



Saving the Robert A. Lee Pool

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Iowa City loves its public pools.



Municipal swimming pools have had strong support since a tragic drowning death spurred completion of Iowa City's first public pool in 1949.

The first indoor public pool was added in 1964 to provide year-round swimming opportunities.

In 1968, Iowa City determined it needed two indoor pools and ultimately added a second.

Since then, the city's population has increased by 60% and continues to grow.

Public input confirms that Iowa City's residents value aquatics above all other recreation services.

Community aquatics in Iowa City.



Three municipal swimming pools:

(Indoor, year-round):

Robert A. Lee (RAL) Pool

Mercer Park Aquatic Center

(Outdoor, summer only):

City Park Pool

- Distinguishing features:
 - Affordable user fees
 - “RecAssist” discounts for income-eligible residents
 - Family/Household/Child discounts
 - Community-focused programming
 - \$2 Swim
 - Holiday and youth-focused events
 - Inclusive programming for health/safety
 - All-age and adaptive swim lessons
 - Lifeguard training
 - Water fitness classes

RAL pool's future is threatened.

The City's Recreation Master Plan
describes intentions to:

Close and repurpose the RAL Pool.

- Claiming low usage that has since been proven false.
- Saying the pool space **might** meet some unspecified need.
- Intending instead, to add a smaller, less versatile warm-water pool at Mercer Park Aquatic Center, despite a lack of community support.

(The term City generally refers to the Iowa City Parks & Recreation Department.)

The City's projected costs (2022).



Expand Mercer Park Aquatic Center by adding another pool.

\$8 to \$9 million

Renovate the **entire** RAL Recreation Center (including the RAL pool).

\$4.5 to \$5 million

Renovate **only** the RAL pool and pool enclosure.

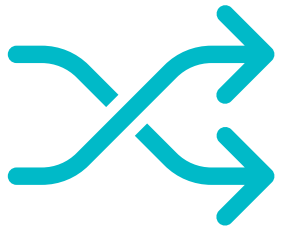
\$579,000

The City's intentions are contradicted by their own data.

Responses confirm residents value aquatics above all other recreation services.

Respondents say RAL's "downtown/central location" is "**preferred**" and "**more accessible.**"

Shifting indoor aquatics to Mercer Park is viewed unfavorably by over two-thirds of respondents.



To the contrary, it directly supports saving and improving the RAL pool.

The City's intentions disregard its own Strategic Plan values.

The City suggests displaced RAL pool users can swim at University of Iowa, Coralville, or North Liberty pools.

- UI pool fees are 2.5 to 4 times higher; no child, household, or low-income discounts; limited hours; no water fitness classes; not community focused.
- Increased transportation costs and travel time to other cities are obvious barriers, especially for seniors, children, and mobility challenged.
- Iowa City residents pay substantial taxes to fund Iowa City recreation services and should not be denied access to them nor the benefits they provide.

(Sources: 10/18/2022 Iowa City Council work session, audio recording; University of Iowa CRWC website; 2023-2028 Iowa City Strategic Plan.)

The City's double standard: Recreation goals don't apply to aquatics.

Iowa City's recreation goals:

- Deliver high-quality programs/services that are in-touch with community needs.
- Deliver recreation accessible to various neighborhoods to reduce need for transportation.
- Provide adults with resources/programs/equipment that promote active living, lifelong fitness, and healthy lifestyles.

(Source: 04/12/2023 Parks & Rec Commission meeting minutes.)

Iowa City's aquatics plan:



**Ignores overwhelming opposition.
Is out of touch with community needs.**



Increases transportation needs by removing recreation access from the city's center and transit hub.



Eliminates access for adults to the safest resource to support a healthy and active lifestyle while aging.

Community members take action.



Attend meetings with City Administrators.

Attend meetings with City Councilors.

Provide public comments to City Council and Parks & Rec Commission.

Volunteer to lead RAL pool activities and conduct community outreach.

Submit editorials to local and regional media.

Gather signatures supporting the repair and preservation of the historic RAL pool.

Verify actual RAL pool attendance, analyze data, encourage accurate and transparent reporting.

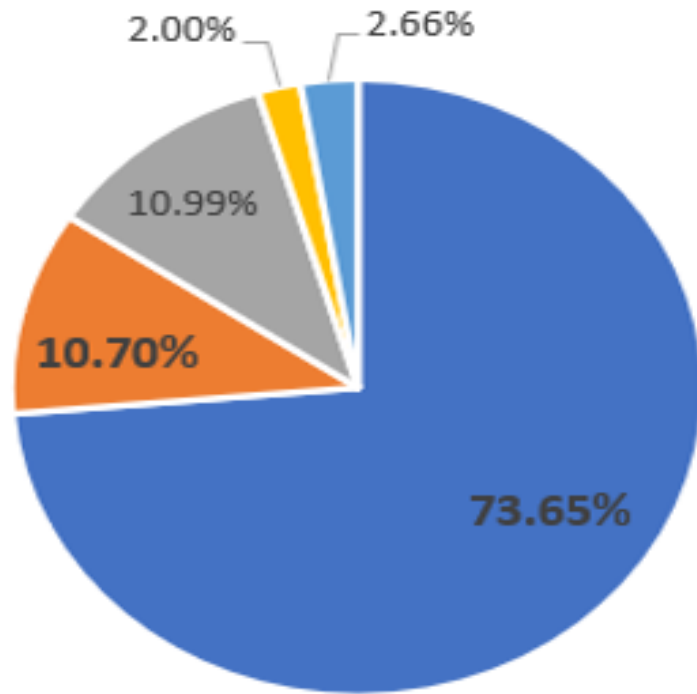
Community disproves City's claims. Shows RAL pool use is robust.

When factors of pool size and hours are made equal to make a valid comparison possible:



- **RAL's total pool use is over 1½ times that of Mercer.**
- **RAL's "Rec" use is more than 2½ that of Mercer.**

Audit confirms magnitude of unreported RAL pool attendance.



Over 8,800 instances of RAL pool use have been omitted from City attendance reports.

(October 2022 – June 2025)

Unreported RAL Pool Use – by Type

■ Rec Swim ■ \$2 Swim Events ■ Training Events ■ Other Events ■ Water Fitness

Loss of public trust.

When describing community-led analysis of monthly pool use reports,
Parks & Recreation Director, Juli Seydell Johnson said,

“We do not dispute their numbers.”

Yet, flawed measurement methods remain
UNCHANGED

(Source: 9/13/2023 Parks & Recreation Commission meeting, audio recording.)

A decision (possibly) delayed.

After the outpouring of community concern, the Parks & Rec Commission recommended delaying decisions for Mercer and RAL pools until after renovation of City Park Pool.

(projected May 2026)



The City's caveat:
If there is a catastrophic issue
(like a tornado hitting the building),
decisions about the future of RAL pool
will be made sooner.

Recreation Master Plan approved.

The Iowa City Council approved the Recreation Master Plan despite overwhelming community dissent and without all members in agreement.

Parks & Rec Department was directed to continue reporting pool use data.

Some councilors defend their vote by describing the plan as a road map that is not set in stone.

(Source: 10/18/2023 Iowa City Council Meeting.)

The City's intentions are clear.

Despite profound community opposition, the City's goal remains unchanged.

All efforts by the public to engage with City representatives resulted in no substantive discussion or meaningful results.

The City has made no attempts to increase RAL pool use. In fact, quite the opposite.

The City continues to provide inaccurate data and misrepresent the facts to justify closing the RAL pool.

Public support endures.

Community members continue to:

- Document true pool attendance and analyze City reports.
- Attend Iowa City Council and Parks & Rec Commission meetings; submit public comments.
- Build community and rally RAL pool supporters.
- Educate the public and promote the RAL Rec Center and pool.



RAL Rec Center added to National Register of Historic Places.



In 2024 a community-led nomination achieved national recognition for RAL's:

Architectural significance and location, designated as a public space since 1839.

Exceptional representation of mid-century modern rec center; very few exist in the U.S.

Rare demonstration of municipal planning, where its central location supports city goals of a walkable, livable, vibrant downtown.

Longstanding and widespread public support.

Providing access to funding for preservation and restoration.

Why saving the RAL pool matters.

The ability to swim saves lives and supports life-long physical and mental health for everyone.

The RAL pool is a special place where community bonds are created and nurtured.

Reducing pool access disproportionately impacts underserved and vulnerable populations.

Decisions based on inaccurate data and false justifications corrupt community-informed governance.

Eliminating public health and wellness resources negatively impacts all residents, for generations to come.

Families prefer the RAL pool for:

Dedicated Wading Pool

Warm Water Swim Lessons

Youth and Inclusive Events

Welcoming Community



RAL pool strengthens family bonds.

- Improves family connections.
- Builds healthy habits.
- Increases confidence in children.
- Improves children's mental health.
- Encourages an active lifestyle.

(Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health.)

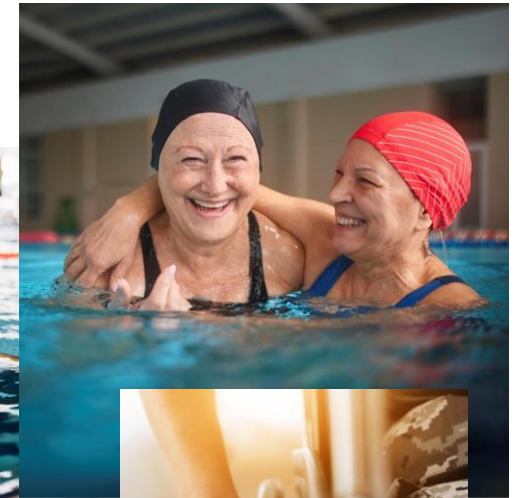
RAL pool is essential for successful aging.

- Increases strength, balance, and stability.
- Reduces acute and chronic pain; improves sleep.
- Improves bone health and use of arthritic joints.
- Reduces inflammation and disability.
- Increases social interaction and engagement.
- Improves quality of life and sense of well-being.
- Provides a safer fitness option with low potential for injury.

(Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Council on Aging.)

Seniors choose the RAL pool for:

Warm Water and Friendly Atmosphere
Proximity to IC Senior Center and Ecumenical Towers
Social Integration Across Age/Cultural Boundaries
Deep-Water Fitness Options and Chair Lift
Less Intimidating, Modest Facility Size



RAL pool supports Iowa City's downtown.

Uniquely Livable

- Provides affordable recreation and wellness for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities, including the most vulnerable.
- Accessibility by foot, bike, and bus aligns with ecological principles of a 15-Minute City.
- The only municipal pool and all-age recreation facility in the City's core.

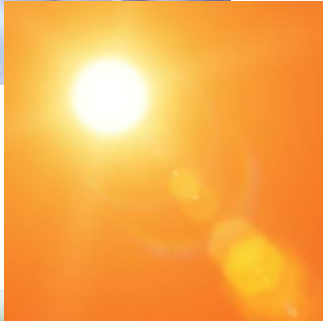
Workers and Economy

- Location allows workers to swim on lunch breaks or before/after work.
- Draws long-term, repeat customers downtown year-round to support:
 - Restaurants
 - Retail stores
 - Arts/Music/Entertainment
- Contributes to a thriving city center and prosperous overall economy.

Iowa City's indoor pools are increasingly essential.



Escalating need for year-round aquatics due to mounting environmental hazards (extreme weather, poor air quality).



Providing uninterrupted access during facility closures (maintenance, repair, swim meets, etc.).



Reducing access to indoor pools when need is increasing would be detrimental to Iowa City's growing population.

Why RAL pool's central location is so important.

Quick and easy access by walking, biking, or one bus ride via the City's nearby transit hub.

Removing accessible aquatics options would create barriers of increased travel time and transportation costs.

Right-sized, easily accessed pools like RAL are models of efficient and responsible recreation services.



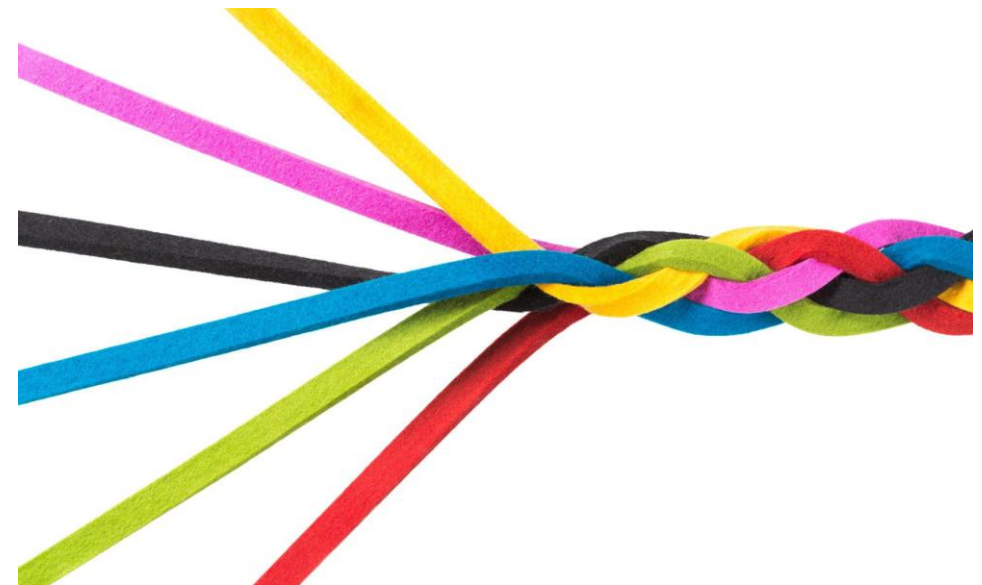
RAL

- Warm water supports seniors, all indoor swim lessons, water fitness classes, holiday/family events, recreation and lap swimming.
- Wading pool serves families with young children.
- Unique deep-water well attracts deep water fitness enthusiasts.

Mercer

- Larger pool and colder water accommodate high-intensity lap swimming and local/regional swim team training and competitions.

**How Iowa City's
indoor pools
serve different,
yet important
functions.**



The RAL pool is...

- Everyone's neighborhood gathering place.
- Where the warm water and central location welcome and accommodate everyone.
- Where efficient and timeless design attract families and individuals of all ages, abilities, incomes, races, religions, ethnicities, and lifestyles.
- Where everyone comes together to play, exercise, and socialize.
- Where a special sense of belonging is built and nurtured.



COMMUNITY.

One testimonial, symbolic of many.

“As a 45-year-old busy, working mother, the RAL pool has become my unique haven for exercise, fitting perfectly with my demanding schedule. I didn’t find this opportunity in other places. As new residents from South America finding our feet in Iowa City, my family and I have been warmly embraced by the RAL pool community, making us feel truly at home. Moreover, the pool’s outstanding swimming lessons, taught by dedicated instructors at flexible times, have been invaluable for my children’s growth and confidence. The RAL pool is much more than a physical place for exercising. It is a place that pulses community spirit, accessibility, belonging and acceptance. These values cannot be replaced with a new pool in another place.”

– **Juliana Talarico, PhD, RN, FAAN**

The RAL pool = Rec Center's life force.

Removing its primary attraction would set the stage for the historic RAL Rec Center's ultimate demise, as poignantly described about closure of the Central YMCA in London:

We've come to accept as entirely normal the gradual erosion of public amenities and community services in our cities and towns, the slow but inevitable decline of all those places that were designed to nurture human connection...

Mourning the closure isn't just about lamenting the closing of a building, and it's not about looking back: it's despair about closing a door to the future.

– Ian Sansom, Times Literary Supplement, January 24, 2025

**The RAL pool is a treasure that makes Iowa City special and unique.
With your support it will continue to do so for generations to come.**



And last, but not least...

**We invite you to
defy gravity with us!**

**We are all FRIENDS
at the
Robert A. Lee Pool.**

Brought to you by Friends of RAL Pool.