

MILWAUKEE COUNTY PARKS AQUATICS STUDY

MILWAUKEE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

AUGUST 2025

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PROJECT OVERVIEW



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Milwaukee County Parks commissioned Williams Architects and Counsilman-Hunsaker to assess the current state of its aquatics system and chart a strategic course for its future. The scope of this project encompassed an evaluation of the County's role as an aquatics provider, from recreational offerings and swim instruction to employment opportunities. Historical attendance trends, staffing efficiencies, and the financial underpinnings of the system, including maintenance costs and fee structures were all analyzed and examined.

The study also takes into account the broader context of aquatics by projecting long-term trends in aquatic recreation by large municipal providers. Equity is a central consideration, ensuring that both access to facilities and the range of aquatic offerings are equitably distributed. Public feedback was also analyzed with the 2023 online community survey providing valuable insights from the regarding the public's perspectives on aquatics in the County. Ultimately, this study aims to provide Milwaukee County with data-driven recommendations and a strategic roadmap to ensure a vibrant and sustainable aquatics system for years to come.

This study has also reviewed previously conducted facility assessment reports for the waterparks, swimming pools, wading pools and splashpads. This information has been utilized to assist with determining expected lifespans and priorities for capital improvements.

Project Goals

- Definition of Milwaukee County's primary role as a seasonal, recreational aquatics provider, with a secondary emphasis on year-round aquatics with two indoor pools.
- Evaluation of attendance trends over the past 10+ years.
- Consideration of comparable municipal aquatic systems.
- Synthesis of existing aquatic facility conditions and determination of remaining useful life.
- Maintenance costs – short- and long-term
- Projected trends in aquatic recreation.
- Equity disparities, both neighborhood and regional. Consideration should be of both user equity needs as well as equitable aquatic offerings.
- Facility counts, type of service, availability analysis, and service areas for aquatic facilities in Milwaukee County identified with ownership. Information shall be shown in both tabular and mapping format.
- Budgetary impacts on opening and operating aquatic facilities.
- Review of online aquatics survey conducted in 2023 and feedback results from in-person engagement events.



PROJECT OUTCOMES

The goal of the aquatics study is to help Milwaukee County define a series of actionable recommendations aimed at updating their aquatics system. Recommendations are provided at the system-wide level and for specific facility types. System-wide recommendations address current and anticipated demand, informed by population trends, national best practices, and public input. These recommendations consider the remaining useful life of existing facilities, equity in distribution and programming, and long-term financial implications.

For specific facility types, the study provides tailored recommendations. Outdoor swimming pools, water parks, and indoor pools are evaluated as a collective category and individually, with guidance on facility management, operating schedules, and budgetary cost recovery. Wading pools and splashpads are also analyzed as distinct categories, with recommendations addressing their unique operational and programming needs. Each recommendation considers factors such as population and demographics within each pool's service area, seasonal usage patterns, and budgetary impacts to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable approach to aquatics in Milwaukee County. While beaches are acknowledged as swimming options within Milwaukee County, they are not subject to the analysis and recommendations of this report.

Milwaukee County Parks serves as one of the primary providers of recreational, fitness, and instructional aquatics for County residents, with a primary focus on outdoor recreational aquatics during the summer season, as has long been the case for municipal parks and recreation aquatics systems across the country.



PROJECT TIMELINE

Kickoff

Project kicked off in October 2024. Kickoff included a virtual steering committee meeting with Milwaukee County Parks Staff, Williams Architects, and Counsilman-Hunsaker.

Project Discussions

Weekly check-in and discussion meetings have been held since October 2024 with a focus on presenting research, discussing past and present pool operations, and examining various future paths for the County in regard to their aquatic facilities.

Site Tours

Counsilman-Hunsaker conducted site visits to several aquatic facilities on October 29 and January 30.

Draft Research and Recommendations Report

In early March 2025, Counsilman-Hunsaker submitted a draft report for a review by Milwaukee County Parks Staff.

Final Documentation | Presentation

Final report submitted in July 2025.





PLANNING STRATEGIES



PLANNING STRATEGIES

System Composition

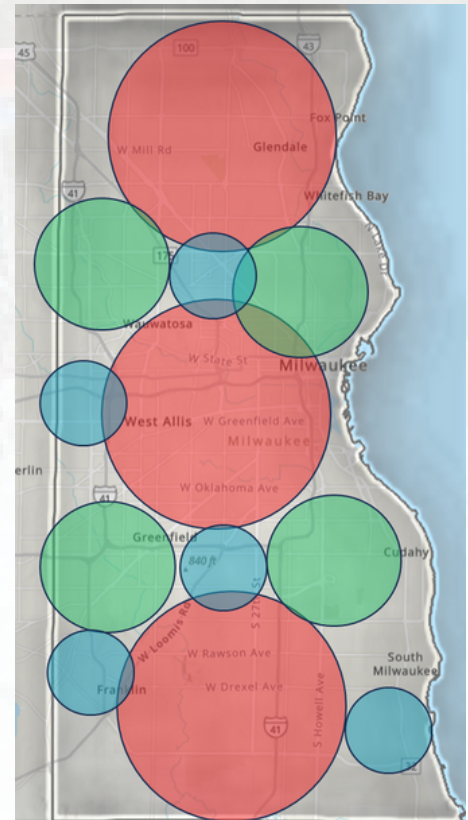
The aquatics planning study process changes if a parks system has existing aquatic facilities or no existing facilities. Considering that Milwaukee County has a mature aquatics system it provides unique challenges to determine the future of aquatics in the County since the existing facilities have been in operation for decades.

Another key factor to consider is the total number of pools within the County. Since 2020, Milwaukee County has not operated several pools each summer due to a variety of reasons, primarily personnel related due to the disruption of service from the global pandemic. As it's been more and more difficult for the County to find adequate lifeguard staff to work at the pools, they've had to make tough decisions about which pools to open and which ones to keep closed. Providing a balance across the county has been a priority while also using past performance of attendance and program offerings as a determining factor. This criteria provides a framework for the current planning study.

The adjacent graphic shows a common planning approach if Milwaukee County did not have any swimming pools where a balance of size, region and service area would be taken into consideration. Regional facilities would be larger and attract residents from over 15 minutes away (similar to Cool Waters and Schulz today), while the community and neighborhood pools target a smaller population and service area that is reflected in their size and layout, with the neighborhood pool being the smaller of the two.

The other planning strategy has been to develop goals for the study that reflect the desire of the County to continue offering recreational outdoor aquatics to their residents within a reasonable distance. Currently there are unserved areas of Milwaukee County with a County-owned and operated facility. The County must decide its goals in regard to the how to best serve its residents with aquatic facilities in terms of drive times, service areas or population density needed to serve an area with aquatics.

Example Planning Approach



Red - Regional
Green - Community
Blue - Neighborhood



PLANNING STRATEGIES

Aquatic Facility Comparisons

Another key factor is the balance of indoor versus outdoor pools. Even in colder climates, recreational swimmers prefer to be outdoors during the summer months. Consideration needs to be given to seasonal availability, but outdoor water still plays a critical role in a successful aquatic system.

Aquatic facilities encompass a diverse range, each with distinct characteristics that influence their financial and operational demands. Indoor aquatic centers, while offering year-round versatility, come with the highest construction and operational costs, often resulting in lower cost recovery percentages. This is due to factors like heating, dehumidification, and specialized maintenance required for indoor environments.

Outdoor aquatic facilities strike a balance between cost and revenue generation. Their construction and operational costs are generally moderate, and they tend to achieve mid-high cost recovery percentages. This is attributed to their seasonal operation and reduced need for climate control. However, outdoor facilities face challenges like weather dependency and increased maintenance due to exposure to the elements.

Splashpads represent the most cost-effective option, with low construction and operational expenses, often leading to full subsidization. Their simplicity and minimal staffing requirements make them attractive for providing accessible water play experiences and heat relief during hot summer days. However, their limited appeal across age groups and weather dependency can restrict their overall usage and revenue potential, along with their inability to offer swimming lessons and recreational swimming.

Wading pools, once a common sight, are steadily being phased out across the aquatics industry. This decline is driven by several factors, including concerns about maintaining proper disinfectant levels, the need for intensive staffing despite low usage, and the inability to host diverse aquatic programs. The trend reflects a shift towards more efficient and versatile aquatic amenities.

The evolving landscape of aquatics highlights a movement towards streamlined operations and innovative facility designs. Rising labor and chemical costs, coupled with the increasing popularity of non-aquatic recreational activities, necessitate a strategic approach to facility management. Modern aquatic centers are incorporating features like zero-depth entries, waterslides, and interactive play elements to enhance appeal and cater to a broader audience. This strategic evolution ensures the sustainability and relevance of aquatic facilities in meeting the recreational needs of communities.




PLANNING STRATEGIES

Data-Driven Decision Making

The following list shows different ways that Milwaukee County can utilize data to help determine the future of all aquatic amenities within the County.

- **Make future aquatics system recommendations based on existing financial operations.**
 - Analyze overall financial performance and create criteria for categories:
 - Cost recovery %
 - Dollar amount of subsidy
 - Determine future of pools based on the subsidy criteria of either percentage or annual subsidy
- **Make future aquatics system recommendations based on seasonal (outdoor) and annual (indoor) attendance and utilization.**
 - Analyze seasonal/annual attendance and determine number of visits range to keep facility operational
 - Under 10,000 visits per season
 - 10,000-20,000 visits per season
 - 20,000+ visits per season
- **Make future aquatics system recommendations based on comparing the pools' existing operations to each other.**
 - Utilize percentage-based criteria as a comparative analysis between pools by determining the percentage of total Milwaukee County Parks visits per pool
 - Determine future of pools based on a utilization percentage criteria (e.g. if a pool receives only 5% of the total visits it might be seen as underutilized)
- **Make future aquatics system recommendations based on services areas within Milwaukee County to maintain balance and equity across the system.**
 - Determine service areas for aquatics
 - Equal distribution of aquatic facilities in each region
 - Requires taking some facilities offline and building new
 - When looking at recommended sizes, quantities, and locations of aquatic facilities, Councilman-Hunsaker recommends a balanced system to support all user groups
 - Based on Milwaukee County's role as a provider of community aquatics, this amount of water should be available for traditional lane usage as well as recreational water activities
 - A balanced system should also include both indoor and outdoor water
 - Set threshold for capital cost upgrades for continued investment when examining renovation, replacement or removal of each facility





MILWAUKEE COUNTY AQUATICS



SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Existing Challenges

Milwaukee County's aquatics system faces a range of challenges and opportunities, as revealed through a comprehensive analysis of its facilities, utilization patterns, and community needs. The system comprises a diverse array of aquatic amenities, including swimming pools, water parks, wading pools, and splash pads, each serving distinct purposes and user groups. However, the system is grappling with aging infrastructure, lifeguard staffing shortages, and evolving community priorities.

Wading pools, in particular, present a significant challenge. Their declining popularity, coupled with high maintenance demands and safety concerns, has prompted a nationwide trend towards their conversion into splashpads. This shift reflects a desire for more versatile and cost-effective water play features that require less supervision and offer broader appeal. Furthermore, wading pools and splashpads do not offer an immersive aquatics experience and are not able to accommodate swimming lessons, water safety classes or fitness opportunities, as their primary function is heat relief and recreation for young children.

Lifeguard staffing shortages pose a critical challenge, leading to facility closures, reduced operating hours, and safety concerns. This issue underscores the need for innovative recruitment strategies, competitive compensation packages, and potentially re-evaluating staffing models to ensure adequate safety coverage and optimal facility operation. Milwaukee County has implemented a variety of staffing recruitment initiatives since 2020 to help combat the shortage including the hiring of a dedicated recruiter, wage increases, and offering various incentives for new and returning staff.

Aging infrastructure and mounting maintenance needs place a strain on the County's aquatics budget. Many of Milwaukee County Parks' aquatics facilities will begin to soon require significant investment for repairs or replacement. This necessitates a strategic prioritization of capital improvement projects and a long-term financial plan to ensure the system's sustainability. Milwaukee County's newest swimming pool was constructed 15 years ago (Schulz) and the last round of pool replacements occurred in the early 1990s with Cool Waters and Pelican Cove.

The indoor pools are approaching 50 years of age which, while they are aging, have not reached the end of their expected lifespan, which for indoor pools can exceed 75 years. Milwaukee County Parks has been replacing the outdoor wading pools with splashpads to help provide a more modern aquatic amenity that is less personnel and maintenance intensive. Wading pools, in general, are not a facility type that most aquatic systems incorporate as an amenity due to their limited programmability and utilization, two factors that are experienced with Milwaukee County Parks' wading pools.



SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Aquatic Facility Distribution

Facility utilization varies across the County, with some pools experiencing high demand while others face underutilization. This highlights the importance of understanding community needs and preferences, optimizing facility locations, and offering diverse programming to attract a wider range of users. External factors, such as weather patterns and competition from other aquatic facilities, also influence utilization and should be considered in planning and operational decisions.

The distribution of swimming pools in Milwaukee County reveals some potential areas for improvement. While the highest density of pools is concentrated in central Milwaukee County, mirroring the population density, there is a noticeable lack of water parks and wading pools in both the northern and southern regions. This suggests that residents in these areas may have limited access to aquatic amenities, particularly those catering to families with young children. Additionally, there are several instances of overlapping service areas for splashpads and wading pools, indicating potential redundancy in provision. Specifically, Kops Park and Cooper Park, Lindsay Park and Indigenous Peoples Park, Mitchell Park and Walker Square Park, Saveland Park, Tippecanoe Park and Humboldt Park, Nathaniel Greene Park and Pulaski Cudahy Park, and Alcott Park, Wedgewood Park and Lyons Park all have overlapping service areas. This overlap may result in inefficient allocation of resources and could be addressed by consolidating or repurposing some facilities to better serve the community.



SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Drive Times

For the purposes of this study, drive times for service areas have been prioritized over a simple mile radius around each pool to better reflect travel times, traffic conditions, and equity.

1. Reflects Actual User Experience and Accessibility

- **Real-World Travel:** A mile radius assumes a straight line distance, which rarely reflects how people actually travel. Roads, traffic, rivers, lakes, railway lines, and other geographical barriers can make a short distance translate into a significantly longer drive.
- **Time is a Key Factor:** For most people, the time it takes to get to an aquatics facility is far more relevant than the linear distance. A 5-mile drive on a congested city street with multiple stoplights and turns can take much longer than a 10-mile drive on a suburban highway. People are more likely to visit a waterpark, indoor pool and outdoor pool if it's a convenient time commitment.
- **Traffic Conditions:** Drive-time analysis can factor in typical traffic patterns and even time-of-day variations (e.g., rush hour vs. off-peak), providing a more dynamic and accurate picture of accessibility.

2. Ensures Equitable Access

- **Addressing Geographic Barriers:** A simple mile radius might show a neighborhood is relatively close to an aquatics facility, but if residents have to navigate a major highway, a river without a bridge, or a dense industrial area, that pool could be inaccessible. Drive-time analysis reveals these hidden barriers.
- **Considering Transportation Modes:** While drive time primarily focuses on cars, understanding the road network still informs public transportation routes and even safe pedestrian/biking paths.
- **Socioeconomic Equity:** Communities with limited access to personal vehicles rely heavily on public transportation or walking. If pools are only close by mile radius but require lengthy or inconvenient drive times, whether by personal transportation or public transit, it does not address existing inequities.

3. Optimizes Facility Placement and Investment

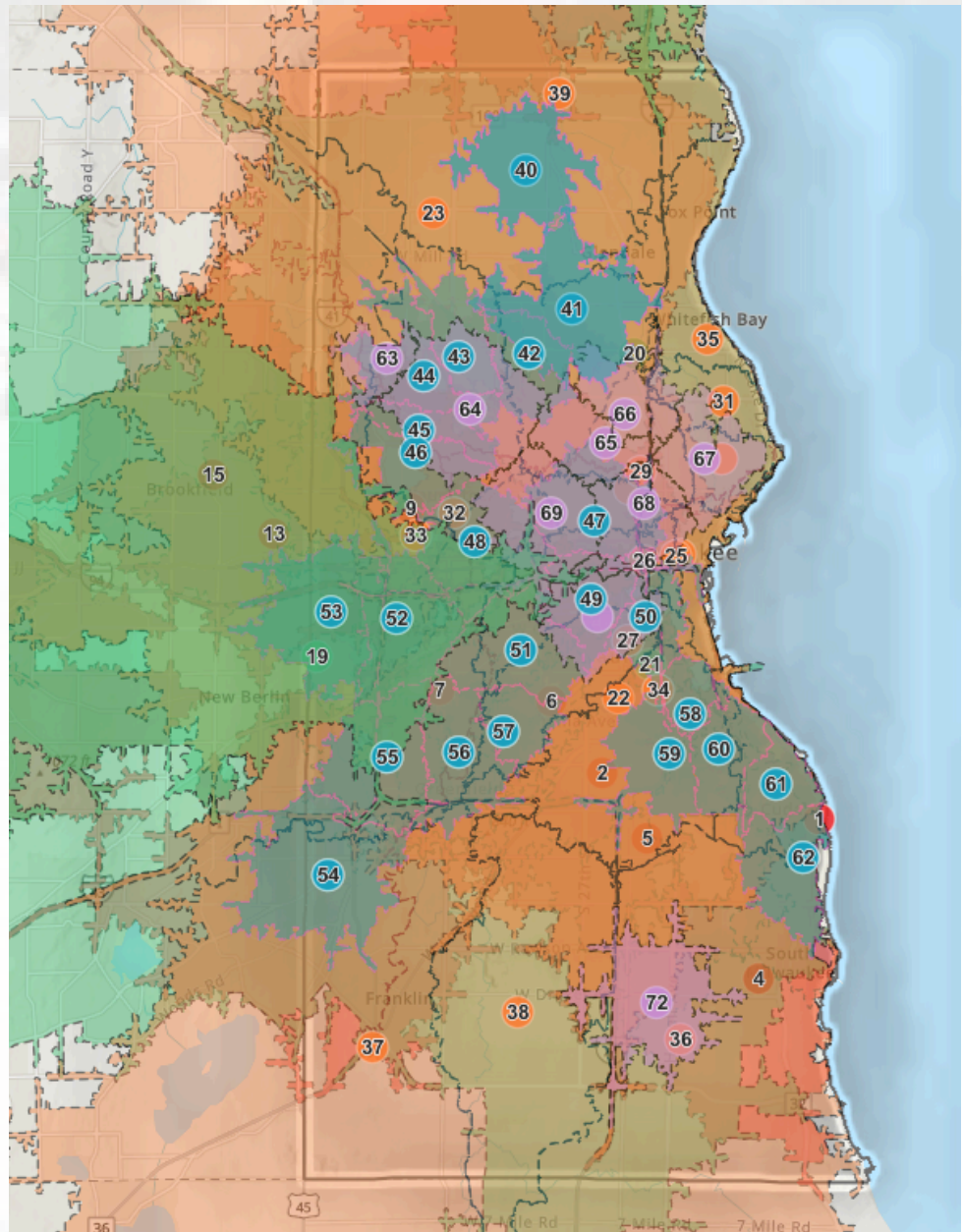
- **Identifying True Gaps in Service:** Instead of seeing overlapping circles (mile radii) that may not translate to effective coverage, drive-times reveal actual service areas. This allows the aquatics study to pinpoint neighborhoods or population clusters within Milwaukee County that genuinely lack convenient access to an aquatic facility.
- **Strategic Siting of New Facilities:** When planning for new pools or significant renovations, using drive times ensures that new investments are placed where they will maximize reach and serve the most underserved populations, leading to higher utilization rates.
- **Understanding Competitive Landscape:** When analyzing other aquatic providers, comparing their drive-time service areas provides a much more accurate understanding of their true market reach and how Milwaukee County's facilities compare.



SYSTEM OVERVIEW

As part of the Aquatics Study process, Counsilman-Hunsaker has reviewed the location and service areas for the Milwaukee County Aquatics Facilities including swimming pools, waterparks, wading pools and splashpads. Drive time distances that correlate to the type of facility have been utilized to identify 5-minute, 7-minute, 10-minute, 15-minute and 20-minute or greater service areas. Wading pools and splashpads have a smaller service area radius due to their size and catering to a younger age group. Swimming pools can have a 10-to-15-minute service area dependent on size while waterparks can extend to 20-minutes or longer. While not all visits to each facility come from within these drive-times, its expected that the majority of visits originate from people who live within these areas.

Green - Waterparks
Orange - Indoor Pools
Purple - Splashpads
Blue - Wading Pools



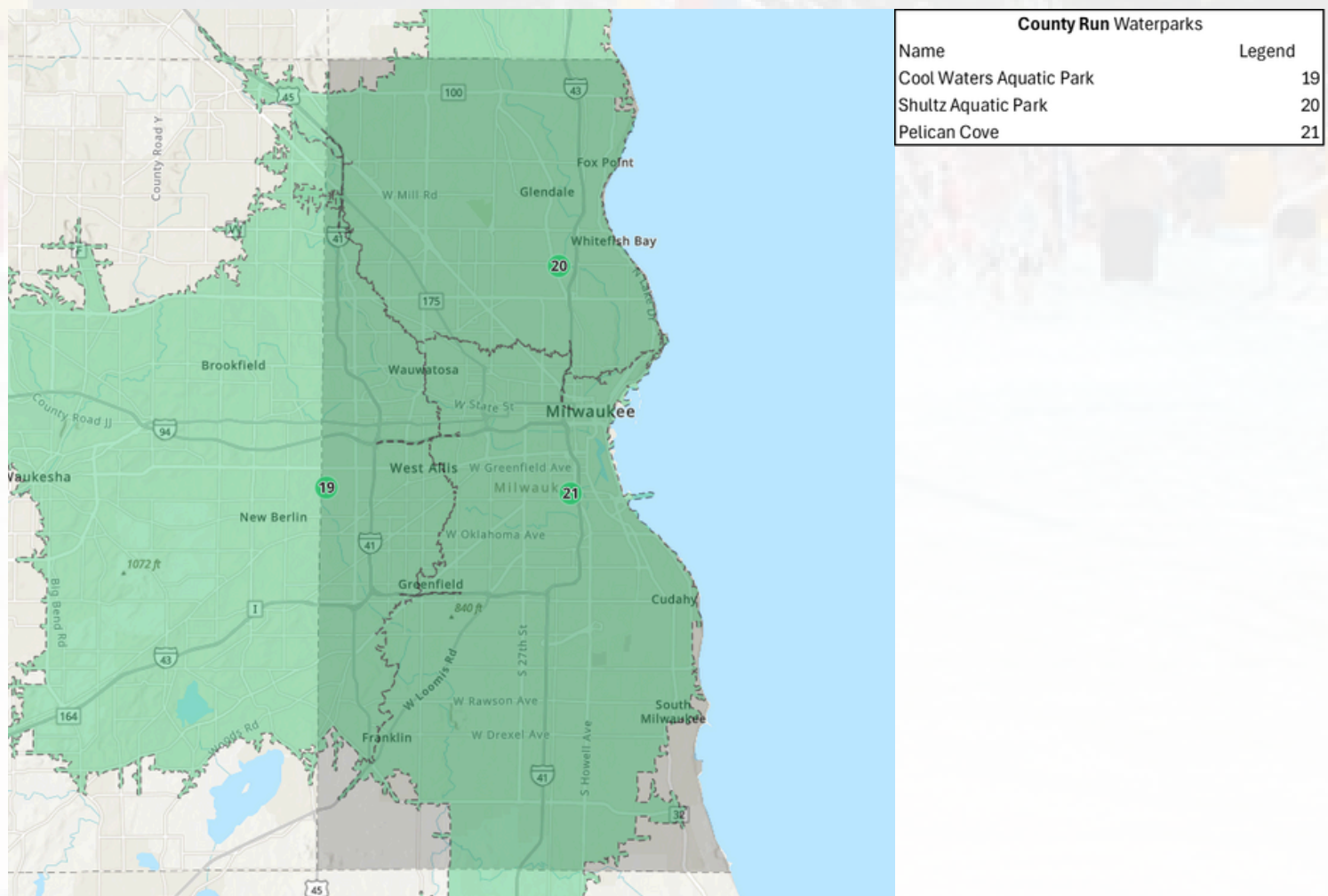
Specific legend for each facility type on pages 16-19, 26 and 29.



SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The following maps have been developed to show existing facility locations, services areas for each facility, other area providers, gaps in service and a comparative look at population density. The three Milwaukee County waterparks are primarily located in the central and north side of the county. The outdoor pools are fairly evenly dispersed with the exception of the far south and northern sectors. The indoor pools are located in the northwest and central to southeast area of the County and the majority of the County is covered within their service areas. For the areas of the County that are not within the service area of Pulaski and Noyes, private providers exist to serve the indoor aquatics needs of those residents. The shaded outline represents the boundaries of Milwaukee County.

Milwaukee County Waterparks - 20-minute drive time service areas for each waterpark

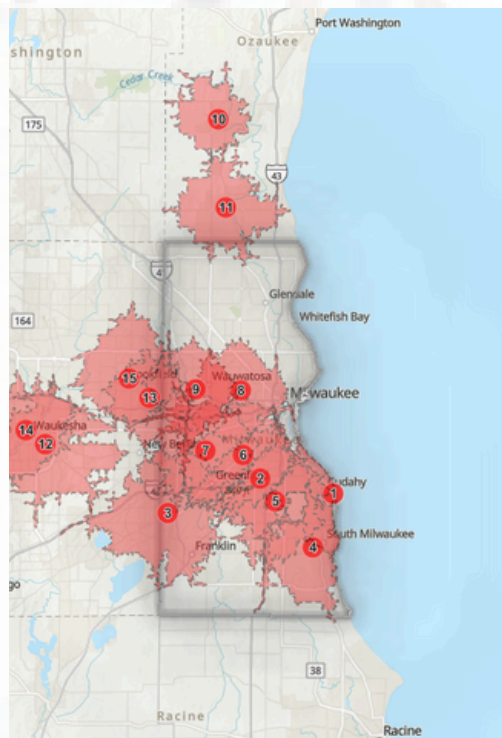


SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Milwaukee County Outdoor Swimming Pools and Other Providers

Studying other area swimming pool providers is important when conducting an aquatics study as it allows for an assessment of the competitive landscape for other swimming pools within the Milwaukee County market, and allows the identification of underserved populations. Other public, private, and non-profit aquatic centers (like YMCAs or private fitness clubs) within or near the county offer swimming opportunities. Understanding their offerings, pricing, usage patterns, and target demographics is essential to identify gaps in service and opportunities for differentiation. Also, by analyzing where other facilities are located and who they serve, the study can pinpoint areas or demographics within Milwaukee County that are currently underserved by aquatic programming. This helps ensure equitable access across the county for recreational aquatics facilities. The distribution of aquatic facilities across the county shows that Milwaukee County is not the only aquatics provider in the County and does not necessarily need to target every area of the county with a particular type of aquatic facility.

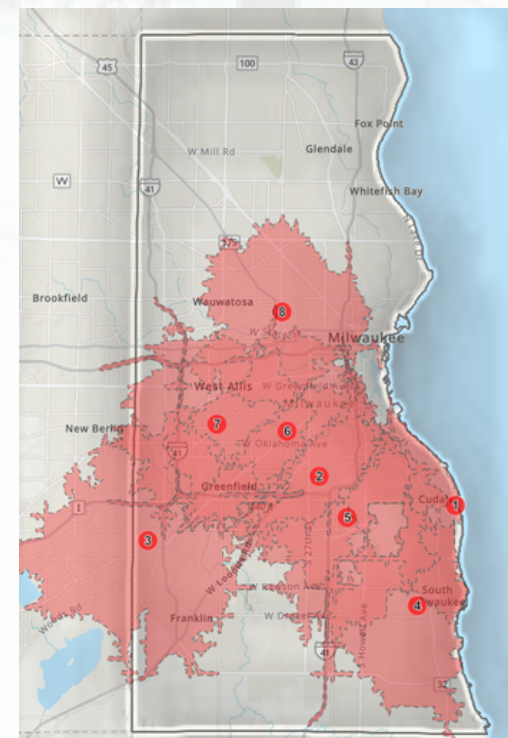
Non-Milwaukee County Pools - 10-minute drive time service areas for each swimming pool



County Run Outdoor Pools		
Name	Legend	
Sheridan Park Pool	1	
Wilson Park Pool	2	
Hales Corners Pool	3	
Grobschmidt Pool	4	
Holler Pool	5	
Jackson Pool	6	
McCarty Pool	7	
Washington Pool	8	

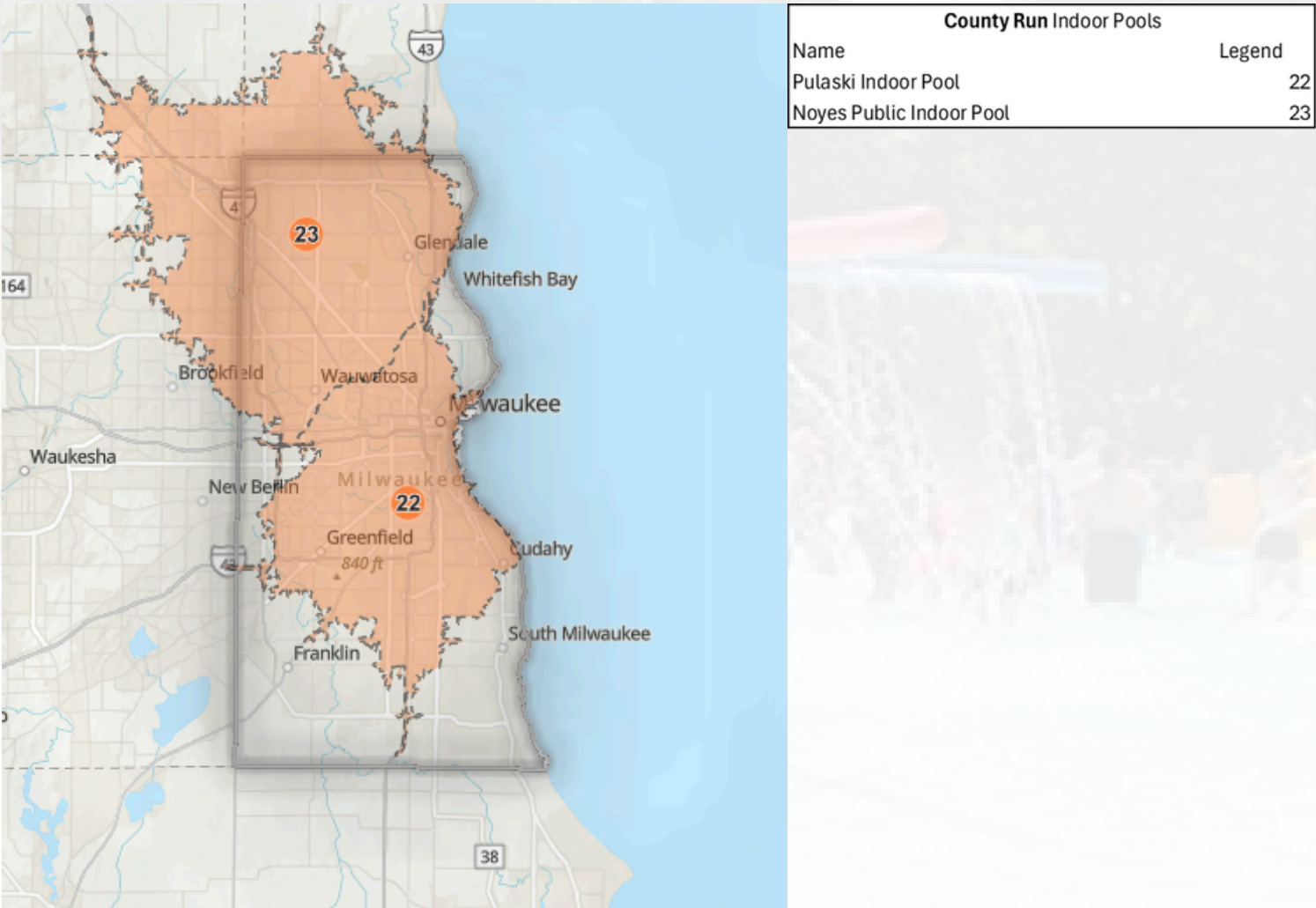
Additional Provider Outdoor Pools		
TOSA Pool at Hoyt Park	9	
Cedarburg Pool	10	
Mequon Community Pool	11	
Buchner Pool	12	
Elm Grove Village Park	13	
Horeb Springs Aquatic Center	14	
Wirth Park Aquatic Center	15	
Veterans Memorial Park Aquatic Center	16	

Milwaukee County Pools - 10-minute drive time service areas for each swimming pool



SYSTEM OVERVIEW

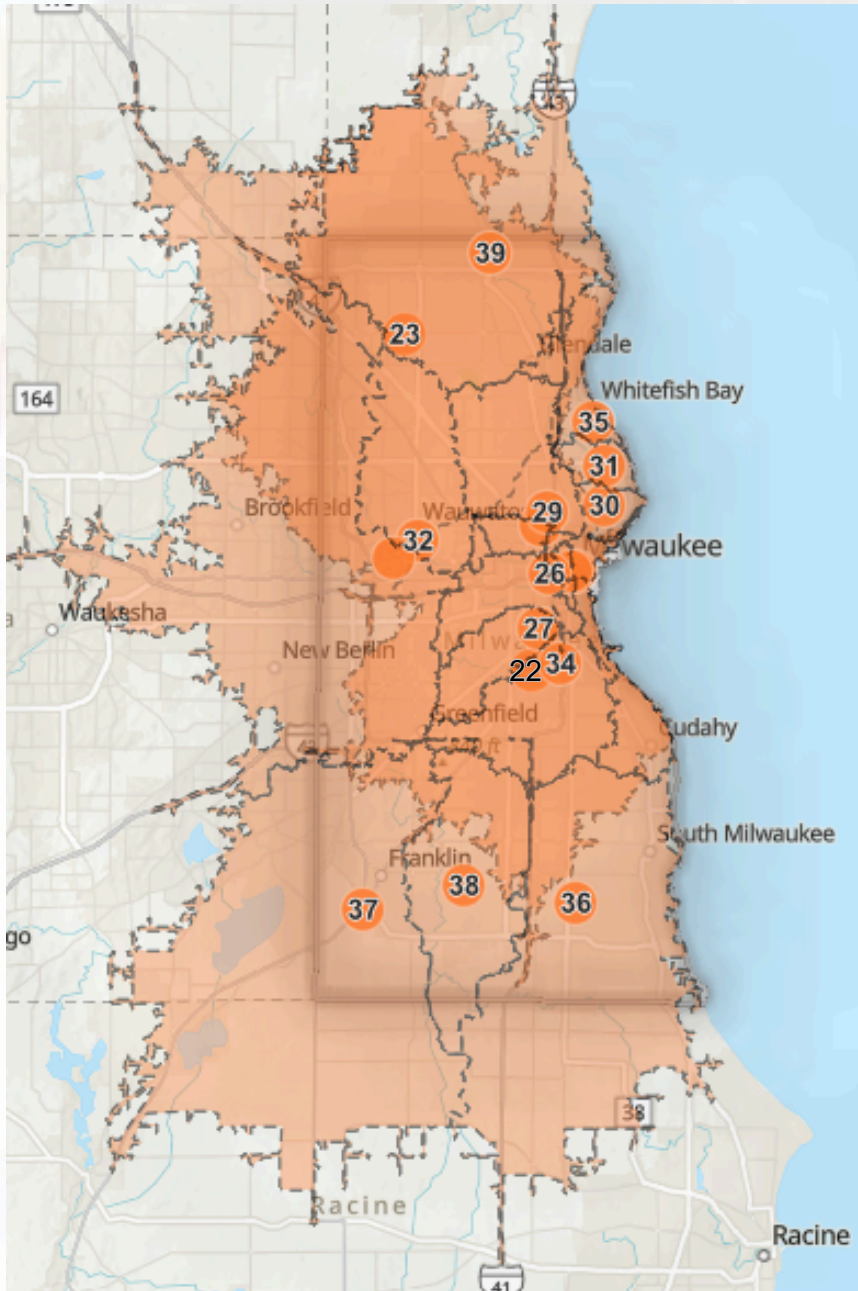
Milwaukee County Indoor Swimming Pools - 15-minute drive time service area for Pulaski and Noyes



SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Area Indoor Swimming Pools - 15-minute drive time service area

The number of indoor pools within Milwaukee County provides coverage based on a 15-minute drive time service area to the entire county. The county-operated Pools, Pulaski and Noyes, are evenly distributed with Noyes in the northwest area, and Pulaski in the center/southeast. While the service areas for Pulaski and Noyes do not cover the entire county, the other area providers fill the gaps enabling all residents to be within the service area of an indoor pool.



County Run Indoor Pools		
Name	Legend	
Pulaski Indoor Pool		22
Noyes Public Indoor Pool		23

Additional Provider Indoor Pools		
Milwaukee Athletic Club		24
Gold's Gym		25
Marquette University RecPlex		26
Milwaukee South Division High School Pool		27
Northside YMCA		28
Milwaukee North Division High School Pool		29
Riverside High School		30
Shorewood High School		31
Wauwatosa East High School		32
Wisconsin Athletic Club		33
Ramirez Aquatic Center		34
Whitefish Bay High School		35
Oak Creek High School Swimming Pool		36
Innovative Health and Fitness		37
Franklin High School Pool		38
Walter Schroeder Aquatic Center		39



OUTDOOR AQUATICS

Operating Budget Analysis

Milwaukee County's outdoor pools and waterparks operate with an annual budget and face challenges in cost recovery and consistent operation. The average expense budget for an outdoor pool in Milwaukee County ranges from \$105,000 to \$150,000 annually, while the average revenue generated is \$33,000. This results in a cost recovery range of 11% to 31% from 2019 to 2024, with reliance on subsidies to maintain operations. This is a common range of cost recovery and subsidy within municipal aquatics systems nationally.

Staffing shortages have plagued the system since 2020, hindering the ability to consistently open and operate pools. This has contributed to the financial challenges, as limited operational hours and closures directly impact revenue generation. Despite these challenges, Sheridan, Wilson, and McCarty Pools, demonstrate higher revenue potential when fully operational when compared to other pools within the system.

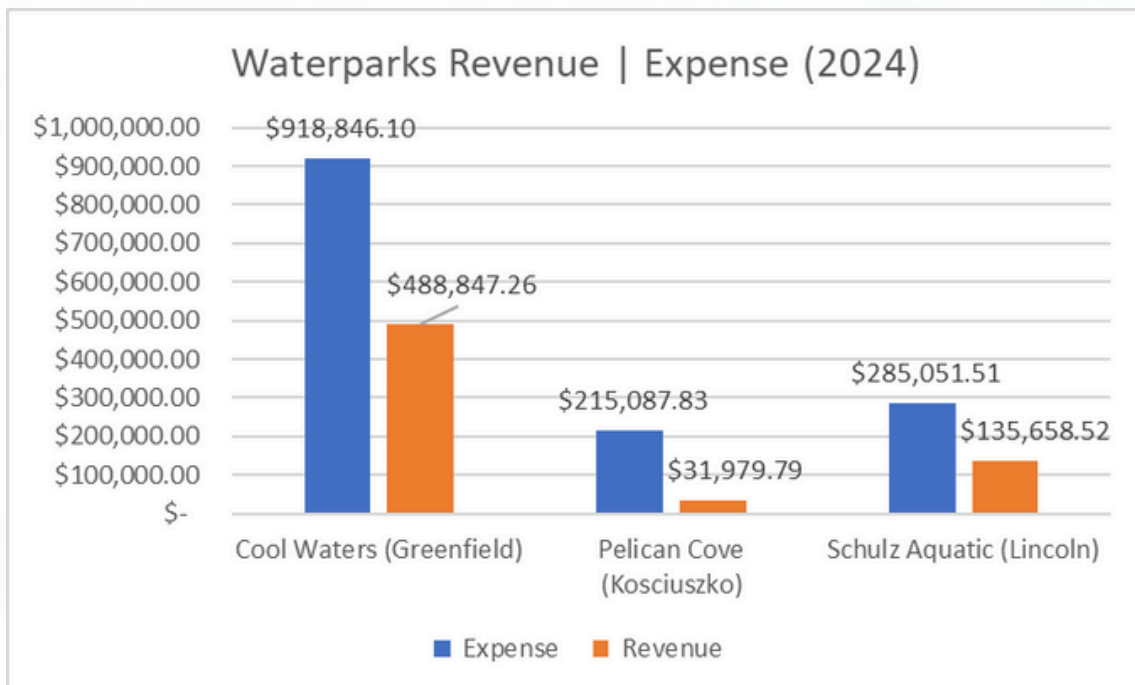
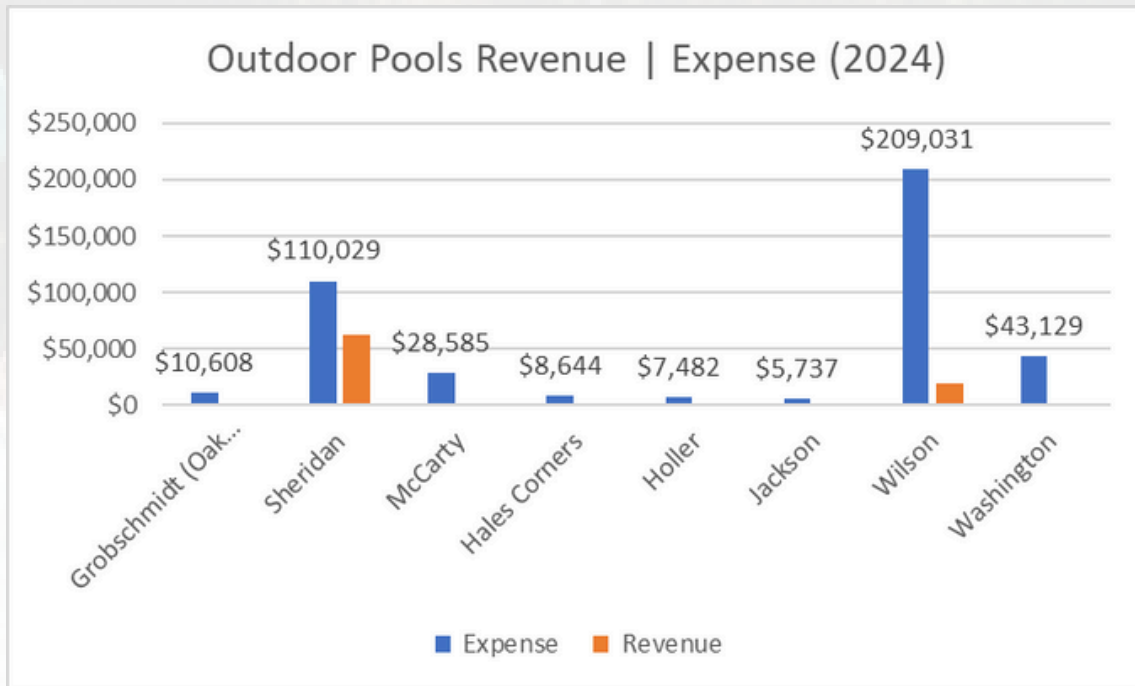
Cool Waters is the most utilized facility in the entire Milwaukee County Aquatics System with an average daily attendance of 525 people in 2024. Cool Waters also requires the highest total dollar subsidy, ranging from \$140,000 to \$207,000 annually prior to 2019 and close to \$450,000 in 2024. The financial data reveals that Cool Waters' expense budget consumes approximately one-third of the total aquatics budget, while its revenue accounts for two-thirds of the total budget.



OUTDOOR AQUATICS

Operating Budget Analysis

The below charts show the revenue and expense comparison for both the waterparks and the outdoor swimming pools. Of the waterparks, Schulz requires the least amount of subsidy, in part due to the reduced amount of personnel expenses compared to Cool Waters. These budget numbers represent a single-season of operations and are not a reflection of average revenue or expense.



OUTDOOR AQUATICS

Cool Waters and Pelican Cove

Cool Waters and Pelican Cove offer very similar amenities and layouts of their swimming pools, but total attendance and utilization between the two is substantially different, with Cool Waters drawing approximately 8 times the number of people during the summer season.



Pelican Cove reopened in 2024 after several years of closure and its attendance and revenue are lower than Sheridan Park Pool and slightly higher than Wilson Park Pool. Pelican Cove consists of a zero-depth entry, open recreational water and a dual waterslide tower though it still remains an underutilized facility when compared to others within the County.

A review of the demographics surrounding the two facilities was completed. This chart compares the demographics of the areas surrounding Pelican Cove and Cool Waters, focusing on population and income. Pelican Cove's area has a significantly larger population (415,642) compared to Cool Waters (247,541). However, Cool Waters' area exhibits higher average and median household incomes (\$93,808 and \$67,870 respectively) than Pelican Cove (\$66,486 and \$47,708). Similarly, the per capita income is also higher in the Cool Waters area (\$41,676) compared to Pelican Cove (\$28,465). Essentially, Pelican Cove serves a larger population with lower income levels, while Cool Waters serves a smaller population with higher income levels. While it is unknown the exact reasons that Pelican Cove's utilization is not in line with that of Cool Waters, the income levels in the service area the presence of multiple other outdoor pools most likely affects its seasonal attendance.

	Pelican Cove	Cool Waters
Total Population (2020 Census)	415,642	247,541
Average Mean Household Income	\$66,486	\$93,808
Median Household Income	\$47,708	\$67,870
Per Capita Income based on Total	\$28,465	\$41,676



OUTDOOR AQUATICS

Attendance Trends

The below chart details attendance figures for Milwaukee County's waterparks and swimming pools from 2016 through 2024. Prior to 2020, most of the pools saw regular attendance, with Cool Waters consistently attracting the highest numbers, averaging 55,000 visits per season. Schulz Aquatic Center, McCarty and Sheridan pools also demonstrated strong attendance, drawing between 14,000 and 18,000 each season. Grobschmidt, Hales Corners, Jackson, Pelican Cove, and Washington, saw lower attendance figures, generally below 10,000 visitors per year.

The year 2020 marked a significant turning point, with attendance declining across most locations. This drop can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to pool closures in 2020 and a disruption of the number of lifeguard staff when pools reopened in 2021. Many pools, including Grobschmidt, Hales Corners, and Jackson remained closed through 2024. Even pools that remained open, like Cool Waters, Noyes, and Pulaski, saw reduced attendance.

Milwaukee County Waterpark and Swimming Pool Attendance (2016-2024)											
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Average (2016-2024)	Average (2021-2024)
Grobschmidt	8,949	6,869	6,213	3,739		0	0	0	0	6,443	0
Sheridan	14,570	13,445	14,049	12,707		14,000	13,494	13,983	15,855	14,013	14,333
McCarty	19,709	14,213	16,707	10,945		0	15,168	0	0	15,348	15,168
Hales Corners	10,309	7,591	8,440	6,325		0	0	0	0	8,166	0
Holler	4,857	2,924	2,738	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
Jackson	11,471	6,964	5,444	6,382		0	0	0	0	7,565	0
Cool Waters	72,572	60,812	70,535	45,935		35,265	0	48,699	48,261	54,583	44,075
Pelican Cove	13,471	9,423	8,192	7,595		0	0	0	8,542	9,445	8,542
Wilson Pool	13,589	12,047	10,430	12,128		8,912	13,026	14,347	12,149	12,079	12,109
Noyes	16,556	16,008	14,241	12,705		1,053	5,006	5,839	5,739	9,643	4,409
Pulaski	40,237	35,671	30,733	25,915		4,608	14,918	22,014	21,355	24,431	15,724
Schulz	25,615	20,212	17,411	14,250		12,109	19,981	17,342	18,285	18,151	16,929
Washington	6,148	5,155	2,720	2,261		0	0	0	0	4,071	0
	258,053	211,334	207,853	160,887		75,947	81,593	122,224	130,186	156,010	143,254

In 2021 and 2022, a partial recovery was observed at some locations. Cool Waters, and Schulz saw attendance begin to rebound, though numbers were still significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. Many pools remained closed or saw minimal activity. By 2023 and 2024 Cool Waters and Schulz showed signs of returning to higher attendance, though lower than pre-pandemic averages. The average attendance for the period of 2021-2024 was significantly lower than the average for 2016-2020 for most pools, reflecting the ongoing impact of the pandemic with a primary factor being the shortage of lifeguard staff.



INDOOR AQUATICS

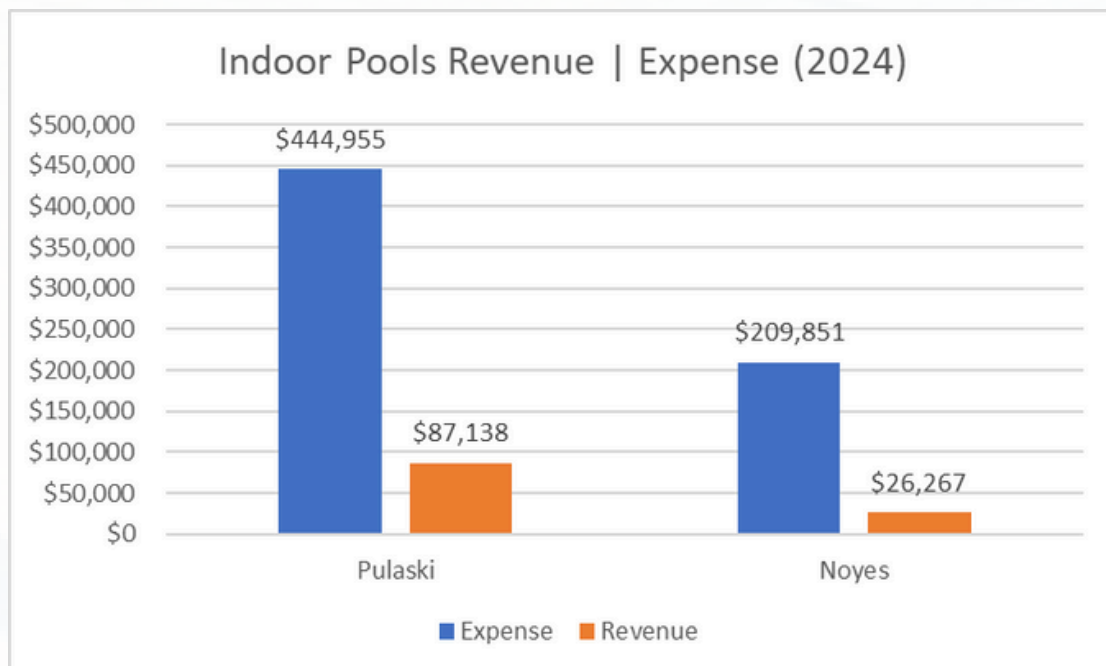
Milwaukee County's indoor aquatic facilities provide essential services by offering year-round aquatics programming. The total annual expense for operating the two indoor pools is estimated to be between \$650,000 and \$800,000, which is below the national average for facilities of this type. However, the cost recovery ranges from 12% to 20% are below the typical range of 40% to 60% for indoor aquatic centers. This indicates a reliance on subsidies and highlights the need to explore strategies for increasing revenue generation and overall utilization.

The two indoor pools, Pulaski and Noyes, have distinct demographic profiles within their respective service areas. Pulaski's drive-time population exceeds Noyes' by 35,000 people, suggesting a larger potential user base. However, Noyes boasts a higher average and median household income, indicating a greater capacity for membership fees and program participation. Pulaski also serves a slightly younger population, which could drive a higher demand for swim lessons and recreational swimming activities.

Despite these demographic differences, both facilities face limitations in maximizing their aquatic programs and revenue potential. Factors such as staffing challenges (which impact hours of operation) and a lack of recreational aquatic amenities restrict the ability to offer diverse programming and attract a wider range of users.



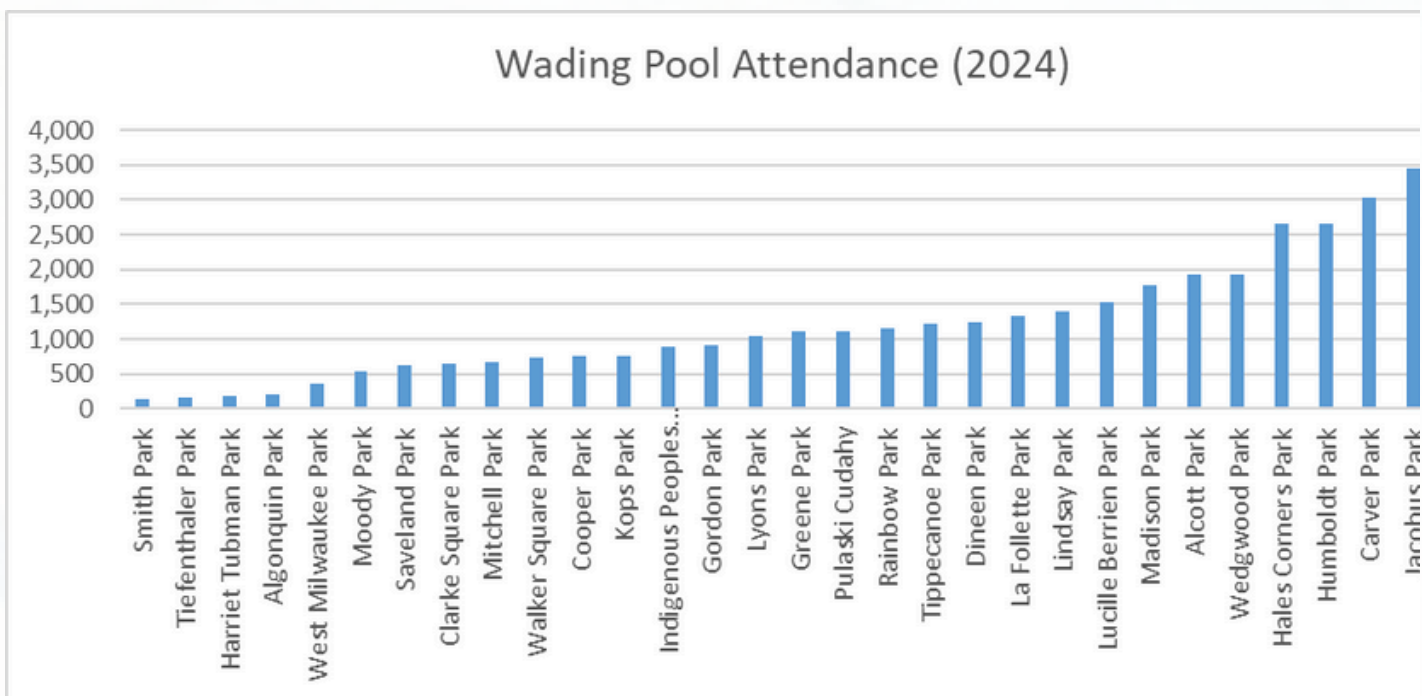
Pulaski Indoor Swimming Pool



WADING POOLS

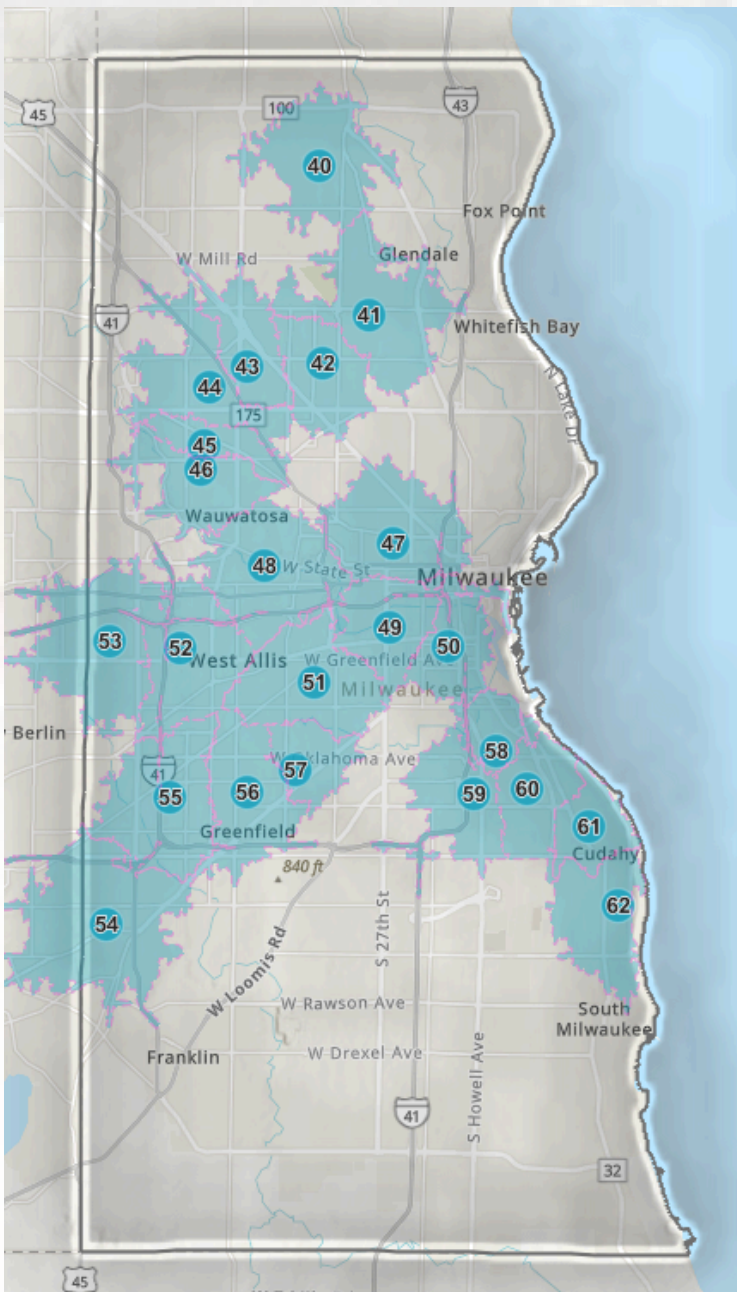
Wading pools are a specific type of aquatic amenity that differ from a traditional swimming pool and modern splashpads, as they allow a zero-depth entry experience that the older swimming pools do not have. Milwaukee County's outdoor shallow water wading pools are experiencing low utilization and face challenges related to accessibility and aging infrastructure. Data from 2024 reveals that 15 wading pools across the County received a total of fewer than 2,000 visits throughout the summer season, averaging less than 25 people per day per pool. While some locations, such as Jacobus, Hales Corners, Alcott, and Wedgwood, experience slightly higher attendance exceeding 2,000 visits per summer, the overall low usage raises concerns about the cost-effectiveness and relevance of these facilities.

Several factors contribute to the declining popularity of wading pools. Their primary function as a means of heat relief is limited by their shallow depth, which restricts swimming and other aquatic activities. The inability to host programs like swim lessons further reduces their appeal and limits their potential to serve the community's broader aquatic needs. Moreover, aging mechanical systems necessitate upgrades, such as the addition of ultraviolet treatment systems, to meet current safety standards. Furthermore, wading pools lack ADA accessibility as per the 2010 swimming pool standards, posing a significant barrier for individuals with disabilities. These challenges underscore the need for Milwaukee County to re-evaluate the role of wading pools within its aquatics system and consider alternative solutions that offer greater accessibility, versatility, and cost-effectiveness. The below attendance numbers represent the summer of 2024 and do not reflect long-term averages or trends.



WADING POOLS

Milwaukee County Wading Pools – 5-minute drive time service area



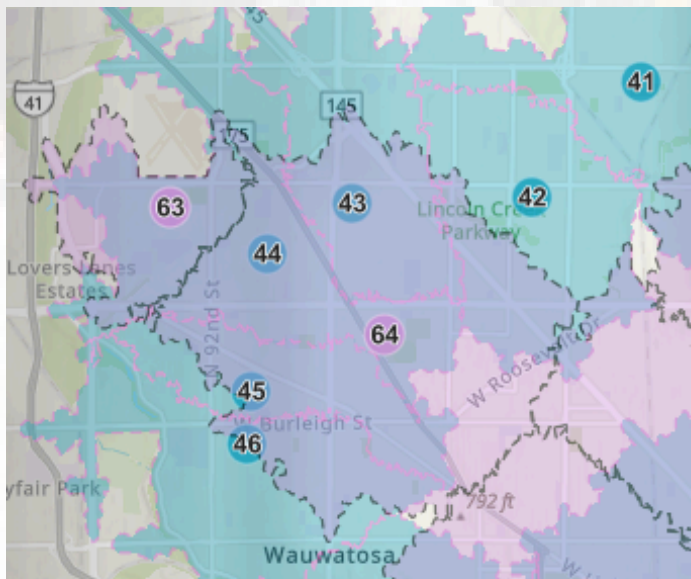
County Run Wading Pools	
Name	Legend
Algonquin	40
Smith	41
Harriet Tubman	42
Indigenous Peoples	43
Lindsay	44
Kops	45
Cooper	46
Tiefenthaler	47
Jacobus	48
Mitchell	49
Walker Square	50
West Milwaukee	51
LaFollette	52
Rainbow	53
Hales Corners	54
Alcott	55
Wedgewood	56
Lyons	57
Humboldt	58
Saveland	59
Tippecanoe	60
Greene	61
Pulaski Cudahy	62



WADING POOLS

Wading pools and splashpads offer a very similar aquatic experience, though not exactly the same. Both are meant to provide aquatic recreation with water depth less than 18 inches with splashpads being a wet deck only and no standing water. Splashpads offer a more interactive experience, while wading pools allow children to sit in the water. There are several areas in Milwaukee County where these two types of amenities have overlapping services areas. Since they are a similar type of amenity and taking into consideration that wading pools across the industry are being phased out, splashpads could be the primary form of heat relief aquatic recreation in Milwaukee County.

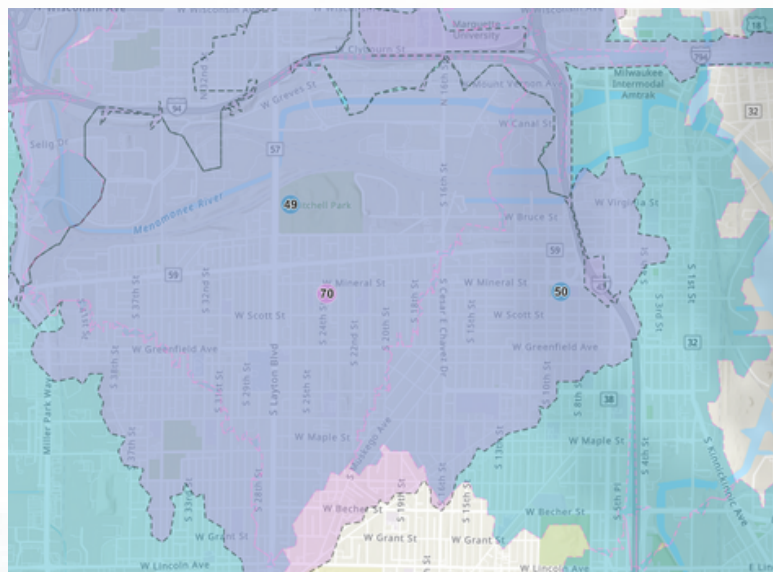
Kops Park (45), Cooper Park (46), Lindsay Park (44) and Indigenous Peoples Park (43) Wading Pools are close in proximity to each other with overlapping services areas and within the service area of Madison (63) and Dineen (64) splashpads.



County Run Wading Pools	
Name	Legend
Algonquin	40
Smith	41
Harriet Tubman	42
Indigenous Peoples	43
Lindsay	44
Kops	45
Cooper	46
Tiefenthaler	47
Jacobus	48
Mitchell	49
Walker Square	50
West Milwaukee	51
LaFollette	52
Rainbow	53
Hales Corners	54
Alcott	55
Wedgewood	56
Lyons	57
Humboldt	58
Saveland	59
Tippecanoe	60
Greene	61
Pulaski Cudahy	62

County Run Splash Pads	
Name	Legend
Madison	63
Dineen	64
Moody	65
Lucille Berrien	66
Gordon	67
Carver	68
Washington	69
Clarke Square	70

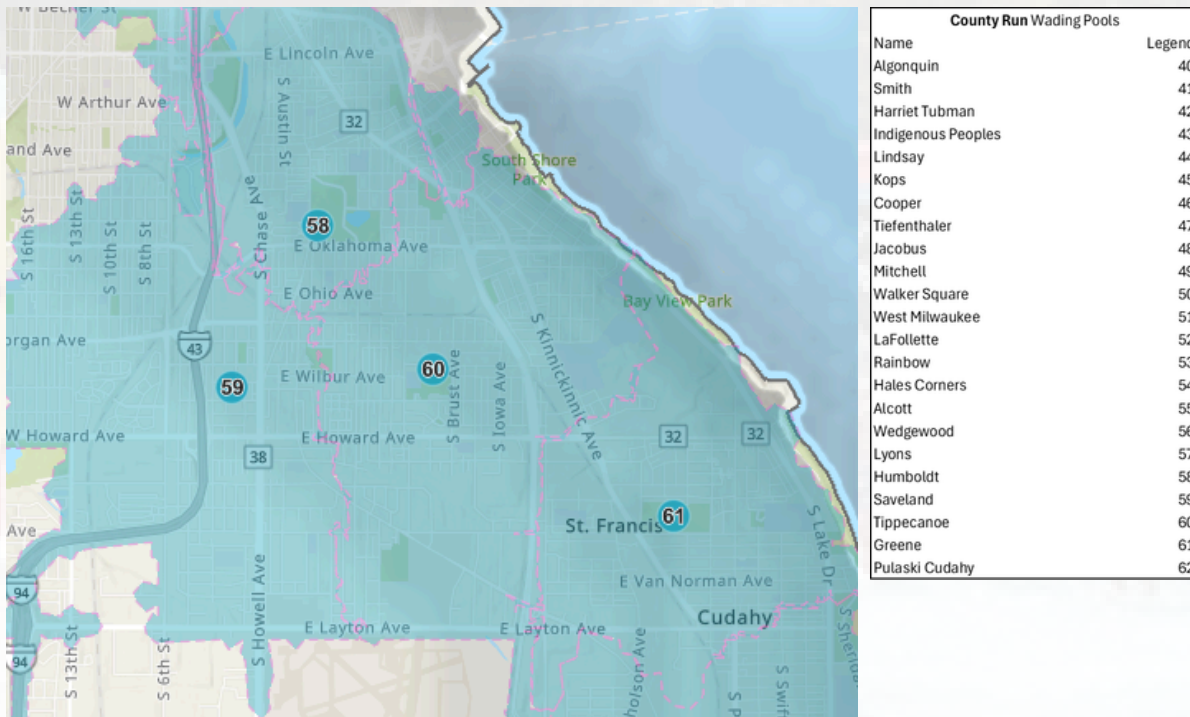
Walker Square (50) and Mitchell Park (49) Wading Pools are within the service area of the Clarke Square Splashpad (70).



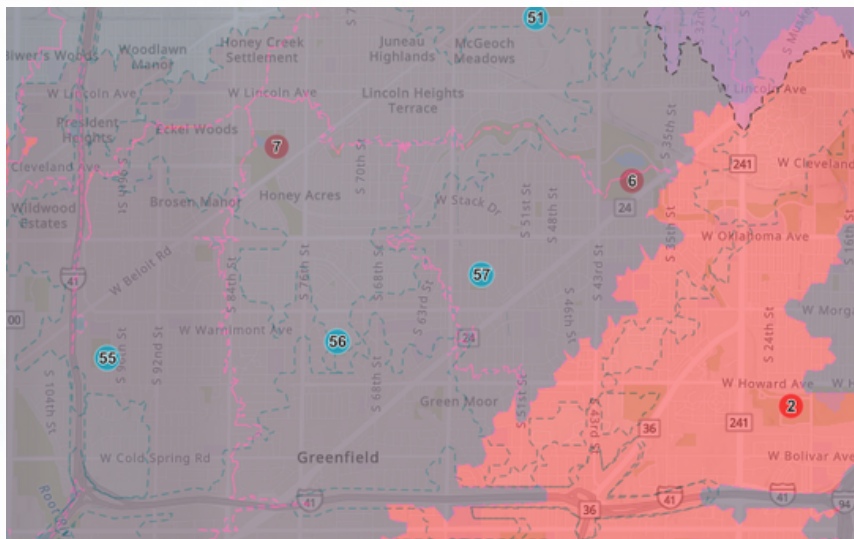
WADING POOLS

The following maps show the proximity and overlapping services areas of Milwaukee County wading pools with other wading pools, splashpads and swimming pools.

Saveland Park (59), Humboldt Park (58), Greene Park (61) and Tippecanoe Park (60) Wading Pools are within the same service area of each other.



Alcott Park (55), Wedgewood Park (56) and Lyons Park (57) Wading Pools have overlapping service areas and are in close proximity to Milwaukee County Swimming Pools Jackson and McCarty.



SPLASHPADS

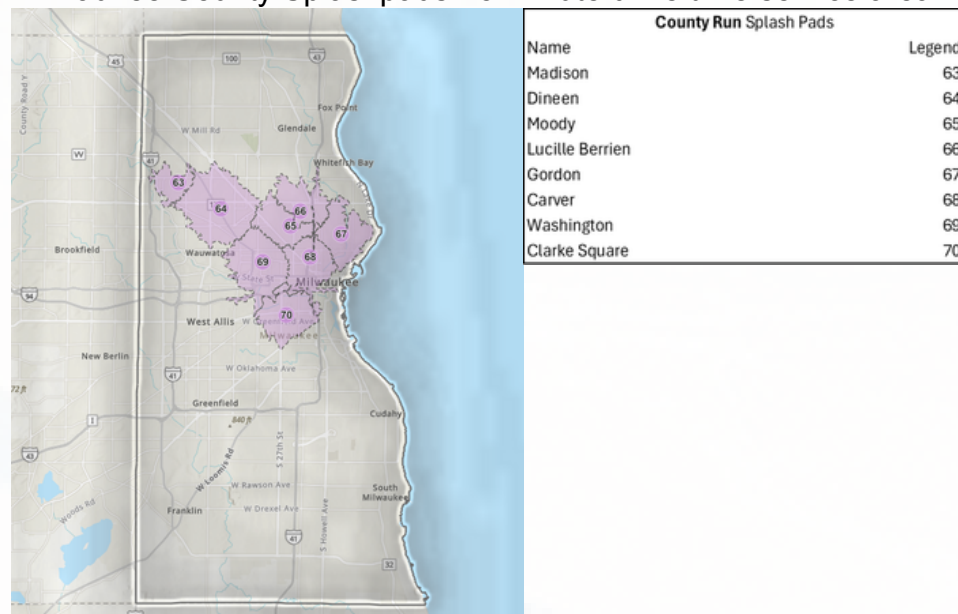
A splashpad is a zero-depth water play area that offers an outdoor aquatic amenity to cool off, typically for children under the age of 12. Splashpads feature a variety of spray features, such as fountains, jets, misters, and water cannons, that create interactive water experiences. Splashpads often incorporate colorful designs, with features like tipping buckets, water wheels, and tunnels. The absence of standing water eliminates the need for lifeguards, making it a more accessible and low-maintenance option compared to traditional swimming pools. Splashpads also meet the current ADA accessibility standards for swimming pools whereas wading pools are no longer compliant.



Milwaukee County has eight splashpads, primarily in the north/central to northern portion, across the county. Several of these have been constructed to replace the aging wading pools where it was no longer feasible to operate them due to their age. Several of the splashpads have a recirculation system which requires a higher amount of maintenance when compared to the flow-through systems. However, flow through systems have a much more significant water usage as all of the water goes directly to waste as opposed to being recirculated. The below map shows the location of existing splashpads, all of which are in the central to northern part of the County.

While splashpads are considered an aquatic amenity, their primary purpose is active play and heat relief since they do not contain standing water for the purposes of recreational swimming, teaching swimming lessons or providing other aquatic programs that can take place at traditional swimming pools.

Milwaukee County Splashpads - 5-minute drive time service area



OVERALL SYSTEM

Using 2023 as a representative year for the Milwaukee County aquatics system shows that total annual expenses were \$2.7M, revenue at \$783,000 with a total net operating subsidy of \$1.9M. This equates to an approximate cost recovery of 29%.

Aquatics system cost recovery ranges across the county have a wide variance based on a number of factors, such as number and types of pools, hours of operation, wage rates, and admission fees. Outdoor swimming pools typically operate with a 40% to 80% cost recovery range. In 2024, Cool Waters, Schulz and Sheridan fell within this range while Pelican Cove, Wilson, Noyes and Pulaski were below this range.

Milwaukee's County waterparks admission ranges from \$7.50 to \$10.50 and the swimming pools fees are \$3.00 to \$5.00. When comparing these rates to other similar aquatics systems, they are in line with national averages for outdoor aquatics fees, and balance affordability and accessibility for the community coupled with the ability to generate revenue to help cover operational costs.

		2023		
Site		Total Expenditures	Total Revenue	Net Cost
Outdoor Deepwell Pools				
	Pool Name			
VG50	Grobschmidt (Oak Creek)	\$ 13,249.09	\$	\$ 13,249.09
VG51	Sheridan	\$ 196,311.12	\$ (56,911.26)	\$ 139,399.86
VG52	McCarthy	\$ 80,588.85	\$	\$ 80,588.85
VN50	Hales Corners	\$ 19,869.42	\$	\$ 19,869.42
VN51	Holler	\$ 2,526.58	\$	\$ 2,526.58
VN52	Jackson	\$ 12,795.99	\$	\$ 12,795.99
VR52	Wilson	\$ 390,268.55	\$ (35,220.34)	\$ 355,048.21
VW52	Washington	\$ 104,060.79	\$	\$ 104,060.79
	Total Deepwell Pools	\$ 819,670.39	\$ (92,131.60)	\$ 727,538.79
				-11.2%
Aquatic Centers				
VR50	Cool Water (Greenfield)	\$ 873,301.54	\$ (439,648.22)	\$ 433,653.32
VR51	Pelican Cove (Kosciuszko)	\$ 13,724.00	\$	\$ 13,724.00
VR56	Schultz Aquatic (Lincoln)	\$ 448,030.10	\$ (129,247.04)	\$ 318,783.06
	Total Aquatic Centers	\$ 1,335,055.64	\$ (568,895.26)	\$ 766,160.38
				-42.6%
Indoor Pools				
VR54	Noyes	\$ 241,824.43	\$ (22,512.61)	\$ 219,311.82
VR55	Pulaski	\$ 328,759.20	\$ (99,567.19)	\$ 229,192.01
	Total Indoor Pools	\$ 570,583.63	\$ (122,079.80)	\$ 448,503.83
				-21.4%
TOTAL POOLS		\$ 2,725,309.66	\$ (783,106.66)	\$ 1,942,203.00

2024 Admission Fees

Rates listed include tax

General Admission with Deep-Well Season Pass: \$5.25

Activity	Age	County Resident Rate	Non-Resident Rate
OPEN SWIM	3 to 11*	\$7.50	\$8.50
	12 to 59	\$8.50	\$10.50
	60 +	\$7.50	\$8.50
EVENING SWIM (General Admission)	ALL*	\$7	\$7
WATER EXERCISE & LAP SWIM	ALL*	\$5 (\$55 for 12)	\$5 (\$55 for 12)

Get UNLIMITED VISITS to BOTH Cool Waters Aquatic Center & David F. Schulz Aquatic Center!

2024 "Deep-Well" Admission Fees

Fees listed include tax

OPEN SWIM	NIGHT SWIM
Age 12 to 59, \$5	General Admission,* \$3
Age 3 to 11* or 60 years +, \$3	
Age 0 to 2 years*, Free	





PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

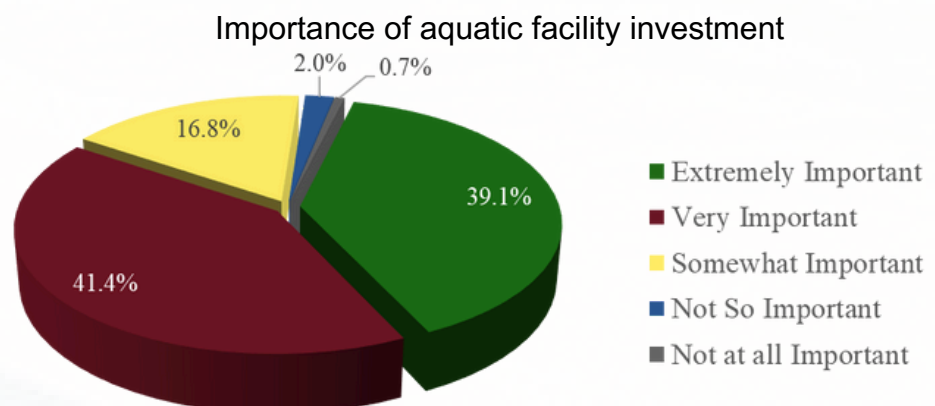


PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Community Survey Overview

In 2023, Milwaukee County engaged the community through an online survey and several in-person events that sought input from residents about their perspective and utilization of County swimming pools, splashpads, wading pools and waterparks. The following are key findings from that survey that help to inform the aquatics planning study.

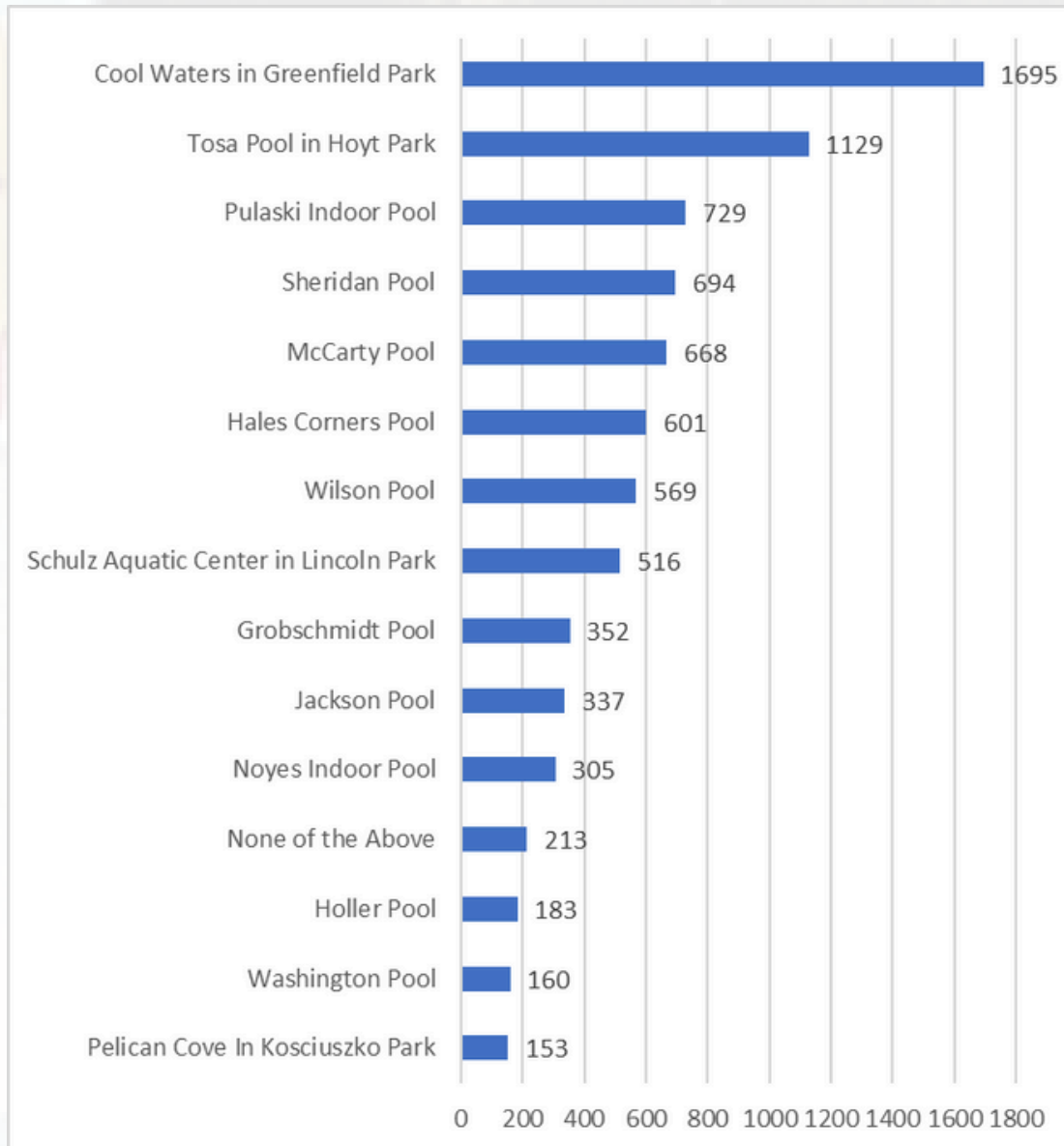
- **High Usage of County Aquatic Facilities:** 79.3% of respondents have used County aquatic facilities in the past 5 years.
- **Popular Facilities:** Cool Waters, Tosa Pool, and Pulaski Indoor Pool are among the most popular choices.
- **Convenience and Accessibility:** Respondents prioritize facilities that are close to home and easily accessible by personal vehicle.
- **Positive Perception of Fees:** Most respondents believe current admission fees are appropriate and would support moderate increases to maintain services.
- **Strong Support for Investment:** Respondents support increased investment in aquatic facilities.
- **Prioritization of Recreation and Cooling:** Respondents desire recreational opportunities and cooling options when considering aquatic facility improvements.
- **Importance of Water Safety:** Respondents recognize the importance of swim lessons and water safety education.
- **Areas for Improvement:**
 - **Address Overcrowding:** Implement strategies to manage overcrowding at popular facilities.
 - **Expand Accessibility:** Explore options to improve accessibility for residents in underserved areas.
 - **Enhance Amenities:** Consider adding new features or upgrading existing facilities to attract more users.
 - **Improve Communication:** Utilize various channels to inform the public about facility hours, programs, and closures.



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Cool Waters in Greenfield Park shows the highest attendance by survey respondents by a significant margin. This suggests it is the most popular aquatic facility among those listed. Tosa Pool in Hoyt Park has the second-highest attendance, indicating a considerable drop from the leading facility but still a substantial number.

Survey respondents outdoor pool and waterpark attendance



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The most significant challenge is the unavailability of preferred facilities, with 1,718 respondents citing this reason, primarily because Milwaukee County has had to stagger the opening and closing of swimming pools over the past several years due to staffing shortages. A significant number of respondents (1,230) reported having no barriers to visiting pools.

Distance from home is a notable barrier, with 883 respondents citing this issue, highlighting the importance of location and accessibility. Price to use and lack of awareness about aquatic facility locations were also significant barriers, with 575 and 551 responses respectively.

Barriers to visiting aquatic facilities





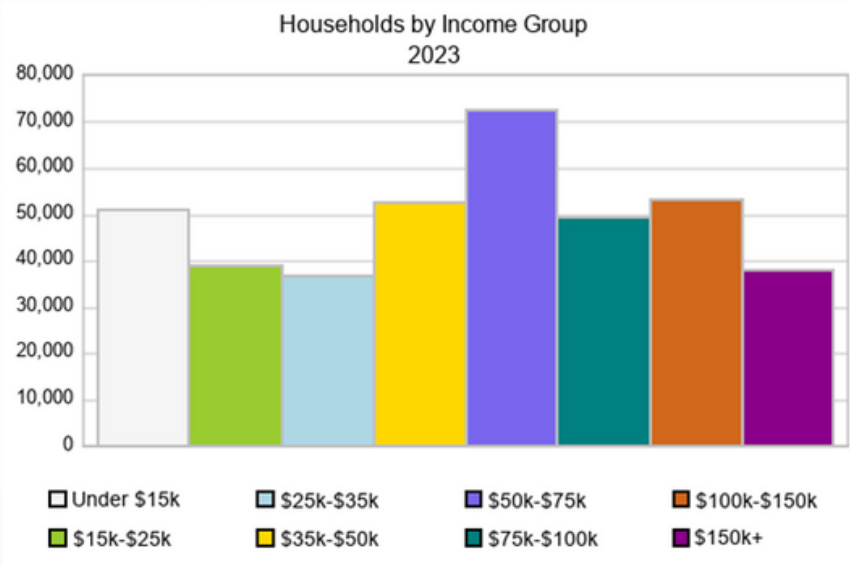
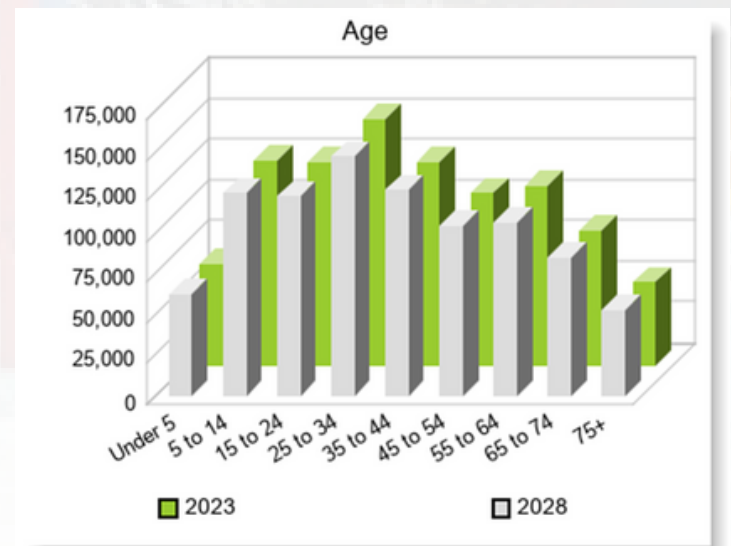
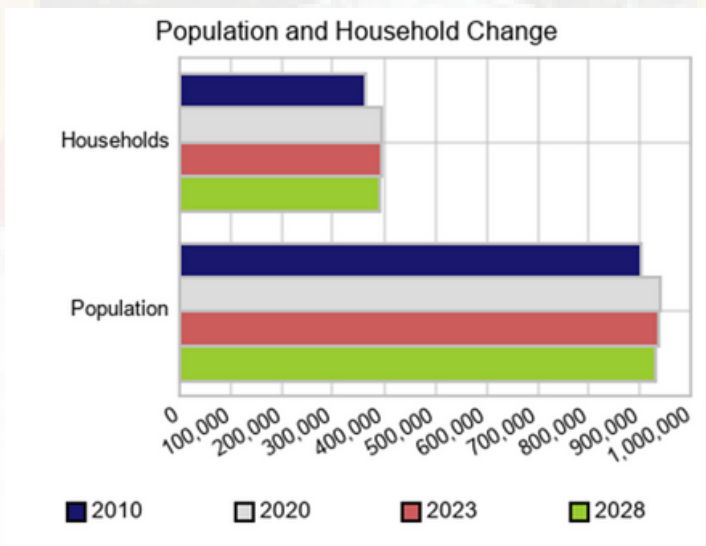
MARKET OVERVIEW



DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Milwaukee County has a diverse population with a significant number of young families. The household count in 2023 was 392,056 and the household projection for 2028 is 390,503, a change of (0.4)%. The population in the study area in 2010 was 902,610 and in 2020 it was 939,490, roughly a 4.1% change. The population in 2023 was 935,745 and the projection for 2028 is 930,055 representing a change of (-0.6)%.

The median age in 2023 is 35.4 and it is predicted to change in five years to 35.7 years. In 2023, the most prominent age group in this geography is age 25 to 34 years. The age group least represented in this geography is Age 75 + years. In 2023 the predominant household current year income category in the county is \$50K - \$75K, and the income group that is least represented in this geography is \$25K - \$35K.



DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Key Highlights:

- **Population:** Approximately 939,489 (2020 Census)
- **Racial and Ethnic Diversity:** Diverse population with significant White, Black, and Hispanic/Latino populations.
- **Families with Children:** Milwaukee County has a substantial number of families with children, making them a key demographic for indoor and outdoor swimming pools.
- **Potential User Base:** Families with children represent a significant potential user base for aquatic facilities, seeking recreational activities, swim lessons, and opportunities for physical activity.
- **Demand for Amenities:** The presence of young families likely drives demand for amenities like shallow areas, water slides, and interactive play features in aquatic facilities.
- **Socioeconomic Factors:** Income levels and socioeconomic diversity within the county will influence the demand for and accessibility of aquatic facilities.
- **Competition:** The availability of existing public and private pools, as well as other recreational options, will impact the demand for new facilities.
- **Population Decline:** The population in Milwaukee County is projected to decline by 5,000 people by the year 2028. While a declining population can affect the utilization of swimming pools, the rate of population decline (-0.6%) is not large enough to affect current pool usage in a significant way.



Populations and People

Total Population

939,489

P1 | 2020 Decennial Census



Employment

Employment Rate

63.3%

DP03 | 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates



Business and Economy

Total Employer Establishments

20,215

CB2100CBP | 2021 Economic Surveys Business Patterns



Income and Poverty

Median Household Income

\$63,185

S1901 | 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates



Housing

Total Housing Units

424,191

H1 | 2020 Decennial Census



Families and Living Arrangements

Total Households

388,165

DP02 | 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates





ROLE OF AQUATICS IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY



AQUATICS IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY

Milwaukee County Parks has undertaken an Aquatics Study to define its role as a provider of recreational swimming, primarily through its outdoor, seasonal swimming pools. The core mission revolves around delivering accessible and enjoyable aquatic experiences during the summer months, aligning with the long-standing tradition of municipal parks and recreation systems nationwide. While the primary purpose is recreational aquatics, the County also emphasizes secondary objectives, including offering learn to swim classes to promote water safety and providing essential heat relief for residents during warm weather. This strategic focus ensures that residents have avenues for recreational swimming, along with heat relief and aquatic programs.

The study highlights that outdoor pools are central to Milwaukee County's aquatic offerings. Despite facing budgetary constraints and lifeguard staffing issues that have not allowed all swimming pools to open each summer, facilities like Cool Waters, Schulz, Sheridan, Wilson, and McCarty have demonstrated high utilization when fully operational. The county recognizes the critical role these seasonal facilities play in meeting community demand for outdoor water activities during warmer months.

The aquatics study considers equity and facility distribution across Milwaukee County, aiming to ensure that all residents have reasonable access to recreational aquatic amenities as the county's outdoor pools are seen as key to serving recreational aquatic needs.



RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

Outdoor Swimming Pools and Waterparks

Councilman-Hunsaker has developed a ranking matrix for Milwaukee County's outdoor swimming pools and waterparks with the goal of helping to identify the options for each pool based on their ranking. When considering an aging aquatics system, there are several scenarios to be explored:

- Continue to operate "as-is" with necessary repairs and annual maintenance
 - Routine maintenance such as keeping systems operational, new pool liners, and deck repairs.
- Continue to operate with renovations to the pool, deck, and/or mechanical systems
 - Could include reinvestment with new features, waterslides, or other aquatic amenities
- Demolition and replacement with a new aquatics facility
 - Replacement to include support buildings and pools
- Demolition and replacement with another aquatic amenity
- Demolition and removal of facility from the County's aquatics system
- Transfer operations to a third-party operator through a public/private partnership

The ranking matrix strives to help the County determine which scenario fits best for each outdoor aquatics facility. Utilizing categories related to the number of total personnel required for each facility, the total annual subsidy, annual attendance, the total cost per person to visit when taking into account operational expenses and revenues, and the overall age of the facility. These recommendations aim to assist Milwaukee County with the realities of an aging aquatics system, and help them to utilize annual fiscal dollars effectively and efficiently in regard to its various types of aquatic facilities.

The pools were ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest score and 1 being the lowest score with the following numerical parameters.

- Staffing Requirement: Total number of staff required to operate the facility for the summer season
- Total Subsidy: Subsidy per season
- Attendance: Total attendance per summer season
- Subsidy Per Person: Total subsidy divided by total number of visits
- Age of Facility: Age in years of each facility (expected lifespan for outdoor pools is 30 to 40 years)
- Service Area Need: Proximity of each pool to other pools within the Milwaukee County System

Rank	Staffing Requirement	Total Subsidy	Attendance	Subsidy Per Person	Age of Facility	Service Area Need
5	>10	>\$100,000	>50,000	>\$5.00	>10	>5mins
4	10-20	>\$200,000	>40,000	>\$10.00	10-20	>10 mins
3	21-30	>\$300,000	>30,000	>\$15.00	21-30	>15 mins
2	31-40	>\$400,000	>20,000	>\$20.00	31-40	>20 mins
1	41+	>\$500,000	>10,000	>\$25.00	40+	>25 mins



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the ranking matrix, the highest rated outdoor aquatics facilities are Lincoln, Sheridan and Hales Corners, followed by Cool Waters, Jackson and McCarty. The lowest rated pools are Wilson and Grobschmidt and Pelican Cove and Washington are in the middle of the highest and lowest ranked facilities. And, while this chart helps to inform one aspect of the decision making in regards to the future of each aquatics facility, it is not an all-inclusive chart. Rather, it is one area of analysis to aid Milwaukee County in its decision making for the future of the aquatics system.

	Staffing Requirement	Total Subsidy	Attendance	Subsidy Per Person	Age of Facility	Service Area Need	Total
Cool Waters	1	2	5	4	3	3	18
Lincoln (Schulz)	2	4	2	4	4	5	21
Pelican Cove	4	4	1	1	3	3	16
Sheridan	4	5	2	5	1	3	20
Wilson	4	3	1	1	1	3	13
McCarty	4	4	2	4	1	2	17
Grobschmidt	5	4	1	1	1	2	14
Hales Corners	5	5	1	4	1	4	20
Jackson	5	5	1	3	1	2	17
Washington	5	5	1	1	1	3	16

*Tosa Pool at Hoyt Park is operated by the Friends of Hoyt Park & Pool (FOHPP) and is not a part of recommendations in this aquatics study.

**Personnel costs are lower at facilities that have fewer attendance visits throughout the summer.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Outdoor Waterparks and Swimming Pools

- Cool Waters continues to be the highest attended out of all of the Milwaukee County aquatics facilities averaging 45,000 visits per season in the past 4 years. It's popularity is due to a number of factors including amenities for children with the large zero-depth beach entry, location and lack of other waterparks in the area.
 - **Recommendation: Continue to operate “as-is” with annual repair and maintenance)**
 - **Plan for mechanical renovation by 2035**
 - **Budget for replacement of spray features in zero-entry area**
 - **Budget for waterslides gel-coating**
 - **Explore staffing-efficient enhancements that increase capacity, create value, and drive higher attendance such as more interactive features in the zero-depth entry and shade structures for guests.**
- Pelican Cove has seen declining attendance since 2016 with factors being a shortened operational season due to staffing shortages along with not operating from 2020 to 2023 after being closed in 2020 during the pandemic. The facility still has modern recreational amenities that are kid-friendly and requires less staffing than Cool Waters.
 - **Recommendation: Continue to operate with renovations and annual repair and maintenance in the short-term (1 to 3 years), and make a determination regarding the future operation of Pelican Cove due to its age and low utilization.**
 - **Develop marketing plan to increase utilization by community and summer camps**
 - **Plan for mechanical renovation by 2035**
 - **Budget for replacement of spray features in zero-entry area if Pelican Cove continues in operation for the foreseeable future.**
- Schulz Aquatic Center (in Lincoln Park) has the second highest attendance average of the outdoor aquatic centers since 2016 with an average of approximately 17,000 to 18,000 visits per summer. As the newest Milwaukee County aquatics facility, it is not yet halfway through the expected lifespan range of 35 to 40 years for an outdoor pool.
 - **Recommendation: Continue to operate “as-is” with annual repair and maintenance**

Cool Waters



Pelican Cove



Schulz Aquatic Center



RECOMMENDATIONS

Outdoor Waterparks and Swimming Pools

- Sheridan Pool is the oldest outdoor swimming pool in the Milwaukee County System and has doubled the average lifespan of an outdoor pool through maintenance and renovations. It has remained open each year with the exception of 2020 and has seen modest growth in attendance during that time, with an average of 14,000 visits per summer. The pool is experiencing issues of age including its pool liner that is in fair condition, an older style vacuum sand filtration system, lack of surface skimming through the perimeter overflow gutter system and aging mechanical equipment.
 - **Recommendation: Continue to operate with renovations and annual repair and maintenance) and plan for reinvestment with a significant renovation, upgrades or replacement.**
- Wilson Pool is an aging aquatic center that has seen steady attendance since 2016, even during post-2020 operation, averaging 12,000 visits per summer. It is the only pool that still has a deep well and 50-meter lanes. While the County does not program the 50-meter lanes for competitive swimming, they have been rented by area competitive swim teams during the summer. The pool's mechanical system operates with vacuum DE filters which is an older-style filtration system that could be replaced with high-rate sand filtration as staff have made comments about operational issues with the DE filters. If the County wants to maintain deep water within the aquatics system, Wilson Pool could be kept operational with plans for a mechanical system renovation in the upcoming years.
 - **Short-Term Recommendation (1 to 5 years): Continue to operate with renovations and annual repair and maintenance.**
 - **Long-Term Recommendation: Consolidate with other pools within the service area in a newly constructed indoor and outdoor swimming pool/aquatic center serving the south side of Milwaukee County.**
- McCarty Pool consists of a large shallow area, deep area and waterslide tower and had declining attendance from 2016 to 2019 by about 50%. When it reopened in the summer of 2022 it had over 15,000 visits, on par with the attendance of Sheridan and Wilson. Even though it is close in proximity to Cool Waters, it serves a different user base. Its liner has bubbles and areas where it has ripped or separated have been repaired in recent years that will need to be addressed in the near future.
 - **Recommendation: Continue to operate with renovations and annual repair and maintenance) and plan for reinvestment with a renovation or upgrades.**

Wilson Park Pool



Sheridan Park Pool



McCarty Park Pool



RECOMMENDATIONS

Outdoor Waterparks and Swimming Pools

- Jackson Pool is in central Milwaukee County and is the large single body of water out of all of the outdoor pools. It has not been opened during the summer season since 2019 where it saw 6,382 visits, down from a high of 11,471 a few years before in 2016. The pool's mechanical system is aging with open Diatomaceous Earth filtration and the pool liner is in fair condition. Milwaukee County Parks currently has \$2.1M allocated for capital projects at Jackson. Due to the size of Jackson Pool, if a renovation is undertaken, there will be minimal new upgrades that will fit within the \$2.1M available budget.
 - **Recommendation: Demolition and replacement with a splashpad based on the \$2.1M budget allocation**
 - **Due to current pricing for pool renovation and construction, Milwaukee County will need to increase the budget allocation of \$2.1M to see significant improvements to Jackson Pool**
 - **A destination splashpad should be considered to bring a new aquatic amenity to this area.**



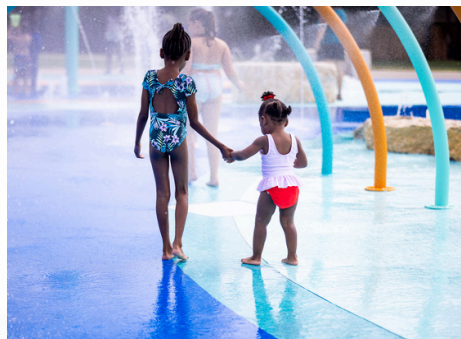
- Grobschmidt Pool is in the southeast corner of Milwaukee County and on the edge of a 10-minute drive time service area from Sheridan Park Pool. The pool has not been in operation since 2019 and had declining attendance from 2016 to 2019, with only 3,700 visits in 2019. The pool is aging and has a higher than average subsidy per visit when compared to the other Milwaukee County outdoor pools. Furthermore, in its existing condition, it does not fall in line with aquatic trends for recreational aquatics.
 - **Recommendation: Demolition and removal of Grobschmidt Pool and consider replacement with a splashpad, or centralized pool in southern Milwaukee County.**
 - **Consolidate with other pools within the service area in a newly constructed indoor and outdoor swimming pool/aquatic center serving the south side of Milwaukee County.**



RECOMMENDATIONS

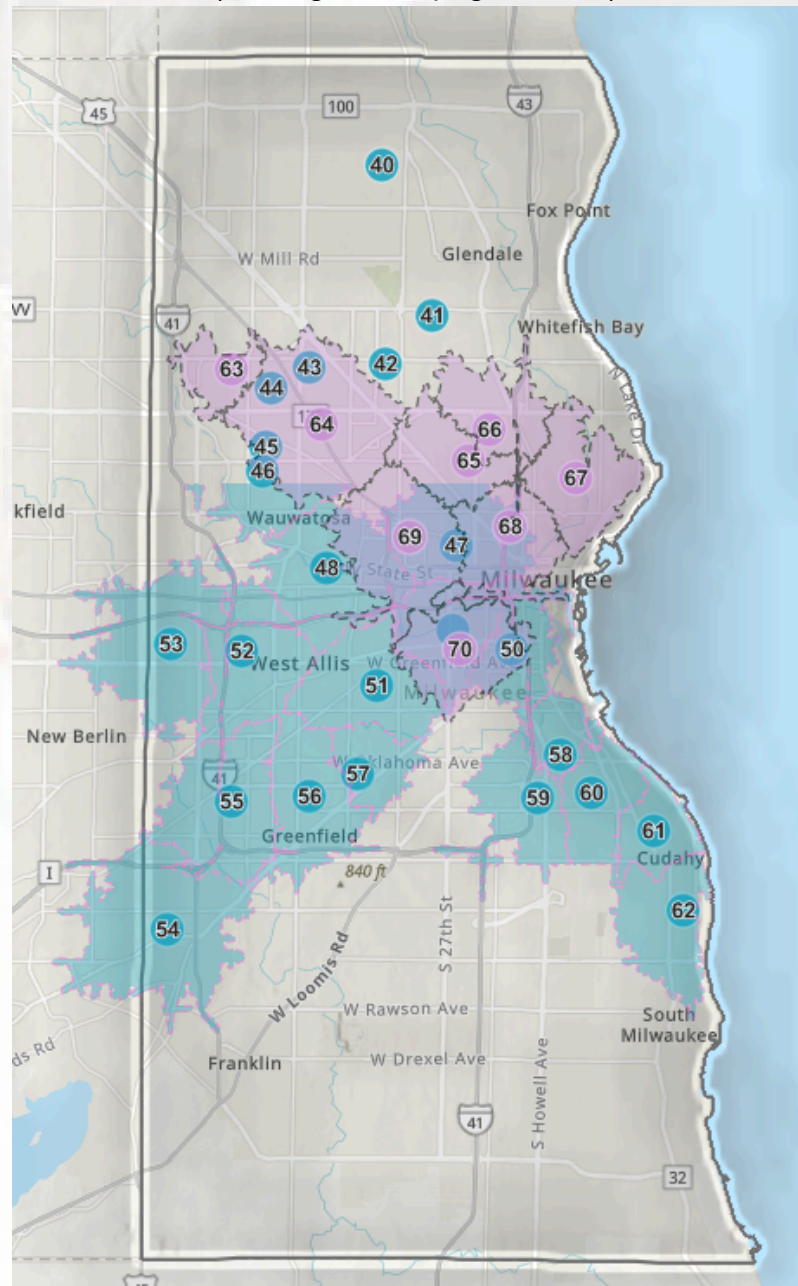
Outdoor Waterparks and Swimming Pools

- Hales Corners is another outdoor pool that was last open in 2019 and has not reopened since the 2020 pandemic year closure. It saw declining attendance from 2016 to 2019, dropping by 40%. It is also an aging swimming pool in the southern sector of Milwaukee County. While it does rank higher in the priority matrix, based on the declining attendance, the necessity of a renovation to bring it in line with current aquatic trends, and falling within the service of Cool Waters, Hales Corners could be decommissioned and replaced with a new pool at a more centralized location in southern Milwaukee County.
 - **Recommendation: Form a public-private partnership to operate Hales Corners swimming pool to be operated and managed by a third-party provider similar to the existing operational model at Tosa Pool at Hoyt Park. This lessens the annual subsidy for Milwaukee County while maintaining usage of the existing pool, park site and location.**
- Washington Pool has not been open to the public since 2019 and saw sharply declining attendance in its last two years of operation with only 2,700 and 2,200 visits in 2018 and 2019. The pool is also in need of a new pool liner, mechanical system components, and has had security challenges during its past operation. When it last operated, it did offer swimming lessons for the ecology center participants and YMCA camps, but only on a limited scale. This area of Milwaukee County is also served by Milwaukee Public Schools with free swimming lessons.
 - **Recommendation: Demolition and replacement with a splashpad**
 - **Keep the Washington Park Splashpad in operation and enhance with an addition/expansion of the existing splashpad to a destination splashpad.**
- In summary, the outdoor pool recommendation is to divest of three existing swimming pools, and build a new aquatics facility in southern Milwaukee County. Given the county's limited financial resources and deferred maintenance, this will represent long term costs savings for future operating budgets.



Wading Pools

- Wading Pools and Splashpads - 5-minute drive time service areas (see legend on pages 26,29)



RECOMMENDATIONS

Splashpads

- Splashpads offer a diverse range of water play experiences from destination parks to neighborhood splashpads. A destination splashpad is akin to a mini water park, designed to attract visitors for extended periods with its array of interactive features. These often include multi-level play structures with slides, tipping buckets, interactive water cannons, ground sprays with varying patterns and heights, and themed elements. Such large-scale splashpads typically incorporate advanced water treatment systems and designated zones for different age groups.
- A mid-sized splashpad strikes a balance between features and more modest footprints, making them ideal for community parks. These splashpads commonly feature a selection of above-ground elements like water mushrooms, arching spray tunnels, smaller tipping buckets, and a variety of ground nozzles. While they may not have the structures of a destination splashpad, they still offer engaging and diverse water play opportunities that encourage interaction and active fun.
- Smaller splashpads are characterized by their compact size and a limited number of features, often found in neighborhood parks. These water play areas typically consist of a few ground nozzles that spray water upwards in simple patterns, perhaps complemented by a gentle above-ground feature like a small flower or a bubbler. The primary goal of a smaller sprayground is to provide a space for quick cool-downs and basic water interaction, especially for toddlers and younger children.
- **Splashpads**
 - Continue operating existing Splashpads
 - Determine areas of the County to build new in underserved areas (southern and northern Milwaukee County) or replacement of aging wading pools
 - Jackson Pool to become a destination splashpad
 - Destination splashpad to be constructed at McGovern Park
 - Current splashpad at Washington Park to be expanded
 - Gap in service area from existing outdoor pools or waterparks, existing splashpads and closed wading pools
- **Create criteria for identification of new areas for splashpads**
 - Gap in service area from other aquatic amenities
 - Areas with high equity index
 - Replacement with splashpads for areas where swimming pool was decommissioned
 - Continue to analyze trends over time to reinforce or change decision about which wading pools to close

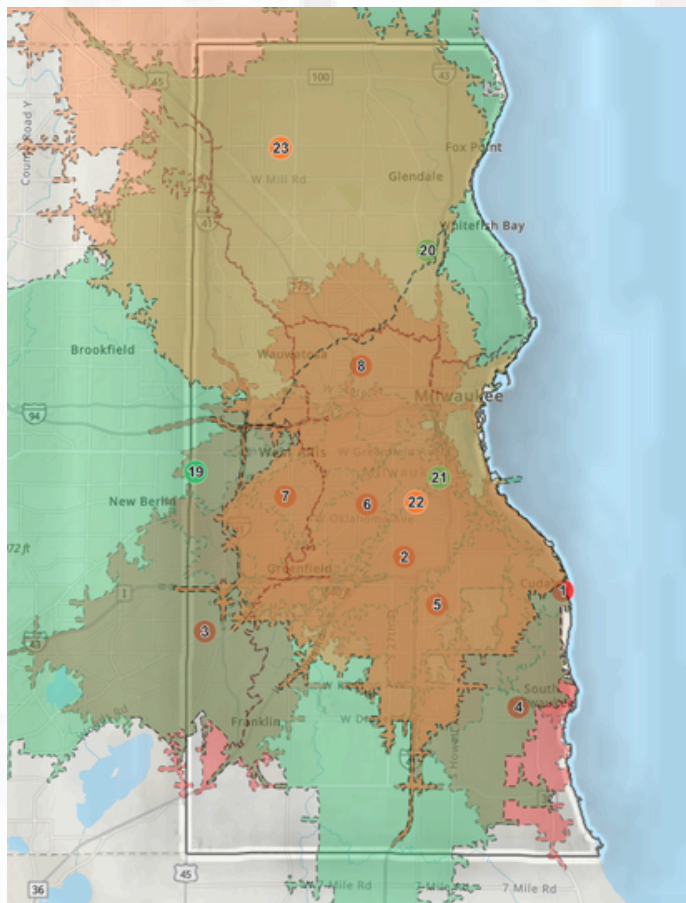


RECOMMENDATIONS

- Waterparks
 - Continue operating Cool Waters and Schulz Aquatic Center
 - Determine investment threshold for Pelican Cove based on its age and lack of attendance compared to other pools of similar size and amenities that could be based on one of the following categories:
 - Annual subsidy dollars compared to visits
 - Capital expenditures that do not generate more visits (e.g. mechanical renovations)
 - Staffing shortages - Utilize staff for pools that receive higher attendance and have a lower annual subsidy
 - Plan for addition of outdoor swimming pool in southern Milwaukee County, possibly centralized between Grobschmidt and Hales Corners, or a renovation or replaced Wilson Pool can fill this area's need.
 - While Milwaukee County does not currently operate an outdoor pool in the northern part of the county, the future MPS aquatics facility and Fox Point Outdoor Swimming Pool help to fulfill the needs of the area's residents.

Milwaukee County Waterparks (20-minute drive time service areas)

Milwaukee County Swimming Pools (10-minute drive time service areas)



County Run Waterparks	
Name	Legend
Cool Waters Aquatic Park	19
Shultz Aquatic Park	20
Pelican Cove	21

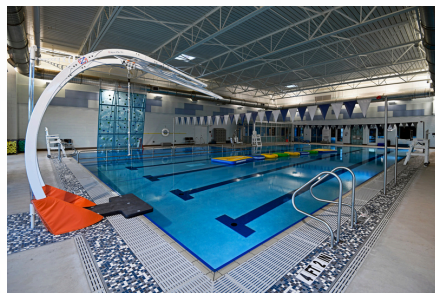
County Run Outdoor Pools	
Name	Legend
Sheridan Park Pool	1
Wilson Park Pool	2
Hales Corners Pool	3
Grobschmidt Pool	4
Holler Pool	5
Jackson Pool	6
McCarty Pool	7
Washington Pool	8

County Run Indoor Pools	
Name	Legend
Pulaski Indoor Pool	22
Noyes Public Indoor Pool	23

RECOMMENDATIONS

Indoor Swimming Pools

- As the only county-operated indoor pools, Noyes and Pulaski help to address year-round fitness, health wellness, recreation and provide the opportunity for the County to offer swimming lessons.
- Noyes Pool
 - Annual attendance in 2024 at Noyes was one-third of its attendance in 2016 which is a sharp decline. Based upon the numbers provided, the facility sees an average of 30 to 40 people per day which is on the lower end of attendance for an indoor swimming pool.
 - **Recommendation: Create marketing strategy to help increase attendance for community use and swimming lessons.**
 - **Recommendation: Explore the addition of recreational amenities to the swimming pool for use on the weekends to increase attendance (climbing wall, waterslide, inflatable obstacle course, Aqua Zip'N).**
 - **Recommendation: At the end of its useful life, demolish and replace with a destination splashpad, perhaps in a different northside location.**
- Pulaski Pool
 - Pulaski's attendance has also decreased since 2016, but still had over 20,000 visits
 - **Recommendation: Create marketing strategy to help increase attendance for community use**
 - **Recommendation: Explore the addition of recreational amenities to the swimming pool for use on the weekends to increase attendance (climbing wall, waterslide, inflatable obstacle course, Aqua Zip'N)**
 - **Recommendation: At the end of the useful life, consider consolidation with a new south side aquatic center as referenced in the Wilson Pool and Grobschmidt Pool recommendations.**



- The possibility of a future recreation community center and aquatic facility at the Browning Playfield site to be constructed and operated by Milwaukee Public Schools' Milwaukee Recreation also plays a role in the future of Milwaukee County facilities. Planned amenities include an indoor pool and outdoor splashpad. This facility could decrease the demand and attendance at Noyes Pool as it's within a 10-minute drive and will have newer and more modern amenities.



FUTURE SYSTEM MAP

All Aquatic Facilities

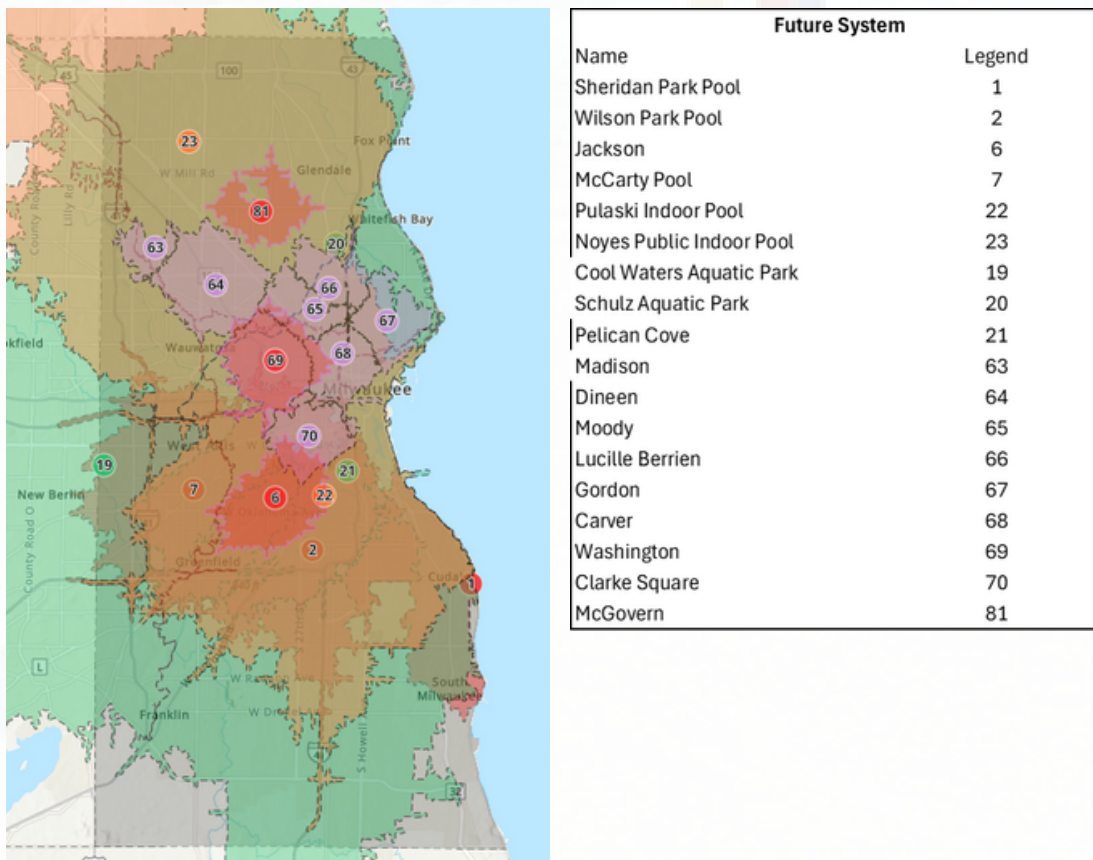
As Milwaukee County begins to consider implementation for the recommendations from the aquatics study, the following map represents the location and facility type of each aquatics facility. The future state of the Milwaukee County aquatics system consists of waterparks, community pools, and splashpads. While the County does not operate an outdoor pool in the northern sector of the county, the northern area has aquatic facilities from the local municipalities of Brown Deer and Fox Point, along with a future MPS indoor aquatics facility. While these areas are within a service area for certain facility types (primarily waterparks), they do not fall within the service radius of a community pools or splashpad. The aquatics system in this state contains 4 community pools (with the option to add two additional pools), 3 waterparks, 2 indoor pools and 8 splashpads with the plan to add 2 to 4 as wading pools are decommissioned and replaced with splashpads. This future system allows for an even distribution of aquatic facility types with existing swimming pools in central Milwaukee County to remain operating or be renovated, and possibly expand their service area.

Waterparks - 20-minute drive time service area for each waterpark

Indoor Swimming Pools - 15-minute drive time service area for each indoor pool

Swimming Pools - 10-minute drive time service area for each pool

Splashpads - 5-minute drive time service area for each splashpad

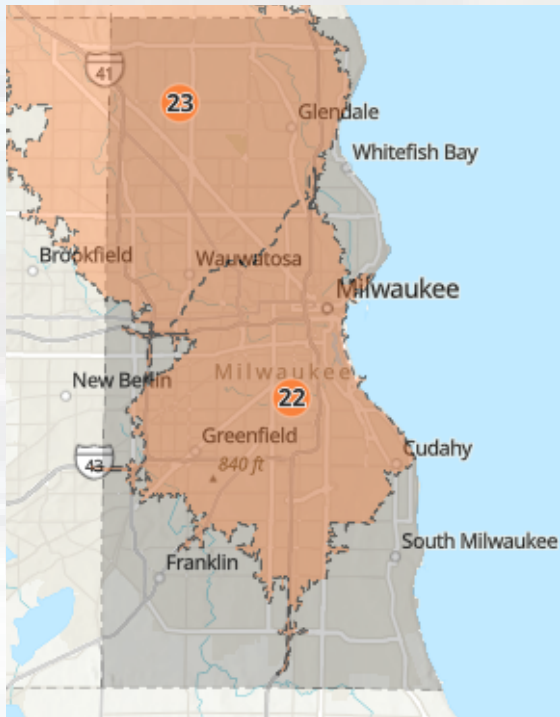


FUTURE SYSTEM MAP

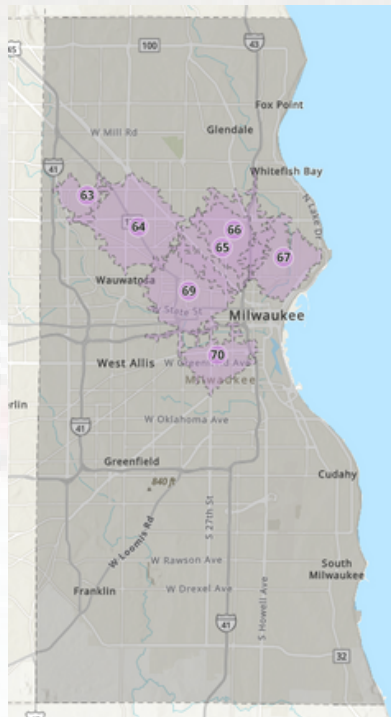
Aquatic Facility by Type

The following maps show the future Milwaukee County Aquatics System by type of facility with targeted areas for future development in the northern and southern parts of the county.

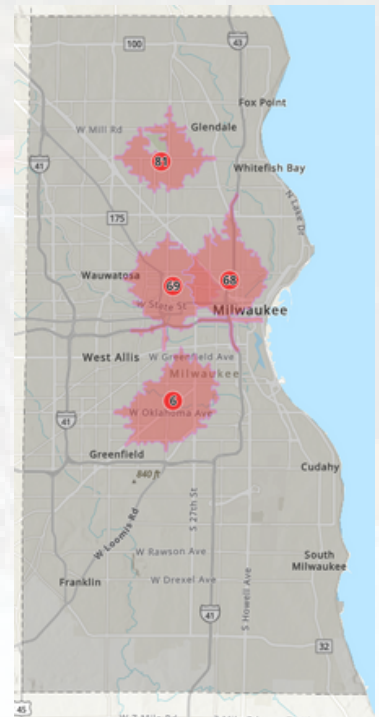
Indoor Pools



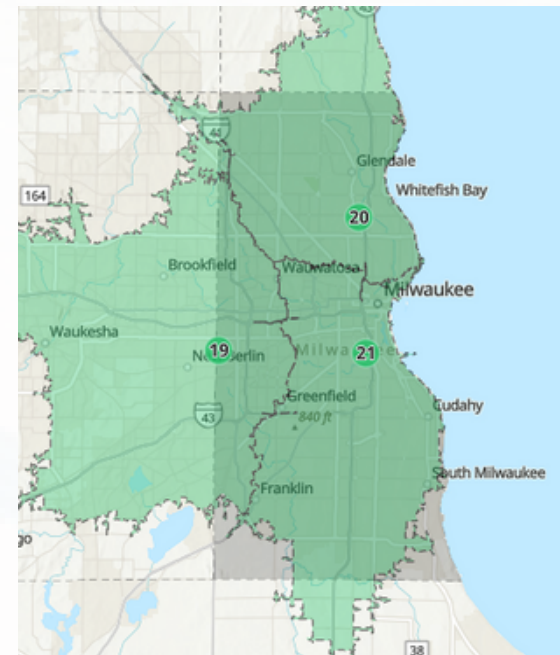
Splashpads



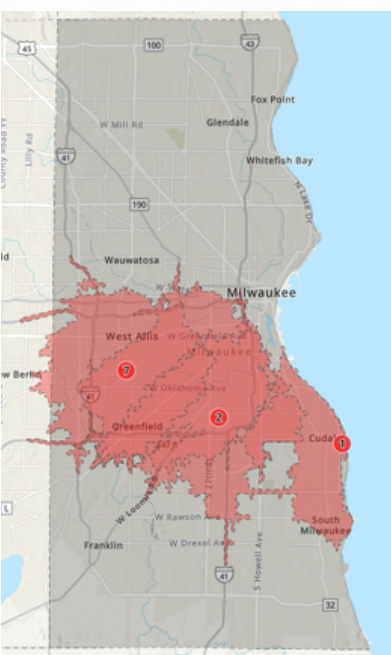
Destination Splashpads



Waterparks



Outdoor Pools



Future System	
Name	Legend
Sheridan Park Pool	1
Wilson Park Pool	2
Jackson	6
McCarty Pool	7
Pulaski Indoor Pool	22
Noyes Public Indoor Pool	23
Cool Waters Aquatic Park	19
Schulz Aquatic Park	20
Pelican Cove	21
Madison	63
Dineen	64
Moody	65
Lucille Berrien	66
Gordon	67
Carver	68
Washington	69
Clarke Square	70
McGovern	81



CAPITAL PLANNING



CAPITAL PLANNING

Based on the continued operation, renovation, replacement or decommissioning of Milwaukee County's outdoor swimming pools and waterparks, indoor swimming pools and splashpads, the following capital budgets have been developed to account for capital budget ranges from 2026 to 2035. Significant investments are earmarked for Jackson, Sheridan, and Wilson Pool. The other outdoor aquatics facilities at Cool Waters, McCarty, Pelican Cove, and Schulz receive smaller, targeted investments for mechanical system renovations.

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Grobschmidt	N/A					N/A				
Sheridan										\$17,802,000
McCarty		\$375,000		\$2,500,000						
Hales Corners	N/A					N/A				
Jackson	\$4,200,000									
Cool Waters	\$954,000				\$412,000		\$2,750,000			
Pelican Cove								\$3,000,000		
Wilson Pool			\$740,000		\$14,835,000					
Noyes			\$2,500,000							
Pulaski									\$3,000,000	
New Splashpads	\$360,000	\$2,400,000		\$1,200,000			\$2,800,000			
Schulz	\$443,000									\$3,500,000
Washington	N/A					N/A				
Existing Splashpads	\$545,000	\$560,000	\$460,000	\$860,000	\$460,000			\$400,000		
Wading Pools	N/A					N/A				
	\$5,957,000	\$3,335,000	\$3,700,000	\$4,560,000	\$15,707,000	\$0	\$5,550,000	\$3,400,000	\$3,000,000	\$21,302,000

In addition to capital planning costs for repairs, renovations, replacements and new facilities, the cost of demolition and decommissioning should be planned for by the County. The cost for demolition has a wide range dependent upon the facility type, location, and to what type of park setting the area is returned. Note: This chart does not include annual operating costs.



SUMMARY



SUMMARY

Milwaukee County's current aquatics system offers a variety of aquatic facilities for all ages and abilities of swimmers and non-swimmers. It also reflects a traditional emphasis on providing access to aquatic amenities within close proximity to residential areas, allowing residents to easily reach facilities by walking, biking, or short drives. However, this approach can lead to higher operational costs due to the increased number of facilities requiring staffing, maintenance, and resources.

While the number and types of outdoor swimming pools generally align with historical planning standards, the traditional swimming pools have seen declining attendance and utilization (with the exception of McCarty and Sheridan). Modern planning standards tend to advocate for a more streamlined approach, focusing on providing a mix of small, medium and large facilities that all offer amenities associated with the modern aquatics experience. This typically involves providing fewer, aquatic centers strategically located to serve larger population segments, potentially at the expense of immediate neighborhood access. While this model can lead to greater operational efficiency, it may require residents to travel further to access aquatic amenities.

The current system in Milwaukee County offers a relatively balanced mix of regional water parks, community outdoor pools, indoor pools, and neighborhood wading pools and splashpads. All of these facilities support the County's role as a community provider of both indoor and outdoor aquatics. This multi-tiered approach provides options for various age groups and interests across the entire County. However, the inclusion of wading pools presents a challenge, as they are becoming outdated in the aquatics industry due to safety concerns, lack of meeting ADA accessibility standards, limited programming potential, and the need for on-site staff during operating hours.

Wading pools, while offering a water feature at a lower cost compared to traditional pools, are increasingly being replaced by splashpads. This shift is driven by the desire for aquatic experiences that require less operational oversight and cater to a similar age range. Splashpads, with their interactive water features and minimal staffing needs, offer a cost-effective and engaging alternative for young children.

The distribution of aquatic facilities across Milwaukee County is generally dispersed, with splashpads concentrated in the central, densely populated areas, while wading pools are more evenly spread throughout the County. County-operated indoor pools offer a balance of northern and southern locations, and non-County facilities, such as those in Brown Deer, help fill some of the gaps in service areas. The southern portion of the County does not have aquatic facilities within convenient drive times highlighting a potential need for increased regional aquatic amenities in that area.



SUMMARY

This comprehensive study evaluated the Milwaukee County Parks aquatics system to provide recommendations for its future in terms of the number and location of aquatic facilities. The project scope encompassed a broad range of analyses, including attendance trends, staffing, facility conditions, financial performance, equity disparities, and community feedback gathered through an online survey.

Key findings revealed an aging infrastructure, staffing challenges leading to facility closures, and varying utilization across pools. The 2023 community survey indicated high usage of county aquatic facilities and strong support for increased investment, with residents prioritizing recreation, cooling options, and water safety education. Market research highlighted Milwaukee County's diverse population and the significant presence of young families, a key user group for aquatic facilities.

Financial analysis showed varying cost recovery rates across different facility types, with waterparks like Cool Waters demonstrating the highest utilization but also requiring a significant annual subsidy. Indoor pools exhibited low cost recovery, while wading pools struggled with low attendance. Both wading pools and splashpads do not have a charge for admission. The study also addressed service area coverage, identifying overlaps and gaps in facility distribution, particularly in northern and southern regions.

Based on these findings, the study recommends a strategic approach to the future of Milwaukee County aquatics. This includes:

- Waterparks: Continued operation of Cool Waters and Schulz Aquatic Center and planning for a new waterpark/aquatic center in southern Milwaukee County.
 - Reinvestment is an option that could include the addition of a water feature(s) that increase the play value of the facility. Coupled with targeted marketing of the facility, these could lead to an increase in seasonal attendance.
- Swimming Pools: Continued operation and investment in Wilson, Sheridan, McCarty, decommission Grobschmidt, Hales Corners (or divest to third-party operator) and invest in a destination splashpad at Washington. Utilize \$2.1M in capital funding on Jackson for a destination splashpad.
- Wading Pools: Phasing out low-utilization wading pools and replacing them with splashpads in underserved areas. Keep wading pools operational that require minimal maintenance and that are on the higher end of utilization. Wading pools closures would be mitigated with simple splashpads for heat relief purposes that come with less operational oversight and maintenance.
 - Plan for phasing out of all wading pools by 2035.
 - Transfer Wil-O-Way wading pool operations to partner with the County's Department of Health and Human Services to determine a long-term sustainable plan.



SUMMARY

- Splashpads: Continued operation of existing splashpads and strategic expansion in underserved areas, particularly northern Milwaukee County (McGovern Park).
- Indoor Pools: Continued operation with creation of a marketing strategy to increase attendance for community use, and at the end of their useful life, consider the consolidation with a new south side aquatic center for Pulaski, and for Noyes, demolish and replace with a destination splashpad, perhaps in a different northside location.

These recommendations aim to balance service areas, address infrastructure needs, enhance cost recovery, and community needs and national aquatics trends, while taking into consideration the importance of considering factors like staffing shortages, rising operational costs, and the need for equitable access when making decisions about the future of Milwaukee County's aquatic facilities.



APPENDIX



COMPARABLE CITIES

City	Total Pop.	Outdoor Pools	Indoor Pools	Splashpads	Wading Pools
Milwaukee County	935,745	10	2	8	23
Chicago	2,664,452	50	27	4	1
Cleveland	362,656	18	12	33	0
Fairfax County	1,160,925	1	9	0	0
Mecklenberg County	1,206,285	2	5	7	0
Minneapolis	429,954	3	1	3	50
Oakland	443,554	2	3	0	0
Toledo	270,871	5	0	2	0

