budget. The splash pad at North Hollywood is the type of water play feature that may be desirable in communities to supplement traditional pool facilities.

























# PROJECT AREA



PROJECT COST \$381,000

SCOPE

\$281,000

\$881,000 \$1,130,000 \$368,000

\$3,834,000

COMPLETION DATE

\$793,000

LANDING POOL with slide ACTIVITY POOL includes ADA entry and Splash Pad toys





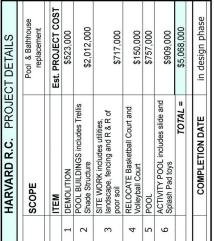
FORMER CONDITIONS

# REPLACEMENT

PROPOSED DESIGN

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-PROJECT AREA

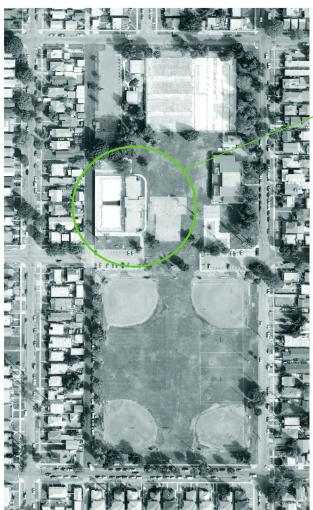






REPLACEMENT

**POOL & BATHHOUSE** 







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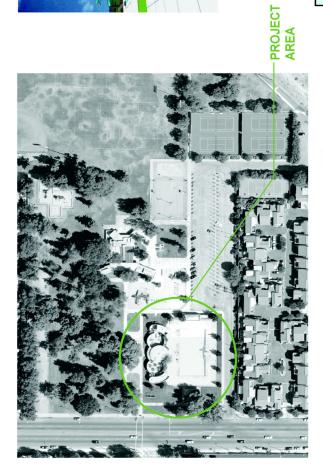


POOL RENDERING

	NORTHRIDGE R.C. PROJECT DETAILS	OJECT DETAILS
	SCOPE	Pool & Bathhouse replacement
	ITEM	Est. PROJECT COST
	DEMOLITION	\$523,000
7	POOL BUILDINGS includes Trellis Shade Structure	\$2,013,000
m	SITE WORK includes utilities, landscape, fencing and R & R of poor soil	\$652,000
4	POOL	\$757,000
2	ACTIVITY POOL includes slide and Splash Pad toys	\$900,000
	TOTAL =	\$4,854,000
	COMPLETION DATE	in design phase













	Spash Pad construction	PROJECT COST	\$53,000	A.N	\$388,000	\$441,000	Jun-04
DETAILS	SCOPE	ITEM	Site work & mobilization	POOL	ACTIVITY POOL with Splash Pad toys	TOTAL =	COMPLETION DATE
				2	4		





PROJECTAREA		
Oaks R.C. SE REPLA		Pool & Bathhouse replacement
An Nuys Sherman Oaks R.C.	Van Nuys / Sherman Oaks DETAILS	36
	Van	SCOPE

	Van Nuys / Sherman Oaks DETAILS	
	SCOPE	Pool & Bathhouse replacement
	ITEM	PROJECT COST
Н	POOL BATHHOUSE	\$948,000
2	POOL	\$1,630,000
8	Change ORDER for soil conditions caused by pool leakage	\$1,300,000
4	ACTIVITY POOL for wading & Splash Pad toy	\$375,000
	TOTAL =	\$4,253,000
	COMPLETION DATES	
	Phase 1 - Pool	Jul-02
	Phase 2 - Bathhouse	Jun-04

mid AUGUST, 2004

COMPLETION DATE

\$1,420,500

TOTAL =

SLIDE / WATER TOYS

\$1,130,500 N.A.

A.A









**NEW CONSTRUCTION** 

PROJECT AREA

Pool renovation & bathhouse rehabilitation work

SCOPE

E.G. ROBERTS PROJECT DETAILS

PROJECT COST

N.A. \$290,000

POOL BUILDINGS rehab)

7

SITE WORK

3 4

DEMOLITION

TEM





FORMER CONDITIONS

# POOL & ENCLOSURE REFURBISHMENT



# **Key to Pool Conditions Information**

In the following pages, this report gives factual information about the City's pools, their conditions, and their needs, both through Quick Looks (by Council District) and in detail on the Condition Reports (by pool).

The detailed reports do not attempt to be all-encompassing in reporting all possible repair needs; estimates are based chiefly on actual, recent work of a similar nature performed by Recreation and Parks Facility Repair Division staff. In some cases, as annotated on these pages, the Bureau of Engineering has been able to provide early results on estimating some portions of pool repairs. Their estimates are much higher than Recreation and Parks' in-house experience, but we must rely on their costs estimates in the event contractors are used, in lieu of Department staff. These estimated costs do not factor in possible additional costs for asbestos or lead abatement, or other unforseen costs that may arise, but are provided here as a basis for understanding the current crisis and the long-term financial requirements of a safe, viable swimming pool system for the City. We have only provided a menu of possible pool repair work if such repairs would meaningfully extend the life of a pool; if repair work would essentially be wasted money, we have only indicated the need for replacment.

The Department previously assembled a priority list for replacements of pools, based on the Infrastructure Report Card, the nature of current problems, and the record of past failure or number of closed days. That preliminary priority of replacement is recorded on the detail pages of applicable pools.

Other information provided for each pool include the date constructed, or reconstructed if it has been replaced, the capacity of swimmers to give a sense of the pool's size, and the hours of operation and programming at each location. Median Household Income quoted is for the immediate 2000 Census Tract (10-block area) in which the pool is located. Most of the seasonal pools are not retrofitted for compliance under the Americans with Disabilities Act.