

Worthington Pools: Toward 100 Years of Service to the Community

SWIMINC is the non-profit entity that developed Worthington Pools on the grounds of Thomas Worthington High School 70 years ago. To this day, it operates the outdoor facilities there without any recurring financial support from the city's taxpayers. SWIMINC now envisions a generational investment – one needed for the survival of outdoor aquatic recreation in this city. Provided all outdoor facilities are reconstructed now, the entire community can look forward confidently to the centennial of Worthington Pools, 31 years from now in 2054.

A significant first step toward this generational investment has been taken already. In January 2023, SWIMINC contracted with Brandstetter and Carroll for a study of redevelopment options. Completed on time and submitted on June 1st, the study will be posted soon on our website. Brandstetter and Carroll examined the possibility of renovating some or all the outdoor facilities, as opposed to reconstructing the entire complex. The estimated cost would be \$10.3 to \$12.8 million. The firm also found that completely reconstructing the complex would cost \$15.4 million. SWIMINC's board of directors unanimously endorses this option, which would result in facilities that everyone in the community will be proud of, both now and in the future.

Comprehensive reconstruction is bound to be more satisfactory two to four decades from now than partial or full renovation, which will cost just 17 to 33 percent less. Comprehensive reconstruction is affordable in part because of Worthington Pools' location on land belonging to Worthington City Schools. For example, the continuing availability of the high school parking lot means that the expense of building a new lot need not be added to the projected investment of \$15.4 million. Also, the affordability of comprehensive reconstruction is underscored by the money the City of Columbus has earmarked for renovating (not reconstructing) just one pool and an adjacent building in Tuttle Park, just north of Ohio State University. The budget for that project is \$10 million, according to a May 26th article in the *Columbus Dispatch*.

SWIMINC also anticipates that new outdoor facilities will be self-supporting on an operating basis. This claim is not based on projections of revenues and expenses during the years to come. Rather, the claim reflects Worthington Pools' actual performance. But for the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in membership sales, instructional fees, etc. in 2020, when Covid-19 forced cancellation of the summer season, revenues would have covered expenses from October 2015 through April 2023. This financial performance is impressive given that nearly all outdoor pools in the United States with comparable results are in wealthy places that enjoy warm weather 365 days a year – places such as Naples, Florida. These complexes stay open year-round and charge thousands of dollars for annual memberships, much more than the hundreds of dollars that a summer membership at Worthington Pools costs.

Brandstetter and Carroll's report has been shared with the City of Worthington. Some municipal leaders have mentioned the possibility of phasing the generational investment SWIMINC is proposing. While waiting eagerly for the City's decision, SWIMINC will engage in proactive maintenance and take all other steps required to continue serving this community, as it has done since 1954.