

ARTICLE 30

THIRTIETH ARTICLE

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Resolution calling for a preliminary study of options for locating a public outdoor swimming facility for Brookline residents.

To see if the Town will adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookline has a both a large population of children and a large and growing population of elderly persons;

WHEREAS, the health and overall quality of life for all residents is a priority for good governance;

WHEREAS, swimming is one of the healthiest forms of exercise for children and for the elderly – as well as for those with ages in between;

WHEREAS, the opportunity to be outdoors, whether for sports or otherwise, is healthful in and of itself;

WHEREAS, outdoor community pools are opportunities for community-building;

WHEREAS, some of the more memorable experiences of childhood are swimming outdoors – for those persons who have had the opportunities to do so;

WHEREAS, currently in Brookline, the only opportunities for outdoor swimming are limited to private clubs and private homes;

WHEREAS, most towns in the Greater Boston area comparable to Brookline provide their residents with one – and sometimes more than one - outdoor swimming facility (for example, Needham, Newton, Natick, Wellesley, Waltham, Watertown, Milton, Belmont, Norwood, Framingham, Hingham);

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookline is the largest town in Massachusetts;

WHEREAS, surprisingly, the website blog for Gohlke Pools of Denton, Texas asserts that “[T]he first swimming pool was a public pool built in 1887 in Brookline, Massachusetts” and that “[P]ools such as this were great places to socialize, and they provided a way to escape the summer heat...”

WHEREAS, Brookline residents surveyed by the Town placed having an outdoor swimming pool high on their list of priorities for parks and open space;

WHEREAS, the only pool currently available to Brookline residents not only lacks fresh air, but is an older facility and so also lacking in accommodations that benefit the very young, the elderly and the disabled, such as zero depth entry, play features, surrounding areas for play and relaxation, and the ability to provide formal therapeutic activities;

WHEREAS, the Town currently is assessing town-wide needs for open space and recreation, brought about by the possibility of acquiring Newbury College properties;

WHEREAS, there are several sites that could serve as locations for outdoor swimming, including but not limited to the DPW site at Larz Anderson, which, if transformed for outdoor swimming, could, together with the ice rink, become part of a larger multi-month recreational center for residents;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Town Meeting calls for a preliminary study of options for siting an outdoor swimming facility for Brookline residents, to be led by the Department of Parks and Open Space, including but not limited to the DPW site at Larz Anderson, land abutting the Putterham golf course, a portion of the property at Newbury College, and any other locations deemed appropriate to evaluate; with such initial analysis serving as preparatory for a more comprehensive study of feasibility to be initiated thereafter.

Or act on anything relative thereto.

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PETITIONER'S ARTICLE DESCRIPTION

One of the more basic amenities to improve the quality of life for members of a community is the availability of some form of outdoor swimming in green space where all ages can come together for sports, relaxing and other forms of recreation. In years past, this option was available naturally in ponds, lakes and rivers. As increasing numbers of people moved to urban areas, municipalities increasingly took on the responsibility to artificially provide those opportunities. In the early part of the twentieth century, hundreds of public outdoor pools were built throughout the country. Some wealthier urban communities, however, preferred the option of relying on private clubs and pools in private yards.

Ironically, while Brookline apparently was the first municipality in the United States to build a public, albeit indoor, pool, in the late 1800s, we did not continue to progress in this area. While most of our neighboring comparable communities now have public outdoor swimming facilities (for example, Needham, Newton, Natick, Wellesley, Waltham, Watertown, Milton, Belmont, Norwood, Framingham, Hingham) and our closest neighbor,

Newton, has both a pool complex and a lake, Brookline has none. For those residents in Brookline who do not have pools in their backyards, nor have paid to join private clubs, the local options are less than satisfactory: While the installation of sprinklers in neighborhood parks provide children with some form of outdoor water play, it is far from ideal. And when the temperatures soar, and other forms of outdoor exercise are not healthy to do – for either children or adults - the idea of going inside a muggy hot building to swim is far from enticing. Moreover, our indoor pool is old, lacking many of the amenities and accommodations that more modern pool facilities can provide to improve the experience for the young, old and disabled, including zero depth entry, play features, surrounding areas for play and relaxation, and the ability to provide formal therapeutic activities.

The upfront cost of construction exists, but is manageable. Hingham has just completed a feasibility study for their new pool complex, and it is estimated to cost \$10 million, and Belmont recently completed a major renovation of its pool complex, at a cost of approximately \$4.5 million. Such price tags, while not a drop in the bucket, are easily comparable to the cost of many Town projects, while producing a substantial overall improvement in the quality of life for residents of all ages.

The ongoing operation of the pool will also require annual expenditures, but other municipalities have minimized these costs by charging both seasonal and daily fees for residents, with higher daily fees for non-residents. For example, the Town of Wellesley maintains Morses Pond as part of its Fields and Facilities within its Recreation Department. Rates range from daily non-resident (\$25) to a full season family pass (\$100 early and \$170 regular price). The Pond is staffed with lifeguards (supplying summer employment opportunities for young people), and is open from early June through mid-August. Morses Pond provides a welcoming, affordable, and healthy space for residents of all ages throughout the warm weather, with swim lessons, picnic area, showers, and other amenities that are well used by residents as well as non-residents.

At the time of the writing of this warrant article, the Town is considering the purchase of Newbury College properties, and there have been some suggestions made to use a portion of that land for an outdoor pool. But other options for locations also exist. Currently, the Department of Public Works makes use of an area of Larz Anderson for storage of equipment and trucks and is unattractive at best. The repurposing of that land for a pool would be more in line with the goals of Article 97 to use parkland for recreational purposes, and would offer beautiful green space in an area of the park near the entrance that is underutilized. With creative design, the co-locating of both outdoor pool facilities and the outdoor skating rink could transform the area into a multi-month and multipurpose outdoor recreational complex. There also are other potential sites that could be identified, such as underutilized land near the parking lot at the Putterham golf course. The purpose of this Warrant article is to enable the Town's Department of Parks and Open Space to consider various options, with the goal of moving forward with a feasibility study following this initial analysis.

For all those of us who were fortunate to have grown up in communities that offered outdoor swimming opportunities, our experiences provided many of the highlights of growing up. And as we age, the importance of having such opportunities becomes equally important. The combination of swimming, fresh air and community is one of the of the best sources of well-being that can be provided to residents of all ages. Passage of this resolution gives the Department of Parks and Open Space the authority to begin the work to provide this benefit to the Town's residents.

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## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE PETITIONERS**

### **I. BROOKLINE JUNE 2006 PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN NEEDS ASSESSMENT:**

- In the Needs Assessment survey of Brookline residents, **an outdoor pool was listed 4<sup>th</sup> most frequently** as the single most important issue/need concerning Brookline Parks, Recreation Programs, and Facilities:

“What is the Single Most Important Issue/Need Concerning Brookline Parks, Recreation Programs, and Facilities?”

Top 5:

Keep parks maintained, clean and safe

More sports fields for youth and adults

More areas for off leash dogs (longer off leash hours)

**Need an outdoor swimming pool**

More open space”

- The Needs Assessment makes use of the Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines published by the National Recreation and Park Association (the “NRPA standards”) to determine Level of Service needs for Brookline. Per these standards:  
Activity/ Facility Number of Units per Population:  
**Swimming Pools: 1 per 20,000**  
(Brookline's population: 59,000)
- “The top four free-time activities for all Americans for the last decade have been and remain: watching television, reading, socializing with friends and family, and shopping. **Swimming and walking are the only two physical activities that make the top ten on the list.**”

### **II. PRE-EXISTING MANDATE FOR FEASIBILITY STUDY:**



2019 Estimates:

Operating Costs*	\$263,900
Revenue:	\$398,000 (includes memberships, daily passes, swim classes, swim teams, private lessons)
<b>Net Revenue Projection*</b>	<b>\$135,000</b>

\*Does not factor in indirect costs, such as Recreation Dept staff time apportioned to the pool.

**Lexington**

(Cost and revenue figures are for 2 outdoor facilities: The pool complex and the reservoir)

2017\* Actual:

Operating costs	\$290,000
Revenue	\$310,000 (includes resident and non-resident passes, daily fees and swim lessons)
<b>Net Revenue:</b>	<b>\$ 20,000</b>

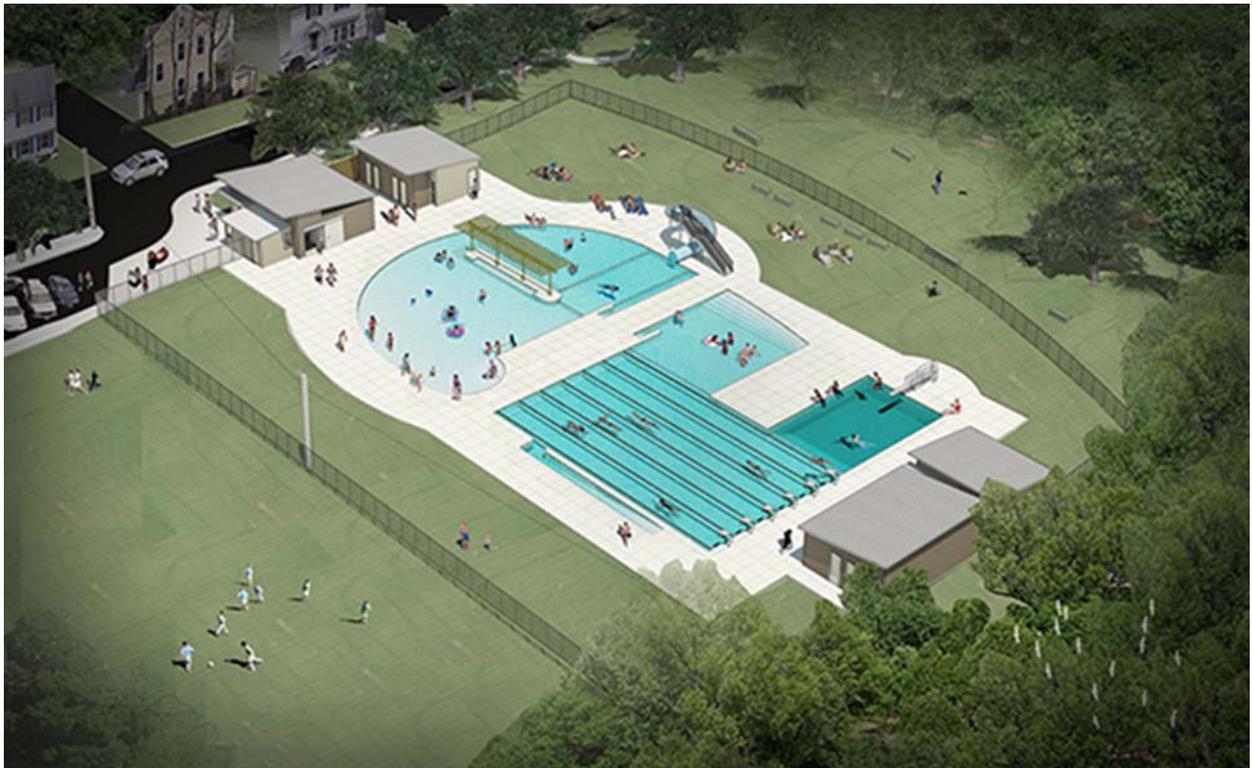
\*Pool closed for renovation during much of 2018, so cost/revenue atypical

According to Needham Recreation Department staff, outdoor pools with modern amenities, having much higher utilization rates than indoor pools, generally can expect high levels of cost recovery. (No data yet for Needham pool complex, since newly opened for only last 2 weeks of 2018.)

**V. RECENT POOL COMPLEX CONSTRUCTION COSTS**

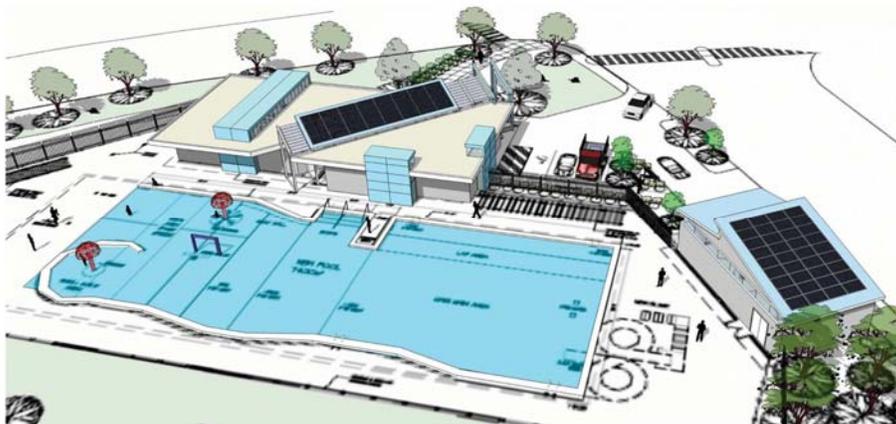
**Belmont Underwood Pool:**

**Construction Cost: \$5.2 million** (including cost of 2 pools, 2 bathhouses, decking, and greenspace grounds surrounding the pools). Planning began in 2013/ pool construction completed 2015.



**Waltham DCR Connors Memorial Pool:**

**Construction Cost: \$6,000,000** (including cost of pool with zero depth entry, play features, separate lap area, bathhouse, decking and seating, filtration system, landscaping, parking, solar panels, zero net energy, Hazmat remediation). According to conversation with Raul Silver, Deputy Engineer, Mass DCR, responsible for the pool's construction: Pools are not expensive, bath house is much of the cost. Connors Pool higher cost due to Hazmat remediation on the site and zero net energy construction. Construction initiated 2010, completed 2012.



Aerial View from the South

**Needham Rosemary Pool Complex:**

**Construction Cost: \$14 million overall cost, of which \$3.2 million was the construction cost for the pools.** Cost was higher due to 1) topographical difficulties causing construction complexities (site located on a slope down toward a lake, with the pools sitting almost level with the lake and installed with ballast slabs and helical piles) and 2) bathhouse is first floor of two story building housing recreation dept offices and gym. Total cost was for the 2 pools (a recreation pool with zero depth entrance, play features, slides, water walking and fitness laps; and a competition pool), splashpad/spray park, the bathhouse for showers, etc., parking, site improvements, terraces, ramps. Feasibility study began 2013/pool construction completed 2018.



**Wayland Community Pool: Construction Cost: \$2.5 million** (includes single competition length pool with 10 lanes and two diving boards, and with an inflatable bubble supported by a steel and glass structure to allow for year-round use; renovation of already-existing lobby areas, locker rooms, showers and bathrooms). Constructed in 2010.



## VI

In his remarks for the opening of the Connors Pool in Waltham, State, Rep. Peter Koutoujian said “Many families in Waltham do not own a summer home or have memberships to private clubs, but they are no less deserving of the opportunity to seek refuge from the heat while enjoying a healthy activity,” The same is true for Brookline:

### **BROOKLINE’S POPULATION BY INCOME:**

According to the U.S. Census of 2017:

25% of households: income below \$50,000.

21% of households: income between \$50,000 and \$100,000

32% of households: income between \$100,000 and \$200,000

23% of households: income in excess of \$200,000

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SELECT BOARD'S RECOMMENDATION

Article 30 is a petitioned resolution that asks the Town to study preliminary options for the siting an outdoor swimming facility. The Board discussed with the petitioners the benefits of outdoor swimming facilities and the experience of nearby communities who run these type of facilities. An outdoor pool was a component of the last Parks and Open Space Master Plan, and this warrant article allows Town Meeting to express an interest in pursuing that plan.

The Board expressed concerns about the cost of the proposal and if there were viable sites given the search for a site for a new school. One Board member noted that the Community Preservation Act had been adopted in some of the communities the petitioners used for comparative purposes. The Board felt that a preliminary study would help the Town understand the costs and benefits of such a proposal. The Board's first motion asked for a study for both an indoor and outdoor facility, but it was ruled outside the scope of the article. After reconsideration the Board unanimously voted FAVORABLE ACTION on the motion offered by the Advisory Committee.

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION

SUMMARY:

Warrant Article 30 is a citizen petitioners' resolution asking that the Town conduct a preliminary study identifying options for locating a public outdoor swimming facility for Brookline residents. Although members of the Advisory Committee raised questions about the cost and potential site of such a pool, the Committee voted 14-4-2 to recommend FAVORABLE ACTION on a slightly amended version of the resolution that appears in the Warrant.

BACKGROUND:

In the late 1800s, Brookline was the first municipality in the country to build public baths. Currently it is one of the few communities in the Greater Boston area that does not have an outdoor public swimming facility. Examples of neighboring towns and cities with public outdoor pools include Belmont, Framingham, Hingham, Milton, Natick, Newton, Norwood, Waltham, Watertown, and Wellesley.

With the possibility of the Town acquiring additional land, should it succeed in purchasing the Newbury College property, the petitioners thought this would be the opportune moment to embark on a preliminary study of where to build a potential outdoor public swimming facility. Citing a survey done as part of the 2005 Parks and Open Space Comprehensive Plan in which survey respondents ranked the need for an outdoor swimming pool as fourth

on their list of priorities, the petitioners concluded that there is support for an outdoor pool among the Town's citizenry.

Although the Town does have an indoor public pool, that facility is heavily used. More importantly, the indoor pool does not offer the fresh air or accommodations such as zero depth entry, play features, or surrounding areas for play and relaxation that a properly sited outdoor public pool might offer during the increasingly hot summer months. An outdoor public pool might also provide relief to families who are not able to access or afford memberships at private pools in Brookline, and an outdoor swimming facility would act as a community gathering space for all regardless of age, ability or resources.

The resolution calls only for a preliminary study for siting an outdoor public swimming facility and nothing more. However, it is worth noting that the estimated capital cost of constructing an outdoor pool with basic amenities would be approximately \$5 million to \$10 million, depending on size and site.

Operating costs would depend on factors such as whether or not the pool is heated, its proximity to public transportation, available parking, actual levels of use, and fees for parking and pool use. In Belmont, the 2020 estimated operating cost for their outdoor pool is \$264,000 while the projected revenue is \$398,000. Lexington's estimated operating cost is \$300,000, and its projected revenue is \$320,000. Of course, it is currently impossible to reasonably project pool use, operating costs and revenue, but the fact that some communities seem to be able to cover their operating costs is something to consider. The possibility of 100% cost recovery for the capital project is less optimistic though some cost recovery may occur. Any meaningful discussion or exploration of the feasibility and practicability of constructing and operating an outdoor pool will likely be the subject of future, outdoor pool-related Warrant Articles, if there are any.

Warrant Article 30 does not request funds for the siting study. The Department of Parks and Open Space is about to begin an Athletic Field Needs Assessment and Master Plan, which will include outdoor pool siting possibilities, should this Warrant Article pass. Any additional steps regarding feasibility, design and construction would need to be budgeted in the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) but they are not within the scope of this article.

#### DISCUSSION:

The Advisory Committee had many concerns as it considered Warrant Article 30 not in isolation, but as a possible first step among many that may result in actually constructing and operating an outdoor public swimming facility in Brookline.

#### *Cost Considerations*

Although authorizing a preliminary study for siting an outdoor pool under Warrant Article 30 does not require any additional expenditure at this time, since it can be rolled into an existing Parks Department siting study, the Committee is mindful that if an outdoor pool project does gain traction and moves forward, it will be at no small cost to the Town.

Entertaining the possibility of building and operating a public outdoor pool, which may only be available for use during two to four months of the year, may not be the best way to allocate Town funds. There are many capital needs in the Town, not the least of which includes maintenance of our existing infrastructure, including several imminent school building and renovation projects. Capital budgeting and planning needs ought to be prioritized and an outdoor pool, as nice as it may be to have, may be quite low on the list of all Town priorities. And, even if there is an ideal site for an outdoor swimming facility, would that property better serve the Town through some other use?

The Committee also noted that a few of the communities in the Greater Boston area with outdoor public swimming facilities have adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and have received partial funding for their projects. Brookline voters have twice declined to embrace the CPA. Additionally, nearby towns and cities have, on average, more available land and a broader tax base than Brookline. It is unwise to try and estimate capital costs, revenue or feasibility by comparing Brookline to neighbors.

#### *The Reality of Use*

The Committee considered whether or not an outdoor Town pool would be widely used once the novelty wore off. Many Brookline families are away for either all or part of the summer, and many students are busy, working, or enrolled in summer camp during the day.

The Committee did consider that, although they are only available for use in the late afternoon and early evenings, the private pools at Beaver Country Day School and The Park School are open to those who pay a membership fee. Those pools are widely used and sometimes oversubscribed. While Brookline may seem quiet in the summer, an outdoor Town pool may be well used if private pool use is any indication. And presumably a Town pool would be available for the better part of the day and to a wider swath of the community.

There was an acknowledgment that the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) pool located in Cleveland Circle, which is open to the public, free of charge, and located near two MBTA stops, is lightly used, if not empty during the few weeks of the year that it is open. However, Committee members recognized that because the pool is exposed to busy traffic on two sides, there is no shade, there are no steps into the pool, and chairs are not allowed around the pool, the DCR pool may not be a good indicator of how well a better planned outdoor, user-friendly facility would be used by residents.

Additional use concerns included the availability of sites that would provide relatively easy access to everyone, whether travelling by public transportation or car. Members suggested that any outdoor Town swimming facility ought to offer sufficient parking and be near public transportation to ensure that it truly is easily available for use by all.

#### *Community Building*

Brookline has a Senior Center and a Teen Center and parks for younger children, but they are isolated and separate from one another. An outdoor pool may be a good opportunity for building community among members of the larger community.

There was a limited discussion of the possibility of siting an outdoor swimming facility in such a way that it would become part of a larger, multi-faceted recreation complex that could build over time, should the Town able and be so inclined. But given the aforementioned cost concerns, limited space and the limited scope of the article, the discussion went no further.

#### *How the Advisory Committee Motion Differs from the Original Warrant Language*

As originally drafted, Warrant Article 30 included several suggested Town sites for an outdoor pool. The Advisory Committee itself momentarily discussed the possibility of creating a sandy beach at the reservoir on Route 9, although members were fairly certain that the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority would not allow the reservoir to be used as an active swimming site, and that parking issues and neighborhood concerns would likely be onerous as well. Because siting any public structure in Brookline requires professional guidance, extensive public input and a herculean effort on the part of Town staff and volunteers, the Committee voted on amended language that removed all suggested sites from the resolution, preferring to support an unfettered study.

The Advisory Committee also deleted the “Whereas” clause that enumerated the deficiencies of the Town’s existing indoor pool. The Committee felt the resolution should accentuate the positive, especially the potential benefits of an outdoor pool, instead of criticizing the Evelyn Kirrane Aquatics Center.

The Advisory Committee motion thus does not include the final three “Whereas” clauses that appeared in the Article 30 resolution in the Warrant, and the “Resolved” clause no longer refers to specific potential pool sites.

On a positive note, regardless of where an outdoor swimming facility may be sited, Article 97 issues are unlikely since the proposed pool is related to outdoor recreation.

#### *Conclusion*

Despite of all of the real and practical concerns regarding siting, constructing, and operating an outdoor pool, the Article 30 ultimately garnered broad support among Advisory Committee members. The article simply asks the Department of Parks and Open Space to look and see if there is a good site for an outdoor pool. There is no harm in supporting a preliminary siting study to gather information, particularly when the study can be folded into the upcoming Athletic Field Needs Assessment and Master Plan.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

By a vote of 14–4–2, the Advisory Committee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on the following motion:

VOTED: That the Town adopt the following resolution:

Resolution Calling for a Preliminary Study of Options for Locating a Public Outdoor Swimming Facility for Brookline Residents

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookline has large populations of children and of elderly persons;

WHEREAS, good health and overall good quality of life for all residents is a worthy objective;

WHEREAS, swimming is one of the healthiest forms of exercise for all ages;

WHEREAS, outdoor community pools are opportunities for community-building;

WHEREAS, swimming outdoors can be a memorable experience of childhood;

WHEREAS, currently in Brookline, the only opportunities for outdoor swimming are limited to private settings;

WHEREAS, most towns in the Greater Boston area comparable to Brookline provide their residents with one – and sometimes more than one - outdoor swimming facility (for example, Needham, Newton, Natick, Wellesley, Waltham, Watertown, Milton, Belmont, Norwood, Framingham, Hingham);

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookline is the largest town in Massachusetts;

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookline was the site of the first public indoor swimming pool, built in the 1890s;

WHEREAS, Brookline residents surveyed by the Town placed having an outdoor swimming pool high on their list of priorities for parks and open space;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Town Meeting calls for a preliminary study of locating and operating an outdoor swimming facility for Brookline residents, to be led by the Department of Parks and Open Space, at any location deemed appropriate to evaluate; with such initial analysis serving as preparatory for a more comprehensive study of feasibility to be initiated thereafter.