



Columbia Pool Closure Frequently Asked Questions

Updated December 15, 2022

What is the status of Columbia Pool?

- After 93 years of serving North Portland, Columbia Pool has had to permanently close due to life-safety hazards and diminishing structural integrity. As with other Portland Parks & Recreation public facilities, Columbia Pool had been closed for most of 2020 due to COVID-19; it has not since reopened.

Why did Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) initially close Columbia Pool?

- At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Oregon in March 2020, based on guidance from public health authorities and direction from elected officials, Columbia Pool closed temporarily. The same was true for all other City community centers and aquatic facilities.

Why is Columbia Pool still closed?

- In 2021, an independent structural engineering firm inspected the pool building before it was to be reopened as COVID-19 restrictions eased. This work was part of ongoing City inspection efforts to ensure public safety. The independent structural engineer recommended keeping Columbia Pool closed due to serious life and safety hazards.

Why not fix Columbia Pool?

- Portland Parks & Recreation does not have funding to complete the additional inspections required to understand the full scope of life and safety hazards of the nearly 100-year-old pool. In addition to significant major maintenance needs, Columbia Pool cost the bureau about \$770,000 to operate every year, while only generating about \$320,000 in revenue. That means PP&R has needed an additional \$450,000 to operate it each year and analysts say this gap would continue to grow each year. Given this, Parks Commissioner Rubio has asked Portland Parks & Recreation to engage the North Portland community around the future North Portland Aquatics Center and \$1.5 million in funding allocated by Council to increase North Portland residents' access to aquatic facilities.

Due to years of historic budget cuts and underfunding of an aging parks system, PP&R is now faced with a \$500 million major maintenance backlog across the whole citywide system. Without a long-term funding mechanism to address maintenance in the

community's park system, Portlanders will lose one in five park assets in the next 15 years. Columbia Pool is just one piece of the infrastructure impacted by the maintenance backlog that PP&R has brought to City Council's attention through the Bureau's [Sustainable Future](#) effort.

How much would it have cost to fix Columbia Pool?

- Significant further inspection and assessment would be needed to understand the full scope of life and safety hazards at Columbia Pool, and the assessment alone is estimated to be at least \$500,000. After nearly 100 years of operations, Columbia Pool would require further structural evaluation, seismic evaluation, a condensation and infiltration review, and a facility renovation review of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems. Any costs associated with further inspections or rehabilitation of Columbia Pool, or any other failing parks infrastructure, can fluctuate based on inflation, supply chain issues, and COVID effects like the depleted workforce. At this time, repair costs are roughly estimated to be \$5 million to \$10 million.

Could PP&R install a bubble covering for outdoor pools at Peninsula or Pier Park (or to replace roof at Columbia Pool)?

- A bubble, also referred to as an air-supported structure or air dome, is basically covering a large area with a fabric sheet that must be anchored to a concrete grade beam around the perimeter of the area and continually inflated with pressurized air.

Covering any of the City's existing outdoor pools or replacing Columbia Pool's roof with a bubble would be categorically unsustainable due to excessive maintenance requirements, high operation costs, and vulnerability to high winds and heavy snowfall. In addition, it would require building a separate dry facility to store and protect the fabric in the summertime. Neither Pier nor Peninsula pools were designed to operate year-round; consequently, new HVAC systems for the pools, offices, and locker rooms would need to be installed if operational hours were extended past summer. Adding a bubble would also trigger additional ADA and seismic upgrades. While bubbles may be less costly to purchase, the expense of installing and maintaining the structure offsets any initial savings.

Why can't PP&R use the \$1.5 million in City Council funds towards Columbia Pool?

- In November 2021, City Council approved \$1.5 million in one-time resources to explore interim solutions to provide North Portlanders increased access to other aquatic facilities while the North Portland Indoor Aquatic Center is being developed. *City Council appropriated the funding for operations, and not for capital expenses.*

- Portland Parks & Recreation has created the FREE North Portland Pass (only for North Portland residents) for use to visit PP&R's Matt Dishman Community Center. Free TriMet bus passes available upon request at time of pass registration.
- To get your free North Portland pass, you can call the PP&R Customer Service Center at (503) 823-2525; visit the Matt Dishman Community Center or call it at (503) 823-3673.
- The Council allocation of funding is also being used for a new position within PP&R Aquatics to support the staffing of life guards and swim instructors.
- And to provide free swim lessons at Pier Pool and Peninsula Pool in the summer of 2023.

Why didn't PP&R use money from the Parks Replacement Bond to assess and repair Columbia Pool?

- When voters passed the [Parks Replacement Bond](#) in November 2014, they approved ballot language that called for renovations for three specific pools in North/Northeast Portland: Peninsula Pool, Matt Dishman Pool, and Grant Pool. The combined total to renovate these three public pools was about \$7 million, and renovations were completed in 2016 (Dishman and Grant) and 2019 (Peninsula). The Parks Replacement Bond addressed 50 park and facility projects citywide.

Where can people who used Columbia Pool now go to swim or take swim lessons?

- Other PP&R pools in North and Northeast Portland. Thanks to voters' support for the [Parks Replacement Bond](#), the renovated Peninsula Pool will again be open this summer with an expanded shallow area for beginning swimmers, a rebuilt pool, deck lighting and increased ADA accessibility. Matt Dishman's indoor pool was resurfaced and the spa/jacuzzi was expanded, doubling capacity.

What are your plans for the Columbia Pool building?

- Currently, PP&R does not have plans for the building, which has been determined to be unsafe for use. The outcomes of the future [North Portland Indoor Aquatic Center](#) will likely influence further plans for the building as Columbia Park and Columbia Annex are both potential sites for the new aquatic facility. Ultimately, the future of the building would be a policy decision made by the Commissioner-in-Charge of Parks – currently, Commissioner Carmen Rubio.

What other financial challenges is Portland Parks & Recreation facing?

- Due to years of historic budget cuts and underfunding of an aging parks system, PP&R is now faced with a \$500 million major maintenance backlog across the whole citywide system. Without a long-term funding mechanism to address maintenance in the

community's park system, Portlanders will lose one in five park assets in the next 15 years. Columbia Pool is just one piece of the infrastructure impacted by the maintenance backlog that PP&R has brought to City Council's attention through the Bureau's [Sustainable Future](#) effort.