

Tara & Ron Riesenburger
35 Lockwood Road
West Newton, MA. 02465
tarariesenburger@yahoo.com
rriesenburger@tuftsmedicalcenter.org

January 20, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

My husband, Ron, and I have been in the medical field for over 20 years. Ron is a neurosurgeon with a sub-specialty in spine surgery, and I work as a nurse with both inpatient (ICU) and outpatient experience. We both have cared for patients with spinal cord injuries and seen the devastation for both patients and their families. My husband has on many occasions operated on patients with spinal cord injuries sustained from diving in shallow water. If survived, patients' lives are often changed forever. We write this letter for consideration of doing everything possible to minimize potential for spinal cord injuries as it relates to diving in pools when designing the new Gath pool.

According to the National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center, diving is the 5th leading cause of spinal cord injuries and is sadly often the most preventable¹. Approximately 800 spinal cord injuries occur each year as a result of diving into a body of water less than 6 feet deep in the US alone (M. Alexander Gabrielson, 1990) (Department of Health New York State, 1992). Due to the mechanism of the dive, damage to the cervical spine (neck vertebrae) and the spinal cord within the cervical spine, can result in complete paralysis from the neck down, a condition known as quadriplegia. A quadriplegic individual is dependent on mechanical ventilation for breathing as well as total care of all their bodily functions with assist from others. The subsequent consequences from which patients living with quadriplegia are subject to are profound, catastrophic and significantly increase their morbidity (M. Alexander Gabrielson, 1990). There are also exorbitant medical costs and socioeconomic burdens as this condition requires intensive and exhaustive medical resources in its acute and rehabilitative stages. These are just some of the many concerns this medical condition poses making education and prevention essential.

Our focus with this letter is on prevention. We write this letter advocating vigilance to pool depths in the new design of the Gath pool that will minimize the potential for spinal cord injuries. In a review of medical literature, shallow water is defined as anything less than 5 feet (Blanksby B. A., 1997) (M. Yilmaz, 2021), and in many cases the literature suggests a minimum depth of 6 feet for diving in pools (Department of Health New York State, 1992). Considering the utilization of the Gath pool by the highly popular competitive swim team, Newton Bluefish, and other competitive swim teams as well as the Parks & Recreation instructional swim programs, we urge members of the design committee to pay careful attention to a minimum 6-

(Center, 2023)

foot depth recommendation where all diving will be taking place as well as clearly labeled areas of NO DIVING in areas less than 6 feet. As Mary and Scott Pohlman have noted in their letter, the Newton Bluefish team has varied levels of skilled swimmers and divers with novice divers who lack control over their dives. Making the diving depth 6 feet across the board where all diving will take place is an act of prevention that cannot be overlooked.

We thank all members of the Pool Design Review Committee, the Parks & Recreation Commissioner, the Aquatic Director and the City Pool Committee for your consideration of this very important matter,

Tara & Ron Riesenburger, M.D.

From: [Luis Perez Demorizi](#)
To: [Cedar Pruitt](#); [Jacqueline Freeman](#); [Megan Anapolle](#)
Subject: FW: Pool Depth Concerns for Proposed New Gath Pool
Date: Tuesday, February 7, 2023 12:20:00 PM

Hi Cedar,

It was great catching up with you yesterday. I wanted to follow up on a memo Commissioner Banks sent to a number of residents that wrote in requesting a deeper shallow end of the lap pool. Please see below on the city's evaluation of these concerns and requests.

Thanks!

Luis Perez Demorizi
Director of Parks & Open Space
Parks, Recreation & Culture Department
City of Newton
T. 617-796-1500

"Earth work is more durable than any other human work" --Charles W. Eliot

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/parks-recreation-culture/parks-open-space>

For questions about Athletic Fields Projects: Athleticfieldproject@newtonma.gov

For questions about the Gath Pool Project: Gathpoolproject@newtonma.gov

From: Nicole Banks <nbanks@newtonma.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 6, 2023 2:43 PM
To: Joshua R. Morse <jmorse@newtonma.gov>; Thomas Scarlata (tscarlata@bhplus.com) <TScarlata@bhplus.com>; Luis Perez Demorizi <lpdemorizi@newtonma.gov>; Rafik Ayoub <rayoub@newtonma.gov>; Alejandro M. Valcarce <avalcarce@newtonma.gov>; Jonathan Yeo <jyeo@newtonma.gov>
Subject: RE: Pool Depth Concerns for Proposed New Gath Pool

Dear Tara,

Thank you for your letter concerning the new Gath Pool and the depth range of the lap pool. The most important goal of this project is that the new pool be built to meet the needs, convenience, and enjoyment of all guests. When the recent decision was made to alter the design to have 2 separate pools these goals did not change, maximum usability for all was and is still of the utmost importance. The pool design has the sanctioned diving area depth at 12'. This is in conformance with state regulations outlined in 105 CMR 435.00. Relatedly, the pools will have the necessary "no diving" markings around all areas that do not meet the depth requirements for save diving entry.

The design outcome you have proposed would require real and significant trade-offs that would

result in the lap pool being over the head of nearly every pool guest. This would be a substantial usability impact with the only benefit being the potential of allowing diving in the shallow end during approximately 5 swim meets across the entire summer pool season. Swim meets account for around 1% of overall pool season time. In assessing the pool depth, we have reviewed past use and anticipated future use of the pool and looked at peer community pools including those with more recent redesigns for guidance. Based on this assessment, here are some of the factors considered that make the 4' depth in the shallow end more advantageous to the community:

Pool crowding during open swim times

Based on discussions with other community leaders who have recently opened pools (none of which are deeper than 4' in their shallow end), we anticipate seeing an approximate 30% increase in pool admittances throughout the day. Extensive input during community meetings and admittance data tells us that the existing pool has been crowded, the two new pools will together be a little larger in area but will still to be crowded given anticipated increased popularity based on data from other similar projects. We already welcome campers from Parks and Rec. summer camps, Newton Public Schools Space Camp, the Boys and Girls Club, and other camps. With a lap pool having a minimum 6' depth, all of these swimmers and general pool guests would be relegated to the wading pool lest they wish to swim in an area over their heads the whole time. Likewise, parents with toddlers and infants may wish to walk in the shallow side of the lap pool while the wading pool is at capacity. With a 6-foot depth it is unlikely that any caregiver or parent would be able to walk in the shallow end while tending to the child.

Expanded programming

Residents have written to the City requesting that more programming be provided to families who are unable to enjoy the pool during 1st shift (9a-5p) hours. These parents feel it is important that their children have access to swim lessons in the evening when their schedule allows them to utilize the pool. Gath Pool has not held evening swim lessons. In my past professional roles in other communities, I have observed the high demand for evening programming, I am confident it will flourish in Newton and ensure that more young swimmers have access to life-saving skills through swim lessons. If the lap pool were to be over the head of all swim lesson participants, these lessons would need to run in the wading pool and would take up considerable space.

Swim lesson/team practices and safety

In my 20+ years overseeing swim teams, all of which had young swimmers that were not the strongest, being able to stand in the shallow end was important for rest. This is why US Swimming, which oversees the country's largest competitive swim association including the US Olympic swim team, states that maximizing 4' depth where possible is advantageous to swim facilities.

Peer community swimming pools

As you are likely aware, the recreation swim team uses in-pool starts for relays. This is common practice across both the summer league and the more competitive winter league. Though I think it is unlikely that the City would limit access to the pool so significantly so that we could modify 5 swim meets, we are certainly open to exploring this further. As part of our review of this request, we have researched other outdoor and indoor swimming pools to identify any that have a 6' shallow end depth so that we could speak to the pool operators to hear their thoughts including pros/cons of

such a design. We were not able to identify any pools meeting a 6’ depth in the region. Here is data collected on nearby pool facilities:

<u>POOL NAME</u>	<u>CITY/TOWN</u>	<u>DEPTH - SHALLOW END</u>	<u>DIVING ALLOWED</u>	<u>IN/OUTDOOR</u>
Acton-Boxborough High School Pool	Acton	3.5	No	Indoor
Belmont Higginbottom Pool	Belmont	4'	No	Indoor
Evelyn Kirrane Aquatics Center	Brookline	4'	No	Indoor
Bolivar Pool	Canton	4'	No	Outdoor
Anthony P. Mucciaccio Pool	Dedham	5'	Yes	Indoor
Milford High School Pool	Milford	4'	No	Indoor
Needham Rosemary Pool	Needham	4.5	No	Outdoor
Newton North High School Pool	Newton	4'	No	Indoor
Hawes Brook Pool	Norwood	3'	No	Outdoor
Atkinson Pool	Sudbury	3.5'	No	Indoor
Walpole Town Pool	Walpole	2.5'	No	Outdoor
Wayland Community Pool	Wayland	4'	No	In and outdoor
Boston Sports Institute	Wellesley	4'	No	Indoor
Westboro Tennis & Swim Club	Westboro	3.5	No	In and outdoor
Weston Middle School Pool	Weston	4'	No	Indoor
Westwood High School Pool	Westwood	3.5'	No	Indoor
Underwood Pool	Belmont	4'	No	Outdoor
Blue Hills Technical High School Pool	Canton	4'	No	Indoor
Beede Swim & Fitness Center	Concord	4'	No	Indoor
West Suburban YMCA	Newton	4'	No	Indoor

-
-

Accessibility

Again, when we changed to a 2-pool design, the overarching goal was to maximize usability for all. Beyond this goal, we are legally obligated to meet ADA accessibility regulations. An accessible chair lift and accessible ramp must land at a depth not exceeding 4’. If the shallow end of the pool was 6’, the design would require an extended ramp from the 4’ landing at the bottom of the ADA ramp into the lap pool to connect to the 6’ depth while meeting the sloped ramp requirements to make this transition. Meeting these requirements would result in the majority of the length of the shallow end being sloped, which is directly counter to the previously submitted request of the swim team to have consistent depths across all swim lanes. Nearly all of the lanes would not meet the 6’ depth you specifically requested for headfirst entries. As a side note, while you may feel a 6’ depth is “safe” for diving, the City’s Law Department has not provided guidance that they concur with this recommendation, particularly when weighing increased liability exposure to the City of Newton.

Project timeline

The design team is excited to be moving this project forward for the community, our commitment has been to break ground this coming fall so that the new facility will be ready for the normal season opening date. Any significant design changes will require a reexamination by the Commission on Disability and another Parks and Recreation Commission public hearing. These additional meetings

would most certainly delay the project such that the pool would not be available for the 2024 summer season unless the project start was delayed until fall 2024.

Your input is most welcome and appreciated. I hope that this response demonstrates that the proposed pool layout is a result of careful consideration of the impacts of every project design element, and decisions involving trade-offs were done so with a particular focus on full and accessible use and enjoyment of the entire facility by all pool guests.

Thank you,

From: Joshua R. Morse <jmorse@newtonma.gov>
Sent: Monday, January 30, 2023 4:11 AM
To: Thomas Scarlata (tscarlata@bhplus.com) <TScarlata@bhplus.com>; Luis Perez Demorizi <lpdemorizi@newtonma.gov>; Rafik Ayoub <rayoub@newtonma.gov>; Alejandro M. Valcarce <avalcarce@newtonma.gov>
Cc: Nicole Banks <nbanks@newtonma.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Pool Depth Concerns for Proposed New Gath Pool

FYI

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Tara Riesenburger <tarariesenburger@icloud.com>
Sent: Sunday, January 29, 2023 7:38:53 PM
To: Joshua R. Morse <jmorse@newtonma.gov>; Nicole Banks <nbanks@newtonma.gov>; Robin McLaughlin <rmclaughlin@newtonma.gov>; Sean Nickerson <snickerson@newtonma.gov>; elslight@rcn.com <elslight@rcn.com>; tgloria@fas.harvard.edu <tgloria@fas.harvard.edu>
Cc: Andrea W. Kelley <akelley@newtonma.gov>; Mary Pohlman <newtonbluefish@aol.com>; Ron Riesenburger <riesenburger@tuftsmedicalcenter.org>
Subject: Pool Depth Concerns for Proposed New Gath Pool

[DO NOT OPEN links/attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]

To the members of the new Gath Pool Design Committee and all other affiliated parties, my husband & I have a swimmer on the Newton Bluefish swim team. We wanted to send a letter to all parties involved with the design of the new Gath pool with particular attention to pool depths as it relates to diving. Please see our attached letter below and please forward to any members of the design committee that we may not have addressed above. Thank you for taking the time to read our thoughts and concerns and let us know if we can answer any additional questions.

Tara & Ron Riesenburger, M.D.

Friends of Albemarle
c/o Cedar Pruitt, President
2 Wyoming Road
Newton MA 02460

Feb 11, 2023

To the Community Preservation Committee,

We're excited about the progress that is being made on renovating Gath Pool. We advocate for moving forward rapidly with investment into this citywide asset and community resource that impacts all of Newton. We appreciate the work and effort taken thus far and look forward to investing time and energy into the completion of the project. Thank you for your time and willingness to help make this resource something that can serve Newton residents for generations to come.

Gath Pool has a significant impact on the daily life and health of our community and needs prompt and urgent attention to continue working. The badly needed updates will make it functional, accessible to our community and deeply appreciated for decades.

Our 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Friends of Albemarle, launched in January 2021 with Gath Pool restoration as the leading priority, and represents all 8 wards of the city. We collaborate closely with Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture. We now stand at 500 members throughout Newton, including more than half of City Council, with members eager to champion Gath Pool as an indispensable part of Newton life.

As the pool ages and falls into further disrepair, we are continually alarmed about our community's ability to use it even through the coming summer. Thank you for your serious consideration of funding for the bulk of the renovation of Gath Pool. We are deeply appreciative.

Sincerely,
The Board of Friends of Albemarle
<https://friendsofalbemarle.org>

Cedar Pruitt, President
cpruitt@gmail.com
2 Wyoming Road, Newton MA 02460

Jacqueline Freeman, Secretary
freeman.jac@gmail.com
29 North Street, Newton, MA 02460

Megan Anapolle, Treasurer
megananapolle@yahoo.com
88 Central Avenue, Newton MA 02460