

What different era today

The University of New Hampshire administration has give the town notice that the Outdoor Pool will be closed this summer. It also appears that they are moving ahead with the destruction of pool unless exorbitantly expensive renovations can turn it into a "modern" pool.

This decision to close the pool would seem to be in violation of an agreement the university made with the town to provide one year's notice. The agreement, as I read it, does not allow one party to unilaterally void this notice requirement.

The letter to the town also implies that the state Department of Environmental Services is forcing the university's hand, when it has been clear all along that DES has found the pool to be safe and healthy and that they would be willing to allow it to operate. Let's be clear, this is a university decision — ultimately the decision of the President, Mark Huddleston.

The university's argument for closing the pool has been embarrassingly inconsistent and weak. When the University Mas-

ter Plan was released a couple of years ago, it was clear that the footprint of the pool would have to change to accommodate the expansion of the Hamel Recreation Center. Like many others, I believe this is the university's true motivation.

It has only been in the last year that the issue of health and safety was put forward as the primary reason for destroying and replacing the pool. The argument goes something like this. Only pools built to contemporary standards are safe. The outdoor pool is not built to such standards. Therefore it is not safe.

That's it.

The administration gives no weight to the fact that the pool has an excellent health and safety record — which is why the DES has agreed to allow it to function. There have been no drownings in the 75-year history of the pool. Access to sections of the pool is carefully monitored so that rescues are rare to non-existent. There have been no outbreaks of skin rashes, eye infections, or other water-related problems. The university has

provided no information to the contrary; indeed it has not bothered to gather it.

In fact, the pool has safety feature that a modern pool does not have — most notably the gradual increase in depth in the minnow and other areas. Since children under 5 are the most frequent drowning victims, this is a powerful advantage over a regular lap pool with a minimum depth of 3 feet. For this reason it has been an ideal place to teach children to swim — the best safety measure of all.

While it appears that the university is set on this course, it has been in conversation with the town about bringing the outdoor pool up to contemporary standards — at exorbitant cost, over \$6 million. Some of these renovations would have no safety benefit, and are frankly silly and wasteful.

Yes, a modern pool would have gutters. But it would be pointless to put gutters on the outdoor pool (it's hard to even visualize). Yes, a new pool would have a bathhouse and showers — but how essential is that for safety? Yes, a

modern pool would circulate the water through the filters more frequently. But if water quality is maintained under the current system, what's the problem?

There are long-overdue measures that can and should be taken to improve the pool. We should address the water loss. We should restore the dock so that swim teams can use the pool. The town is more than willing to work on these and other issues might actually enhance the safety and efficiency of the pool.

One positive outcome of this conflict has been the historical research citizens have done. It has revealed a very different relationship of the university to the town at the time the pool was built. This pool, like many across the country, was created as an expansive public space where a community, town and gown, could come together. No one had much then, but everyone had this wonderful granite-tiled pool.

What different era we live in today.

Tom Newkirk
Durham

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COMMUNITY COMMENTARY

End of a good friendship?

The following was sent to Durham Town Administrator Todd Selig and the Durham Town Council.

I regret that I cannot be in attendance tonight at the meeting, but I do want to let my feelings known to you and members of the council.

"Annie" — this past summer's show at Prescott Park — has in the script where an aide to President Roosevelt is encouraging him to "do something", specifically to establish various programs to put the depressed population back to work. That did indeed come into reality and began to put money back into pockets. Something on the line "think about the people". The aide proposed, with vigor, a litany of projects that did indeed ultimately come about ... for the people. Those of you who attended the show remember this scene. In the list of projects I would have loved to have penciled into the script., "Projects like, — pools ... like building one in Durham — where the community can come together Think about it Mr. President!" As we know, the Durham Town

Pool's existence is attributed to one of many projects initiated by the Roosevelt administration to help the people and to help the economy of the country.

The existence of the Durham Town Pool is part of a unique history in President Roosevelt's plans to put the country back to work. The Town Pool should have, but does not have, a plaque attributing its existence to this crucial time in our history. Many other projects were initiated, of all sorts, and I would think among all the projects there are many other town pools. Pools of all kinds and all shapes, but our Durham Pool is unique! Is it a pond? Is it a pool? Call it what you will, but it has become the gathering place of the community and many from the university and a most unique facet of the town.

My feeling is that, over a period of years, the University has preferred a path to demolition by neglect instead of preservation of pride. And the green eyes of the University have been on this parcel of land for years. Hardly a year

in my 35 years in New Hampshire and the majority of them spent in Durham and in the outdoor pool, has there been a year where the rattling of the University has not been hovering over the Durham Pool. The creativity of the University to "spruce up" the pool with a few minimal enhancements making the pool a conversation piece and a respected memory of the Roosevelt Administration. Many positive comments come from new residents of the community, visitors, from all over the country as well as foreign pool users. Yes, I have heard many amazed comments that the pool exists as a result of the good benevolence of the university and supportive community.

Have I heard complaints ... of course. It's not an 8 lane 50 meter competitive pool, but even better ... it is living history. I must add that the most derogatory pool rhetoric I have heard, as recently as this past summer, came from University Employees connected in some way to the pool, maintenance? training guards? the "concessions" area? I can only call it

pool bashing. I was waiting for my grandson to finish a lesson and did not look like a pool user just a bored grandmother so the conversation was not guarded. This helped me understand the way pool guards talked about the pool, mouthing this same diatribe I heard from their superiors. What is this called? Brainwashing? I did not speak up in defense, just sat and listened and understood.

And lastly, as the years have passed by I have watched the University, in my opinion, distance themselves further and further from the role of good friend and partner with the town that I used to see. This ultimate statement on the pool's existence is the pinnacle of the decline of the good partnership we have shared. (My opinion). I ask, just exactly what is the motivation of the University? A bigger athletic facility? Or the ultimate power play of UNH, for what reason? But whatever, to me, this probably, is the end of a good friendship.

Crescentia Anne Healy
Durham

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Open letter to USNH Board of Trustees

As the outcry about UNH's closure of the Outdoor Pool has grown louder, I am reminded of why I lobbied so hard for Mark Huddleston to be president when I was on the UNH Presidential Selection Committee. He was one of the few candidates who articulated strong support for Town/Gown relationships and actually had the experience to back it up.

At the time the relationship with the town was at its worst. I had just run for Town Council and in meeting after meeting, citizens asked me if I would support cutting off the sewer and water to UNH until it paid a fee in lieu of taxes. They were annoyed at the fact that University hadn't added any parking when it built the Whittemore Center. They blamed the University for badly behaved students, high taxes, and pretty much everything else that was wrong in the town.

Then the fight over Moore Fields and the soccer complex erupted. An email list in opposition grew from 20 to 2,000 in a matter of weeks. Ultimately, as you are no doubt aware, the project was canceled, a \$6 million

check was returned and the president had resigned. I use that story in all my books and speeches as an example of why organizations should put a value on the health of its public relationships.

When Mark came to the University he quickly addressed those problems and ultimately improved that poisoned Town/Gown relationship. In the years since then, his actions have consistently proven that we made the right choice and my respect for the University has increased enormously due primarily to Mark's dealings with the town.

But now, I see the controversy over the Outdoor Pool head-

ed in the same direction, only it's worse. Once again the relationship has soured. But this time it isn't just a piece of land the University is taking away. It is a piece of the town's history. That pool and the joy it has given to Durham residents has shaped the character of this town. To me it has always been on a list of places in Durham that you make people see, a piece of WPA history right in our own backyard. As a kid, the high point of my year was swimming lessons at the pool. It wasn't just about learning to swim, it was about the camaraderie and gaining the confidence to move from "Minnow"

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to "Perch" to "Shark." There are thousands of people like me whose lives were similarly shaped by that pool and who feel the same connection and passion for that amazing place.

Which is why I'm writing you today. My profession is measuring relationships, and if I were measuring the Town/Gown relationship today, my guess is that on factors like trust, credibility and satisfaction, UNH is losing several percentage points every week. The cost of that decline may well far exceed the cost of preserving the pool. All the research shows that erosion of those elements of a relationship negatively impacts the finances of an organization — in higher legal fees, longer time to complete projects, higher recruitment costs and the introduction of unfavorable legislation.

I urge you to reconsider your decision to close the pool next summer and to continue to work with the town on a mutually agreeable solution.

Katie Delahaye Paine
Durham

EDITORIAL

UNH a friend no more?

Last week one of our reporters was told he was persona non grata at a meeting of University of New Hampshire and town officials at which the fate of the UNH Outdoor Pool was discussed.

A UNH spokesperson said the group does not meet criteria for a "public body" under the state's Right-to-Know law.

"It is clear from this statute and the cases decided under it that the 'public body' for Right-to-Know law purposes is only the governing body of the public agency or institution and not the administrative offices or officers or employees of the agency or institution," she said in an email.

To be blunt, the spokesperson is dead wrong — in both substance and merit.

To be quick and to the point, this interpretation of the law would exempt subcommittees and appointed advisory panels for city councils, schools board and the like from being subject to RSA 91(a), the Right-to-Know law. It would allow such groups and advisory panels to meet willy-nilly and in private because — argues UNH — they are not the governing body. Rather, simply appointed by a governing body.

But such is not the case. If you are doing the public's business you must abide by RSA 91: a — with specific exceptions, none of which we believe apply in this case.

Also a breach of the Right-to-Know law, UNH allowing selected members of the public to attend — members of FUNHOP — while barring another of the public — our reporter.

Friends of the UNH Pool carries no governmental designation. It is not an official government committee or subcommittee. As such, its members have no greater or lesser right to attend a closed-door meeting of public officials than our reporter.

Nonetheless, we were able to report the overall substance of the meeting thanks to the good graces of Durham Town Administrator Todd Selig.

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Selig explained that town and UNH officials discussed several options for the FDR-era pool, including one that would shrink the current 44,000-square-footprint by nearly a quarter.

For those who have fought hard to save the pool this appears to be a significant development. And perhaps, had we not been kept from the meeting there might be more details available. Instead, unanswered questions abound. And, we would argue, distrust allowed to fester and grow.

Of course, there is an argument to be made that in the end UNH is going to do what UNH wants to do, and the devil-be-damned.

Were we to counsel UNH President Mark Huddleston, it would be to better behave for fear of costly blow-back.

UNH's action concerning the pool have renewed calls locally to re-evaluate *all* financial sharing arrangements, such as the Fire Department. It has also caused bad blood on the council which led to one member referring to "a UNH student drowning in their own vomit." Surely, this is not an image Huddleston wants to promote during UNH's expensive rebranding effort (another sore subject on which we have editorialized).

We hope Durham reader Crescentia Anne Healy is wrong, but we will close with words from her community commentary published Tuesday, Nov. 26.

"And lastly, as the years have passed by I have watched the University, in my opinion, distance themselves further and further from the role of good friend and partner with the town that I used to see. This ultimate statement on the pool's existence is the pinnacle of the decline of the good partnership we have shared. (My opinion). I ask, just exactly what is the motivation of the University? A bigger athletic facility? Or the ultimate power play of UNH, for what reason? But whatever, to me, this probably, is the end of a good friendship."