

In Response to UGA's Notice of Decision Report Legion Pool Redevelopment

While the University of Georgia's detailed final decision report on Legion Pool addresses many of the opponents' questions and concerns, its timing underscores a fundamental failure in transparency. Answering questions (that were raised over the course of three months) after the decision was finalized, renders the process effectively closed to meaningful engagement, closing the door to any follow-up questions or concerns from opponents of the redevelopment.

True transparency requires openness *before* decisions are locked in—not after. UGA denied the community an opportunity for *genuine* dialogue and collaboration. This approach erodes trust and leads many to believe that public input was never intended to shape the process.

The following arguments in support of demolition were listed, often repeatedly so, under Comment Considerations (p. 3-4), Public Comments Summary and UGA Response (p. 9-18), Legion Field Redevelopment: Myths vs. Facts (244-245), Media Fact Sheet: Legion Field Redevelopment (246-247) and Legion Pool FAQs (248-253). For the sake of simplicity, Friends of Legion Pool (FOLP) responds to each point once, and not necessarily in the order they appear in the report.

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Transparency and Community Engagement

UGA: *Cost estimates and attendance data were shared publicly through at least two UGA news stories.*

FOLP: Only limited information was shared in the PR releases, starting with the first release on September 25, 2025. The detailed GEPA EER report was not released until November 4, 2025. Questions raised in response to those releases went unanswered until December 26, 2025, when the final decision report was published.

UGA: *Of the opposing written comments, 28 (33%) appeared to quote all or portions of a form letter that requested a meeting be held in the spring, cited historical significance (WPA, WWII, and the American Legion), and made inaccurate racial integration claims.*

FOLP: There is nothing inherently wrong with the use of a template – this is common practice, especially when multiple individuals make the same request. We all wanted the meeting to be in early Spring 2026 semester, we all wanted to point out the historic significance. There was some confusion regarding the desegregation of the pool which is clarified below under “Historic Importance”.

UGA: *UGA received 36 written requests for a public hearing. Prior to receiving the minimum required requests for a public hearing under Board of Regents policy (25), UGA elected to hold a discretionary public hearing scheduled for December 8, 2025.*

FOLP: Calling the meeting before being legally required (at 25 requests) is a moot point. The requests were always expected to reach that threshold, and ultimately, they did. It appears that the real intention behind scheduling the meeting early might have been to move the process along quickly, not to provide meaningful engagement or transparency.

UGA: *UGA held the public hearing on Dec. 8 to give students the opportunity to speak, if desired, before leaving campus for the holiday break. The time of the hearing from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. was selected after reviewing exam schedules in order to maximize opportunities for student participation. According to the Registrar's Office, approximately 1.18% of students had a 3:30 p.m. exam that day, and 9.7% had a 7 p.m. exam; students with evening exams were prioritized in the speaking order.*

FOLP: UGA repeatedly demonstrates that its decisions are driven by numbers and statistics, rather than by the people behind those numbers. Any academic advisor can attest that finals week is one of the most stressful times for students. Their entire focus is on studying for exams, taking exams, decompressing, and preparing for the next one, and stressing over the outcomes of those finals. Some students even face multiple exams in a single day.

UGA's statement shows a complete lack of understanding of what students – whom UGA claims to prioritize – actually experience during finals week. Few, if any students with a 7:00 PM exam will attend an event an hour prior, and few, if any students finishing an exam at 3:30 PM will prioritize attending over preparing for the next day's exams. Therefore, scheduling this meeting during exam week (and at a remote location) effectively limited student participation. If UGA truly values student input, it should have chosen a time outside one of the most academically demanding weeks of the year.

UGA: *The hearing date, time, and location were advertised in the Athens Banner-Herald (legal organ) more than 2 weeks before the scheduled meeting. UGA typically uses the chosen location for environmental hearings given its size to accommodate speakers and available parking without displacing students attending classes.*

FOLP: The location and time of the hearing was a very poor choice. UGA could have easily chosen one of many on-campus locations that are easily reached on foot or via transit, especially around rush hour, to accommodate those who were most likely to attend (UGA students and faculty/staff) and already on campus. Classes had ended on December 2, so no students would have been displaced by an on-campus hearing, and there are non-classroom options (Georgia Center, Tate Center, MLC, SLC, etc.).

The Riverbend location was difficult to get to and parking was not adequate – two of the attendees had to park illegally and were asked to move their vehicles during the meeting, which shows that parking was at its limit.

UGA: *Of the 34 comments during the public hearing, 18 were from individuals who had previously sent a written comment to UGA, including two of the commenters who read excerpts from a Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation letter that was sent to UGA.*

FOLP: Many of those that spoke out at the hearing had sent letters and emails to various UGA administrators. Yet, in the absence of any acknowledgment or response, we could not know whether those communications were ever read. This lack of engagement left the public hearing as the only way to ensure our thoughts were heard and documented.

The excerpts from the Georgia Trust letter were read aloud because the organization was unable to attend in person – a testament to the broad concern beyond those physically present.

What UGA saw at the public hearing was just the tip of the iceberg. For every person who attended or submitted letters, there are dozens more who strongly oppose the demolition but did not attend or write. Many stayed silent out of fear of retribution by UGA or, more importantly, because the redevelopment was perceived as a “done deal”, making engagement feel futile.

During the hearing, each speaker was limited to a maximum of two minutes – except for Stan Jackson, the only speaker in support of the redevelopment. No timer was set for Mr. Jackson. An audience member tracked the time, and when we insisted that his two minutes were up, Mr. Jackson continued speaking without intervention from Mr. Trevor. This led to visible frustration and protest from the audience. This incident is not mentioned in the official public hearing transcript.

Equal time limits are a basic expectation of fairness in public hearings, and this exception again raises concerns regarding the integrity of the process.

UGA: Of the opposing written comments, 49 (58%) cited personal use and/or personal memories as a reason not to proceed with the proposed project.

FOLP: The love for this pool is not just about cold facts, numbers and statistics. Those who have visited the pool have memories and experiences which are woven into the fabric of Legion Pool; let’s not measure the pool’s significance solely by archival records or structural details, but also by the history that is made through and by the community – people – the pool serves. The comments were made to show how valued and cherished the pool is.

It is heartbreaking to see how UGA seems to reduce this issue to numbers and statistics alone, disregarding the human aspect entirely, dismissing the passion and commitment that so many of us have for Legion Pool as merely personal or sentimental. A decision driven solely by metrics cannot capture the depth of what this pool represents. True leadership must balance data with humanity.

Historic Importance

UGA: While UGA does not dispute the overall historical significance of Legion Pool, several of the public comments made erroneous claims that Legion Pool was the first public pool to be desegregated in the South in 1961.

FOLP: Like many other aspects of Legion Pool’s history, the point of racial integration somewhat confusing and there is conflicting information online. It can be said that Legion Pool was technically the first, or one of the first, desegregated pools in the Jim Crow south. Due to the details of its transfer from the City of Athens to UGA in 1954, the pool was classified as both public *and* desegregated in **1961** when Judge Bootle made his ruling that *all* UGA facilities be desegregated, specifically swimming pools. The degree to which integration occurred in practice is unclear, but the fourth African American student at UGA, Harold Black, described an experience in 1962 at the formerly adjacent Stegeman center. As a symbolic gesture, lifeguards drained the pool after his first swim in it and began to drain it again on his second visit. Dean Tate finally intervened. Black became a regular attendant. Since Stegeman Pool was buried under the Tate Center parking deck, Legion Pool is the last vestige of this historical flashpoint.

It is shameful that UGA would want to diminish this fact instead of actively supporting its significance, even if it was only a legal achievement as opposed to the official “Integration Day” in 1966.

UGA: UGA plans to preserve the historical significance of the site through the development of a permanent archival record following State Historic Preservation Office guidelines. This is consistent with previous documentation of historic properties on campus. Photographic documentation will be stored for public review at the UGA Richard B. Russell Jr. Special Collections Libraries.

FOLP: How does demolishing a historic site and replacing it with “photographic documentation” in a library honor its historical significance? It doesn’t. Preserving history means keeping the place alive – not reducing it to pictures in an archive. A photograph cannot replicate the experience, the sense of place, or the community that Legion Pool represents.

We don’t want to look at photos in a library. We want to continue making connections and creating memories at Legion Pool and enable future generations of Bulldogs to do the same.

Attendance

UGA: The pool’s seasonal use and declining attendance do not justify such a sizeable investment. Usage has declined 55% since 1998 and over 30% since 2019. Students make up only 10% of total visitors—fewer than 2.5% of UGA students in recent years.

FOLP: The often-mentioned decline since 1998 coincides with UGA going from quarter to semester system in the fall of 1998, which may have affected the pool operating season, as Legion Pool used to have an extended season in the 1970s, 1980s and beyond.

The fiscal analysis (2019-2025) included years when the pool was closed (2020–2021) or operated under restricted conditions (2022 which saw the absence of pool passes and the addition of parking fees). The removal of the 25-visit pass in 2025 further affected patrons for whom this was a budget-friendly option.

Student attendance is low because the pool is only open from the end of May through the first week of August, when most students are away from campus. UGA now offers a growing number of online courses, especially in summer semester, which enables students to be off-campus while still completing degree requirements. This has been a huge trend in the last few years, as confirmed by any Academic Advisor.

UGA: The proposed project received written support from several key student groups, including the Student Government Association, the Residence Hall Association, the University Union Student Programming Board, the Interfraternity Council, and the Panhellenic Council.

FOLP: While engaging with students on campus over the past three months, supporters of Legion Pool found that most students were unaware that the pool still exists, because it is always closed (“abandoned”) during regular semesters. An overwhelming number of students would like to see the pool remain, if made available during parts of the regular (spring and fall) semesters.

Repair, Operation and Funding

UGA: Over the last 15 years, the Division of Student Affairs has spent \$309,197 on annual repairs and maintenance, and the Facilities Management Division has absorbed an additional \$465,504, bringing total repair and maintenance investments to \$774,701. This figure excludes over \$409,000 in utility

expenses over the same period. Despite these significant investments in maintenance and upkeep efforts, the pool continued to experience declining usage and persistent operating deficits.

FOLP: Despite UGA’s investments to keep Legion Pool operational, these efforts amounted to temporary fixes rather than addressing the core issue – a persistent water leak. For the past 13 years, if not longer, UGA was aware of this leak yet chose not to make a permanent repair. Instead, the pool continued to reopen season after season. This prolonged deferral of maintenance likely accelerated the deterioration of the pool’s infrastructure, compounding repair costs and contributing to its current state of decline, which is now used to advocate for pool demolition.

Per the Georgia State Agency Historic Property Stewardship Program (“Stewardship Law”) (see [O.C.G.A. § 12-3-55 & Regulatory Guidance](#)), state agencies like the Board of Regents (BOR) bear both statutory and local responsibility to maintain a historic property. Accordingly, it appears that the BOR/UGA had a legal duty not only to invest in Legion Pool’s operations, but also to prevent deterioration, address known leaks permanently, and uphold its historic integrity. Continued reopening of the pool without addressing the identified water leak for over a decade may have violated the state’s mandate that historic structures be maintained and protected from neglect.

Under said law, the BOR must act as “stewards” of the historic properties they own: they are supposed to “preserve, protect, use and maintain” these properties “for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.” (BOR Guidelines at § 1.2.1, p. 35). These preservation objectives “must be a fundamental part of the mission of any State Agency.” As a result, the BOR “has an affirmative responsibility to seek and use historic properties to the maximum extent feasible in carrying out its activities.” (Georgia’s Standards and Guidelines for State Agency Historic Preservation Programs (“Georgia Standards”) at p.4). In fact, the BOR is required to give “priority to the use of historic properties” over new construction and other buildings for its real estate and workspace needs; and it must give the greatest priority to historic properties that are “located in central business areas”, (Stewardship Law, Standard 7; Georgia Standards at p.16; O.C.G.A. 12-3-56).

Legion Pool is listed on UGA’s [Office of University Architects Historic Preservation page](#) as a Category 2 resource (a contributing resource within a historic district listed in, or eligible to be listed in, the National Register (NRHP)).

UGA: Renovation and repair were evaluated in the EER, which identified significant structural and compliance issues. Estimates for basic repairs range from \$926,000 to \$2.175 million plus the costs for repairs under the pool, which could not be estimated. Replacement of the pool alone would cost \$5.7 million. A comprehensive replacement of the entire facility would cost an estimated \$11.4 million.

FOLP: There is no denying that the pool needs repairs to address the often-cited water-leaks and other issues. Across the country, communities are successfully restoring historic pools and public spaces. We feel that with the right vision and commitment, UGA could save this pool, and several options were provided by Councilman-Hunsaker.

UGA has yet to release the cost of the proposed redevelopment, including the cost of pool demolition.

UGA: The pool is estimated to lose 24,000 gallons per day during the summer operating season, with evaporation on a 90-degree day only accounting for about 2,100 gallons of water loss per day.

FOLP: To the best of our knowledge, swimming pool water loss due to evaporation is about 0.5" per day, up to 1" in drier climates. Since Georgia is typically humid, let's stay with 0.5". Legion pool is 160' x 75', or 1,920" x 900". That gives us a surface area of 1,728,000 square inches. Assuming that evaporation claims 0.5" of depth every day, that translates to 864,000 cubic inches, or 3,740.25 gallons. A low-humidity day might double this loss. While we agree that most of the water is lost through leaking pipes, it might be slightly less than the estimate provided by UGA.

UGA: *Recent data provided by UGA's Facilities Management Division reveals that when use of the bath houses and associated facilities is factored in, the loss is considerably more: a total of 39,175 gallons of water per day between this past June 24th and July 16th—as compared to 326 gallons per day between this past August 15th and September 9th.*

FOLP: The reported figure of 39,175 gallons per day labeled as "loss" requires clarification. It is important to distinguish between actual system leaks and intentional water usage. When the pool is open, pool patrons are using the bathrooms, are showering, etc. which should be considered normal and positive usage, not waste. Without clear differentiation, the term "loss" can misrepresent the situation and we feel that transparency in these definitions is essential for informed decision-making.

- Does Legion Pool have separate water meters for the pool and the bathhouse?
- Could UGA share those meter accounts/records?
- UGA students, staff, faculty and visitors all over campus are using bathrooms every day. How does the Legion Pool bathhouse water consumption compare, for example, with that at the Ramsey Center?

UGA: *Except for two seasons in 2000 and 2011, the pool has recorded annual operating deficits since at least 1997 with losses totaling more than \$850,000.*

FOLP: This would translate to an average deficit of roughly \$ 30,000 per year. While we all want the pool to break even or operate at a profit, this figure is by no means insurmountable when viewed in the context of UGA's overall budget and expenditures, and much of this deficit could be reduced through strategic repairs and operational improvements.

UGA: *Since at least 2013, these deficits were funded through Student Activity Fee reserves, limiting other student programs. Because Legion Pool's annual deficits were fully covered by student fees—even though students represented less than 10% of visitors—the working group concluded that continuing operations under any administrative structure would remain financially unsustainable and unfair to students.*

FOLP: Although Student Affairs has seen \$ 214 million in renovations (completion dates 2024-2028) including the current addition of a third weight room at the Ramsey Center, it sounds like Student Affairs may not be the best choice to fund/operate Legion Pool, and other options should be explored. UGA Athletics or Auxiliary Services come to mind, but there may be other avenues, including many ways to generate additional revenue and reduced operating cost once the pool has been renovated.

UGA: *Investments at the Ramsey Student Center are driven by sustained and demonstrated student demand. Facility usage data and multiple years of student survey feedback show consistent overcrowding during peak hours, limited equipment availability, and space constraints that interfere with the ability of students, faculty, and staff to complete workouts.*

FOLP: It is completely understandable that UGA wants to invest in the Ramsey Center. However, this investment does not need to come at the expense of Legion Pool—and vice versa. Both facilities can and should coexist, serving different needs within the UGA community.

UGA: *Nearly 20% of UGA students are Pell-eligible, over one-quarter have unmet financial need, and more than 1,300 emergency assistance requests were made last year. Redirecting Legion Pool's ongoing losses to student support and wellness would have far greater impact.*

FOLP: To imply that Legion Pool siphons money away from students in financial distress is simply ludicrous. We fully recognize the importance of supporting students in need and commend UGA for prioritizing these initiatives. However, Legion Pool is not causing hardships for students, and framing this as an either/or choice is misleading and unfair. UGA, the flagship institution of the University System of Georgia and ranked one of the top 20 public schools in the nation, should have the capacity to support both essential student services and preserve a historic, community-centered resource.

UGA: *Even if the pool were to be renovated, pool operating costs over time would continue to be a significant investment considering pool treatment chemicals, staffing, ongoing maintenance, water evaporation, and utility usage.*

FOLP: Yes, maintaining a pool requires some investment but the pool does not need to operate at a massive loss if it is repaired and better managed.

UGA: *Extending operations would increase losses and environmental waste.*

FOLP: Not if the pool is renovated, marketed and properly managed.

Alternatives to Legion Pool

UGA: *While many of the opposing commenters expressed an opinion that Legion Pool's operating season was unreasonably short, the pool season was very similar to Athens-Clarke County's aquatics season, which in 2025 ran from May 24 – July 27 (with an extended season at two of five pools until August 2).*

FOLP: UGA's comparison between Legion Pool and ACC pools is fundamentally flawed because these resources serve entirely different purposes.

ACC pools are designed for families and primarily children and operate only when ACC schools are out for the summer. Once ACC schools resume, these pools close.

Legion Pool, on the other hand, being on campus, could – and should – primarily serve as a resource for UGA students, staff and faculty, who are on campus year-round. Opening it in the two months of summer semester, when 80% of the target audience: the students are off campus, and then closing it when they *return*, is the exact opposite of ACC's approach.

UGA: *Athens-Clarke County offers five public pools and two splash pads, including the newly renovated Bishop Park pool following a \$7.5 million SPLOST investment. These facilities ensure robust access for local residents.*

FOLP: None of these pools have lap lanes, so they are not an option for recreational fitness swimmers. As stated above, they are mainly orientated toward families and children. They all close at 5:30 p.m., making it impossible for UGA employees/staff to go there during the week. All are closed on Mondays, and the flagship renovated Bishop Park pool is also closed on Sundays. All are located off campus.

In comparison, Legion pool is located on campus and is open Monday – Sunday from 11:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m. which allows for lunch time and after-work visits for those who keep UGA running during the summer, and convenient access for students as well should it be open when students are actually here.

Below is a comparison of Legion Pool and the five ACC pools including the “flagship” newly renovated Bishop Park Pool.

Pool	Location From Campus	Lap Lanes	Hours	Closed	Season (2025)
Legion Pool	On campus	Eight	11:30 – 7:00	Never - Open Daily	May 22 – August 7
Bishop Park Pool	3 miles	None	1:00 – 5:30	Sundays, Mondays	May 22 – August 2
Heard Park Pool	2 miles	None	1:00 – 5:30 12:00 – 5:30 Saturdays	Mondays	May 22 – July 27
Howard Park Pool	1.5 miles	None	1:00 – 5:30 12:00 – 5:30 Saturdays	Mondays	May 22 – July 27
Lay Park Pool	1.2 miles	None	1:00 – 5:30 12:00 – 5:30 Saturdays	Mondays	May 22 – August 2
Walker Park Splash pad only	2.4 miles	None No pool	10:00 – 5:30	Mondays	May 22 – September 1

UGA: Students have pool access through their off-campus apartment complexes.

FOLP: Not all students do (and certainly not all faculty/staff). Not all students move into apartments that offer a pool and none of these apartment pools contribute to a sense of community among UGA students, faculty and staff, as Legion Pool does.

On the other hand, there are 6,000 first-year students living in dorms that have no pools - Legion Pool could be their pool.

UGA: UGA values community engagement and is expanding inclusive recreation opportunities through facilities like the Ramsey Center and Lake Herrick. Lake Herrick provides year-round access and programming for students, faculty, and Athens residents, while the Ramsey Center serves students, faculty, staff, and their dependents and will be available for summer camps as well.

FOLP: There is no denying that there are other resources for community use on campus, but none of them replace Legion Pool.

Lake Herrick is a wonderful green space – much larger than the proposed Legion Field redevelopment – that offers walking trails. Maybe part of Lake Herrick could be redeveloped to serve as the music and event venue UGA envisions Legion Field? And while the Ramsey Center offers a variety of activities, it does not have an outdoor pool.

Once Legion Pool is gone, there will be nothing on campus to accommodate outdoor swimming. To simply suggest that those interested in outdoor swimming should use Lake Herrick, or the indoor Ramsey Center, misses the mark. Outdoor pools are popular for a reason – people enjoy being outdoors, and outdoor pools provide a way to be active while cooling off at the same time, during the long, hot, Georgia summers.

As one student put it, “there is just no fun to be had at the Ramsey Center.” It’s great for swimming laps – if one can get a lane – but it is not the best place to connect with others. Also, Ramsey Center rec swim hours have significantly declined over the past years, especially for staff that works until 5 pm. The competition pool has been completely taken over by high school swim teams and club swim most of the time, and as a result, the rec pool is extremely crowded.

UGA: *Several letters have claimed that “nearly all” other SEC institutions have outdoor pools, but our review does not support that characterization. Currently, 10 SEC institutions have an outdoor pool—including UGA—and six do not. Where outdoor pools exist across the conference, all but one of those are incorporated into student recreation centers and closely aligned with the student recreation mission, with many constructed alongside modern recreation facilities within roughly the last 20 years. There are no standalone pools outside student recreation centers or aquatic complexes in the conference.*

FOLP: Of the 13 SEC schools *with a swim team*, 10 have outdoor pools (including Georgia/Legion Pool) – two having at least a leisure outdoor pool or access to one for university use – and only three do not have an outdoor facility (Arkansas, Missouri and Kentucky).

There would be no way to incorporate an outdoor pool at UGA’s Ramsey Center since all available land has been taken up by dorms, a dining hall and parking; therefore, preserving Legion Pool as an outdoor pool option at UGA should be considered.

Parking

UGA: *With the addition of 70 parking spaces, the proposed plan provides much needed parking in the area. The proposed parking lot only accounts for 20% of the redevelopment area. It is anticipated that 70 additional parking spots in the center of campus will not adversely impact traffic.*

FOLP: With a total of 54,000 students, faculty and staff on campus, parking represents a major problem, and the 70 spaces (about 0.33% of all 21,000 parking spaces on campus) will have too small of an impact to justify removal of a valuable and beloved historic structure – our pool. On the other hand, the *negative* impact that these 70 spaces will have on traffic and pedestrian safety in this particular, already very congested area, will be significant.