

*OP-ED piece written on behalf of the Grand Marais Pool Committee  
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### **Time to Sink or Swim**

*Looking at the future of the Grand Marais Municipal Pool*

Step into the Grand Marais Municipal Pool and you might agree that the aging facility could use a face-lift. Behind the walls, however, is proof that the renovations need to go beyond the surface. Mold, rust, and rot are prevalent—so, what does that mean for the facility's future?

*First, a look at the past...*

The pool and its accompanying natatorium opened in 1977, and a few problems were spotted shortly after. The roof leaked, energy costs were high, and support columns soon began to rust. Caused by high levels of humidity, many these problems were expected to be solved by a new membrane roof in 1995. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

From 2002-2003, several different consultants and contractors visited the pool to assess the building's structural issues and offer solutions. One study in particular concluded that in order for the building to survive much longer, the exterior walls, doors, and windows needed to be completely removed and replaced—the roof, too, within the next five years. They reported that the building's ventilation needed to be improved, and also noted the need for the entire structure to be more energy-efficient.

The pool itself, on the other hand, was studied in 2006. The consulting firm, Burbach Aquatics, Inc. found a variety of code violations, including the exit doors, electrical system, diving board, lifeguard chairs, and more. It would be possible to make some renovations that will bring everything into code, but in some cases—as with making it deep enough to use the diving board—the cost isn't justifiable.

While the natatorium itself could be reconstructed with the pool left as it is, that would also be very expensive—and isn't necessarily the best choice in the long run. Careful consideration needs to be made as we decide what is next.

*Current trends for community pools*

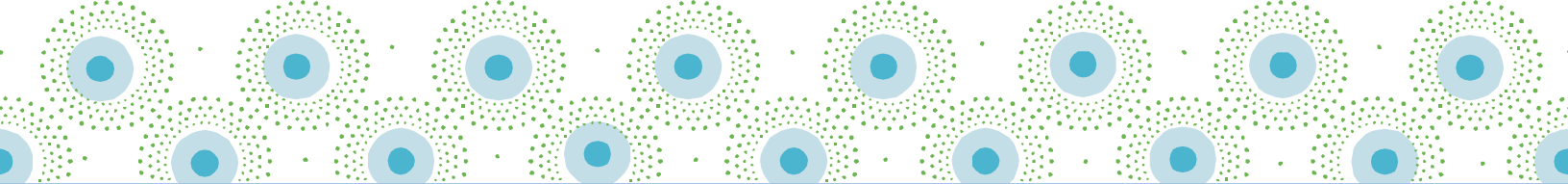
Many industry experts agree that traditional pools like our Grand Marais Municipal Pool are a dying breed. The current trend is to create a more recreationally-focused facility with waterslides and other attractions, and/or to combine it with other resources, such as a library or meeting spaces, making it one aspect of a complete community center.

This concept has worked well for some other municipal/county owned pools. According to an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, the sale of pool passes more than doubled when the Itasca Park District opened an indoor "water park" with palm trees and waterslide five years ago. Other cities, like Bayfield, Becker, Sleepy Eye, Le Sueur, and Granite Falls, have chosen to make their pools part of larger community and fitness centers.

Right now, the Joint Recreation Powers Board and Grand Marais Pool Committee are carefully considering the possibilities, crunching the numbers, and weighing the pros and cons of each. They're also looking into ways to raise the money to fund the project, whether it's through private donations, grants, taxes, or other sources.

A complete report on the information they've gathered so far is available to you (see the contact information below). In addition to presenting the options and associated costs, this report also includes property tax estimates, from the County Auditor's Office.

*continued...*



*Want to learn more?*

To receive a copy of the report compiled by the members of the Joint Recreation Powers Board, including specific findings from the studies cited in this article, contact [diane.booth@co.cook.mn.us](mailto:diane.booth@co.cook.mn.us). You may also send feedback and additional questions to Diane.

The debate over the future of a pool in Cook County will continue. It's important that we make the choice that is right for our community, so make sure you are informed and your opinion is heard. You can do that by contacting the City Council, Cook County Board of Commissioners, and/or the members of the Joint Recreation Powers Board.

