

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA PENNSYLVANIA

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

Review of Public Pool Chair Lifts and Facilities

Department of Parks & Recreation

April 2025



City Controller
Christy Brady, CPA

*Ensuring transparency, accountability,
and fiscal integrity in city government*





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why the Controller's Office Conducted the Review

During fiscal year 2022, the Department of Parks and Recreation (the "Department") initiated its "Rec for All" Plan that aimed to make its pool centers more welcoming places for individuals with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions. The installation of swimming pool chair lifts was an early part of the initiative. In 2023, the Department, with the support of the Philadelphia Department of Health, received a \$35,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Health Promotion and Risk Reduction to help fund additional chair lifts for the city's public pools. As a result, chair lifts have now been installed at twelve of the city's pools with the hope of adding thirteen more in the future. The purpose of our review was to determine whether the new chair lifts were functioning as planned, and the city's pools and spray grounds provided the welcoming and well-maintained play settings city residents expect.

What the Controller's Office Found

Our 2024 review of the twelve new chair lifts, as well as the pool and spray grounds at those sites, identified the following conditions:

- Chair lifts were not operable in six of the twelve sites that offered them. Four of the six lifts had mechanical problems at the time of our visit and two could not be tested since the batteries necessary to operate the lifts were missing from the pool areas.
- All of the lifeguards at the twelve locations acknowledged that they were minimally trained to use the chair lifts, and rarely, if ever, were asked to operate them.
- The grounds at four of the twelve locations were not adequately maintained and presented some serious safety concerns. Investigators found instances of cracking concrete around pool areas, chipping paint in a spray ground area, a broken fence surrounding a pool's perimeter, and low-hanging wires behind a building.
- Lifesaving equipment was improperly stored at one location, which compromises the ability of lifeguards or pool staff to quickly locate the equipment in the event of an emergency.

What the Controller's Office Recommends

With more than half of the city's pool chair lifts requiring some level of maintenance, and pool grounds at some of these sites showing signs of structural decline, we recommend that the Department calculate the potential costs for the necessary repairs and then prioritize the repairs based on the severity of the conditions. Department management should also ensure that the conditions cited above are corrected as quickly as possible. Specific recommendations can be found at the conclusion of this report.

INTRODUCTION	<u>Page</u>
Background.....	1
Objective, Scope and Methodology	1
 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Investigators’ Findings.....	2
Recommendations.....	8
 TABLES:	
Table I: Summary of Investigators’ Findings	2
Table II: Summary of Investigators' Findings 2025.....	10
 PHOTOGRAPHS:	
Photograph 1: Fox Chase Pool – Improperly Stored Equipment.....	3
Photograph 2: Fox Chase Pool – Inoperable Chair Lift.....	4
Photograph 3: Mander Pool – Missing Chair Lift Battery.....	4
Photograph 4: Penrose Pool – Missing Chair Lift Battery.....	4
Photograph 5: Pleasant Pool – Inoperable Chair Lift	4
Photograph 6: Simpson Pool – Inoperable Chair Lift.....	5
Photograph 7: Vogt Pool – Inoperable Chair Lift.....	5
Photograph 8: Fox Chase Pool – Broken Concrete Around Pool Area	6
Photograph 9: Fox Chase Pool – Vegetation Over Fence.....	6
Photograph 10: Fox Chase Pool – Low-Hanging Wires.....	6
Photograph 11: Mander Pool – Broken Fencing Surrounding Pool Grounds.....	7
Photograph 12: Mander Pool – Chipping Paint on Pool Steps.....	7
Photograph 13: Mander Pool – Vegetation Over Fence Covering Sign.....	7
Photograph 14: Pleasant Pool – Vegetation Growing Over Fence.....	7
Photograph 15: Vogt Pool – Cracking Concrete and Chipping Paint on Spray Ground	8
Photograph 16: Vogt Pool – Cracking Concrete Around Filter	8
 RESPONSE TO INVESTIGATORS’ REPORT	
Susan Slawson, Commissioner	11

Background

Each summer, the City of Philadelphia, through the Department of Parks and Recreation (the “Department”), opens its more than 60 swimming pools and 90 spray grounds¹ for city families hoping to find recreational spaces that offer refreshing alternatives to the city’s intense summer heat. Pools and spray grounds are especially important to the city’s children since they provide safe environments for playtime activities while also promoting exercise and social interaction. These sites are located across the city so that all neighborhoods can benefit from the services they provide.

During fiscal year 2022, the Department initiated its “Rec for All” Plan that aimed to make its pool centers more welcoming places for individuals with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions. The installation of swimming pool chair lifts was an early part of the initiative. Individuals needing assistance to get in and out of the pool would only have to notify a lifeguard to help operate the lift equipment. Purchase and installation of each chair lift costs between \$8,000 and \$9,000.

In 2023, the Department, with the support of the Philadelphia Department of Health, received a \$35,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Health Promotion and Risk Reduction to help fund additional chair lifts for the city’s public pools. As a result, chair lifts have now been installed at twelve of the city’s public pools with the hope of adding thirteen more in the future.

Objective, Scope and Methodology

In 2014 and 2017, the Controller’s Office examined the city’s pools and spray grounds to determine whether the city provided the welcoming and well-maintained play settings city residents expected. While the reports confirmed that most public pools and spray grounds were properly maintained and functioning, investigators also found that some of the facilities contained unsafe conditions that ranged from minor defects to potentially hazardous deficiencies. The 2017 report also noted that since 2014 the number of sites with problems increased.

In August 2024, at the end of the summer pool season, we again observed the conditions at some of the city’s pools and spray grounds, but with a focus on the twelve sites that received the new chair lifts. To perform our review, we interviewed Department staff on duty at the facilities, and we checked safety, operational, and compliance issues that addressed whether:

- The facility adequately posted its operating hours and safety regulations in a visible location;
- An adequate number of lifeguards were on duty, and they were attentively watching the swimmers;
- Life-saving equipment was on site and located near lifeguards in the event of an emergency;
- Chair lifts were operational;
- Lifeguards were trained to properly operate the chair lifts, and
- The pools, decks, spray grounds and public gathering areas were maintained and free from debris.

During our site visits, investigators requested and received permission to photograph conditions at each pool and spray ground, as needed.

¹ Spray grounds can be defined as playgrounds equipped with water features such as sprinklers and/or splash pads.

Investigators' Findings:

As summarized in [TABLE I](#) below and described in more detail within the following pages, our review of the twelve pools with new chair lifts identified the following conditions:

- Chair lifts were not operable in six of the twelve sites that offered them. Four of the six lifts had mechanical problems at the time of our visit and two could not be tested since the batteries necessary to operate the lifts were missing from the pool areas.
- Lifeguards at all twelve locations acknowledged that they were minimally trained to use the chair lifts, yet were rarely, if ever, asked to operate them. Also, half of the chair lifts that were observed were inoperable.
- The grounds at four of the twelve locations were not adequately maintained and present some serious safety concerns. Investigators found instances of cracking concrete around pool areas, chipping paint in a spray ground area, a broken fence surrounding a pool's perimeter, and low-hanging wires behind a building.
- Lifesaving equipment was improperly stored at one location, which compromises the ability of lifeguards or pool staff to quickly locate the equipment in the event of an emergency.

TABLE I: SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATORS' FINDINGS

Site	Zip Code	Operational & Safety Conditions Reviewed					
		Hours & Regulations Clearly Posted	Lifeguards on Duty	Lifesaving Equipment Accessible	Chair Lifts Operational	Lifeguards Trained re: Chair Lifts	Grounds Adequately Maintained
Christy Pool	19143	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Dendy Pool	19122	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Fox Chase Pool	19111	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Hunting Park Pool	19140	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Finnegan Pool	19142	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Kelly Pool	19131	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Lederer Pool	19125	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Mander Pool	19121	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Penrose Pool	19122	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Pleasant Pool	19119	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Simpson Pool	19124	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Vogt Pool	19135	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Inadequate Conditions Observed:		0	0	1	6	12	4

Source: Prepared by Controller's Office's Investigation Unit based on results of our pool site visits.

Hours, Pool Regulations, and Safety Signs Were Clearly Posted

Investigators started our review of the twelve pools and spray grounds by observing how and where the operating hours and pool safety regulations were posted at each location. Our objective was to determine that the facilities would be open when expected, that the public was clearly notified of the pool hours, and that visitors were reminded of their obligation to act in a manner that minimizes harm to themselves and to others. During our site visits, we noted that all locations clearly posted their operating hours and safety regulations by the entrances, or at a location where they would be easily seen by visitors. No instances of non-compliance were noted.

Lifeguards on Duty and Attentive to Swimmers

While opening pools for the summer is among the city's yearly goals, not having enough qualified individuals to oversee the activity at these pools would clearly defeat the city's intentions to provide fun, safe environments for the community. At the time of our review, we noted that there appeared to be an adequate number of lifeguards on duty at each of the twelve sites we tested. All lifeguards were attentive to the swimmers, polite, friendly and focused. The lifeguards were actively monitoring activity in the pools and ensuring the safety of visitors walking around the pool decks.

Most Lifesaving Equipment Was Accessible to Lifeguards

Lifesaving equipment, such as rescue rings, backboards, and medical supplies, should be stored in a secure location that is readily accessible by the lifeguards or other pool staff. This would help minimize the time used to search for critical care supplies and ensure a timely rescue response when needed. Investigators found lifesaving equipment was accessible in eleven of the twelve pool sites we visited. However, at the Fox Chase pool, a backboard was on the side of a storage shed alongside a table blocking its access. See [PHOTOGRAPH 1](#) below. Before leaving the Fox Chase pool, investigators notified the lifeguards that the backboard needed to be stored in a secure, readily accessible location.

PHOTOGRAPH 1: FOX CHASE POOL -
Medical Rescue Backboard found beside the maintenance shed, alongside a trash can and folding table.



Carousel House Recreation Center Status

Carousel House, the only recreation center in the country that specializes in accessibility for those with disabilities, was unable to be a part of this investigation due to its permanent closure and demolition. The grounds were properly fenced off at the time of this report.

Chair Lifts Were Not Always Operational

The new chair lifts installed during the 2022 and 2023 summer seasons were intended to allow individuals with limited mobility the same access to the city pools as those without mobility concerns. The chair lifts are made of durable materials that help these visitors enjoy the recreational aspects of the swimming pool while also obtaining the therapeutic benefits associated with water activities. Those wishing to use a chair lift can transfer, or be transferred, to the seat which is secured in place by seat belts. An electronic arm or hydraulic system lowers or raises the seat in and out of the water.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During our August 2024 on-site visits, investigators found that four of the twelve new chair lifts were not operational. For example, at the Vogt Pool, investigators found that the visitors could not use the chair lift because a mechanical problem prevented it from moving left to right to accommodate those trying to sit on it, or pool staff trying to direct it towards the pool. Additionally, batteries for two other chair lifts were missing so investigators could not determine if the lifts were functional. Both conditions at the six sites are displayed in [PHOTOGRAPHS 2 through 7](#) below.



PHOTOGRAPH 2: FOX CHASE POOL –
Chair lift appears inoperable since it is not available for everyday use. The cover is weather-beaten and torn.

PHOTOGRAPH 3: MANDER POOL –
Chair lift battery was missing.



PHOTOGRAPH 4: PENROSE POOL –
Chair lift battery was missing.

PHOTOGRAPH 5: PLEASANT POOL –
Chair lift was inoperable.





PHOTOGRAPH 6: SIMPSON POOL –
Chair lift was inoperable.

PHOTOGRAPH 7: VOGT POOL – While the chair lift can move up and down, it cannot swing from left to right, which prevents visitors from using it and lifeguards from properly and safely operating it.



Lifeguards Were Minimally Trained on How to Operate the Chairlifts

Additionally, investigators found that lifeguard staff at the sites were trained on how to use the chair lifts. When the lifeguards were interviewed, some of them stated that while they received minimal training at the beginning of the season, since then they've rarely, if ever, been asked to operate the lifts. Other lifeguards stated that they received a short training session from the chair lift vendor but since the company's representative did not leave a battery with the lift, pool employees were denied the opportunity to practice what they learned.

Pool Grounds Were Not Always Maintained

Finally, as part of our review, investigators observed the physical condition of the pools and spray grounds. Considering the results of our 2014 and 2017 reviews, the Controller again wanted to determine if the pools were offering inviting, clean, and safe environments for city residents. Therefore, our investigation sought to determine whether:

- spray grounds, where available, were operable;
- grounds were clean and free from debris;
- pools were clean and the water was clear; and
- pools and decks were free of structural hazards (such as broken concrete, chipping paint, etc.)

Our site visits revealed the following:

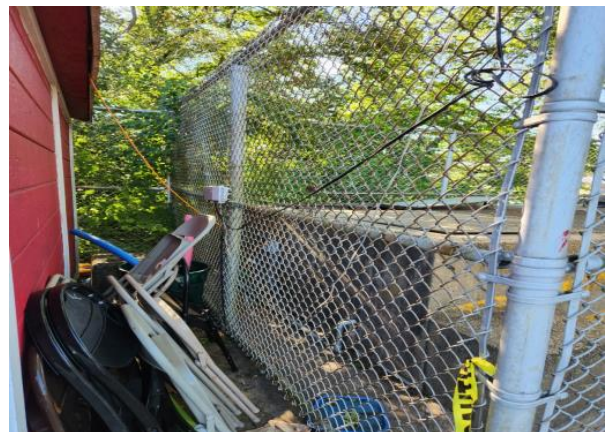
- [Fox Chase Pool](#) – The pool water, while clear, contained decaying leaves that had gathered at the bottom. Furthermore, areas around the pool showed evidence of cracking concrete and patched repair work that creates a tripping hazard. Low-hanging electrical wires were also observed behind a building that could be accessible to wandering children. See [PHOTOGRAPHS 8, 9 and 10](#) on page 6.

PHOTOGRAPH 8: FOX CHASE POOL –
Cracks observed in the concrete next to the shallow end of the pool. Additionally, decaying leaves were at the bottom of the pool.



PHOTOGRAPH 9: FOX CHASE POOL –
Vegetation was observed growing over the fence.

PHOTOGRAPH 10: FOX CHASE POOL –
Low-hanging electrical wires behind building could be accessible to children.



- **Mander Pool** – A fallen tree limb damaged the fence surrounding the pool property and had not yet been repaired. While creating a safety hazard for anyone trying to climb the fence, it also creates a liability for the city since the pool's perimeters are not adequately secured from intruders. Investigators also identified cracks in the concrete and breaks in the wooden planks surrounding the pool that creates tripping hazards where staff and visitors regularly walk. See **PHOTOGRAPHS 11, 12 and 13** on page 7.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



PHOTOGRAPH 11: MANDER POOL –

Fencing, surrounding the pool area, was damaged by a falling tree limb, but not repaired timely

PHOTOGRAPH 12: MANDER POOL –

Paint chipping on the steps of the pool, which creates a slipping hazard



PHOTOGRAPH 13: MANDER POOL –

Vegetation grown over the fence past an acceptable length.

- [Pleasant Pool](#) – Investigators observed significant amount of overgrown vegetation in areas around the pool. See [PHOTOGRAPH 14](#) below.

PHOTOGRAPH 14: PLEASANT POOL –

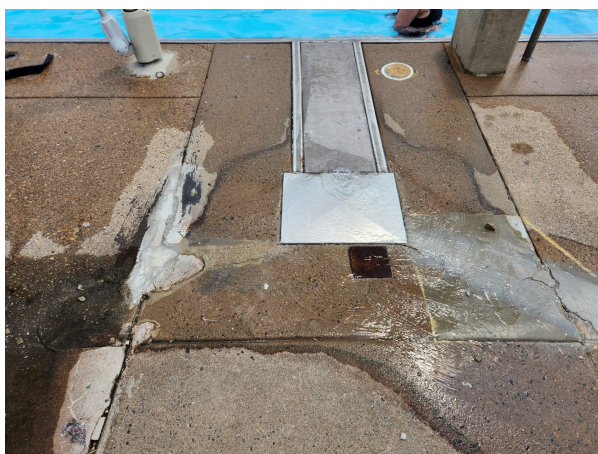
Vegetation grown over the fence past an acceptable length.



- Vogt Pool and Spray Ground – There were cracks in the concrete around the pool area. The ledge around the spray ground showed evidence of damaged concrete while the interior of the spray area exhibited chipping paint. See [PHOTOGRAPHS 15 and 16](#) below.



PHOTOGRAPH 15: VOGT POOL –
Spray grounds show evidence of cracking concrete on the exterior ledge and chipping paint on the interior of the spray area.



PHOTOGRAPH 16: VOGT POOL –
Filter not working properly, shows cracks in the concrete caused by blocked drains.

Controller's Office Recommendations:

With more than half of the city's pool chair lifts requiring some level of maintenance, and pool grounds at some of these sites showing signs of structural decline, we recommend that the Department calculate the potential costs for the necessary repairs and then prioritize the repairs based on the severity of the conditions. The Department should also make additional efforts to obtain the financial resources necessary to repair and maintain the pools and spray grounds in the future.

Additionally, to ensure safe, welcoming, and well-maintained recreational settings for all city residents, we also recommend that management:

- Ensure that all pool chair lifts are functioning properly so everyone can enjoy the facilities;
- Locate missing batteries and ensure that they are installed in the chair lifts at the beginning of each day. Likewise, the batteries should be removed and securely stored at the end of each day.
- Provide pool staff and lifeguards with annual refresher training on how to operate the chair lifts;
- Vacuum the pools each day to remove decaying leaves that could block drains and cause slipping hazards;

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Repair broken cement surrounding the pool areas;
- Repair broken fences, as needed; and
- Repair and repaint spray grounds, where needed.

Appendix A:

During the 2025 summer season, the pools with chair lifts were reinspected by investigators. The lifeguards were attentive to the swimmers, trained in lifeguarding safety and use of the chair lifts. At the pools that the chair lifts worked, guards participated in demonstrating the proper use of the equipment. All the pools had their emergency stabilization equipment accessible. Of the ten chairs tested, there were five chair lifts operational with working batteries, three with missing batteries, and two with dead batteries.

Regarding the servicing of the chair lifts, the pool staff who were interviewed stated that the service company who came to check the batteries would later return with new batteries, which is not acceptable. The company that the city contracts should be required have replacement batteries on site when a battery is removed, it should be replaced on site.

TABLE II: SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATORS' FINDINGS-2025

Site	Zip Code	2025 Operational & Safety Conditions Reviewed					
		Hours & Regulations Clearly Posted	Lifeguards on Duty	Lifesaving Equipment Accessible	Chair Lifts Operational	Lifeguards Trained re: Chair Lifts	Grounds Adequately Maintained
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Fox Chase Pool	19111	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Hunting Park Pool	19140	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finnegan Pool*	19142						
Kelly Pool	19131	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lederer Pool	19125	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mander Pool	19121	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Penrose Pool	19122	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pleasant Pool	19119	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Simpson Pool	19124	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Vogt Pool	19135	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Inadequate Conditions Observed:		0	0	0	5	0	4

Source: Prepared by Controller's Office's Investigation Unit based on results of our pool site visits.

* Pools closed during Summer 2025 season due to repair and construction.

There were two pools not filled with water and closed for the season. Finnegan Pool required a replacement of the entire filter system and the spray ground was also not functional. Christy Pool spray ground was under construction, therefore the pool was required to be closed for the season.

Investigators interviewed the Recreation Leader at Finnegan Recreation Center where both the pool and the spray grounds were not operational. While neither was an option, the Recreation Leader working with the community, provided a slip and slide product to provide relief for the children in the area.

Department's Response:

The following is the response from Parks & Recreation Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie Dunn, on behalf of Commissioner Susan Slawson:

-As of July 29, 2025 each of the pool chair lifts that were not operational at the time of inspection have been checked and reported as follows:

Fox Chase- Battery replaced & chair lift operating

Simpson- Currently chair lift works, but not properly; Skilled trades is working to resolve

Pleasant- Battery replaced & chair lift operating

Vogt- Currently chair lift works, but not properly; Skilled trades is working to rectify the problem

Mander- Battery replaced & chair lift operating

-As of July 29, 2025 each of the following pools reported to have been inadequately maintained at the time of inspection have been cleaned:

Simpson

Pleasant

Vogt

Mander

-The Christy pool opened to the public on July 30, 2025.