



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

STAFF REPORT

To: Council

File No.: 7900-01

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: July 26, 2023

Subject: Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool – Free Public Admission Pilot

PURPOSE: To request Council's approval to proceed with offering free public admission to the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor pool as a pilot program for the 2023 operating season beginning August 8, 2023.

BACKGROUND:

The draft Comox Valley Aquatic Needs strategy, presented to Council in January 2023, identifies the tremendous community and individual benefits public pools provide. In addition to water safety and drowning prevention, public swimming pools offer opportunities for social connection, health and fitness, rehabilitation, skill development, and recreation and leisure. The draft strategy also articulates the unique activities that outdoor pools, wading pools, and spray parks provide which include water introduction for toddlers and young children and respite from summer heat.¹

Due to the unique benefits outdoor pools provide to community in addition to the community and social value they offer as informal and low barrier gathering places, some cities across Canada provide free public admission to their outdoor swimming pools, including but not limited to:

- Surrey's eight (8) outdoor pools are free for public admission
- Campbell River's Centennial Pool is free for those up to 18 years old
- Port Coquitlam is piloting free public admission for the 2023 season
- Halifax's recently opened new outdoor pool is free for public admission
- Winnipeg provides free admission to four (4) unheated outdoor pools (of a total of eight (8) outdoor pools)
- Kitchener provides free admission at two (2) of its four (4) outdoor pools

Please see Attachment 1 for current fees and charges and schedules for the outdoor pool.

DISCUSSION:

In light of the social and community benefits provided by outdoor pools and the actions of other municipalities offering free admission, staff began investigating the option to pilot free public admission at the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool for the remainder of the 2023 season.

Of the outdoor pool's aquatic offerings, recreational swimming has the fewest barriers to participation and appeals to the broadest cross-section of the public. Recreational and leisure swimming is often a user's introduction to aquatic services and should therefore be considered essential in aquatic service provision.

¹ [2023-02-03 DRAFT Comox Valley Aquatic Needs Strategy.pdf \(courtenay.ca\)](#)

Additionally, the outdoor pool provides respite from the heat which is especially important during lengthy hot, dry conditions, as it provides a safe alternative to non-lifeguarded swimming in natural water ways, which accounts for 81% of drownings in B.C.²

Staff are recommending that the City pilot free public admission for the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool for public swim times beginning August 8, 2023 until September 1, 2023.

The free public admission will apply to all ages during the following aquatic offerings:

- Open Swim
- Family Swim
- Adapted Swim
- Lengths Swim (including Early Bird and Evening Lanes)

Participants will continue to be required to pay for admission to aquatic programs where an instructor or additional staff is required to deliver the program, or other additional costs are incurred. This includes:

- AquaFit
- Lessons (group and private, Kayak)

All rentals and bookings are still required to pay appropriate fees and charges including birthday parties, private or club rentals, and other bookings.

Patrons who have purchased pool specific passes or punch cards will be eligible for a prorated refund or credit, depending on preference. Punch cards do not have an expiry date so can be saved for future use if a prorated refund isn't requested.

The maximum capacity of the outdoor pool is 200 persons. While it is rare to reach this capacity, it does occur occasionally when multiple day camps are in attendance in the early afternoon portion of public swim. During the first two weeks of July the outdoor pool averaged 135 attendees during the Monday to Friday public swim from 1:30pm – 4:30pm. Weekend public swims averaged 85 in attendance. The number of lifeguards on duty during Open Swim is already at its maximum due to current high attendance and as such no additional staffing expenses are expected to be incurred as a result of this pilot. The remaining public swim programs are not expected to see participation numbers rise to a level that require additional lifeguards.

If approved, staff will prepare communication materials to ensure the public is aware of the pilot program, what aquatic services it applies to, as well as highlighting peak times to encourage the public to attend at quieter times. Staff will continue to track attendance to public swim times in order to report back on the pilot in the Fall.

² 81% of drownings in B.C. occur in lakes, ponds, rivers, and oceans. [The Lifesaving Society | Water Safety Training & Education](#)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The annual operating budget projects \$31,000 in public swimming admission revenue, however in 2022 the actual public swimming revenue was \$65,795. The financial impact of the free public admission pilot program will range from \$15,000 to \$30,000 in foregone revenue as it would be initiated half way through the season. Public admission revenue is most significantly impacted by weather and as such can be unpredictable year over year.

The impact of reduced revenue will likely be absorbed by the Recreation, Culture, and Community Services (RCCS) department budget if it produces a surplus at year end which is consistent with historical performance. However, if the RCCS operating budget has revenue shortfalls resulting from the pilot program, staff recommend the use of gaming funds to balance the outdoor pool operating budget.

Table 1: Outdoor Pool Annual Operating Budget

Outdoor Pool Annual Budget			
Revenue	2022 Budget	2022 Actual	2023 Budget
Public Swimming	\$ 35,000	\$ 65,795	\$ 31,000
Lessons	\$ 30,000	\$ 15,296	\$ 49,000
Misc. Revenue	\$ 500	\$ -	\$ 500
Pool Rental	\$ 11,000	\$ 11,873	\$ 12,000
CVRD Operating Grant	\$ 96,700	\$ 96,700	\$ 101,500
Total Revenue	\$ 173,200	\$ 189,664	\$ 194,000
Expenses			
Program Expenses & Supplies	\$ 217,600	\$ 142,712	\$ 231,200
Pool Repair & Maintenance	\$ 92,300	\$ 60,134	\$ 109,400
Total Expenses	\$ 309,900	\$ 202,846	\$ 340,600
Total Surplus (Deficit)	\$ (136,700)	\$ (13,182)	\$ (146,600)

As identified in Table 1, the City receives an operating grant from the CVRD annually. Staff have confirmed that a decision to provide free public swimming admission will not adversely affect this operating grant.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Recreation, Culture, and Community Services (RCCS) will lead the implementation of the pilot project if approved by Council. Free public admission will result in temporary increase in administrative support to process prorated refunds and credits for pass and punch card holders, as well as tracking of participation. Support will be required from Communications to ensure public notification and information is provided, as well as Finance to support analysis of the impact of the pilot.

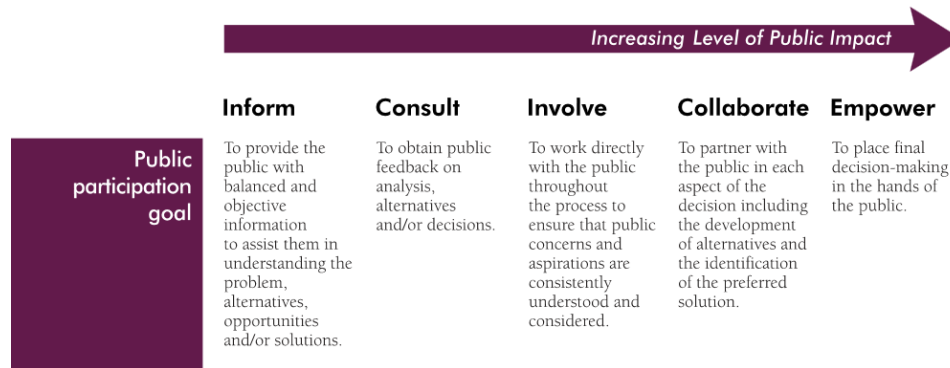
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Parks and Recreation - Review recreation programs and engage with community on current and future needs, changing demographics

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff would inform the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



© International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org

CONCLUSION:

The Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor pool offers unique benefits to residents, in addition to the community and social value it offers as an informal and low barrier gathering place. Staff recommend that Council consider the proposal to provide free public admission for the remainder of the outdoor pool 2023 season to encourage increased use, enhance access to low barrier recreational activities, and provide additional options for respite from the summer heat.

OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council direct staff to implement a pilot program offering free public admission at the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool from August 8, 2023 to September 1, 2023 and that staff report back in the fall on the results of the pilot program.
2. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Current Fees and Charges and Schedules for the Outdoor Pool

Prepared by: Susie Saunders, Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Reviewed by: Kathy Collins, Manager of Recreation Programming
Adam Langenmaier, Director of Financial Services

Concurrence: Susie Saunders, Acting City Manager (CAO)

ATTACHMENT 1: Current Fees and Charges and Schedules for the Outdoor Pool

May 29 - July 2 *schedule subject to change*

Pool Schedules

COURTENAY OUTDOOR POOL

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Early Bird Lengths 5:30 - 10:00 am	Early Bird Lengths 5:30 - 6:30 am					
	Early Bird Lengths 8:00 - 10:00 am					
Private Swim Lessons 8:30 - 9:30 am						Swim Fit 8:30 - 9:30 am
Aquafit 10:00 - 10:45 am	Lanes 8:00 - 10:45 am	Aquafit 10:00 - 10:45 am	Lanes 8:00 - 10:45 am	Aquafit 10:00 - 10:45 am	Family Swim 8:30 - 9:30 am	
Open Swim 2:00 - 4:30 pm/Lanes					Private Lessons 9:30 - 11:30	
Kayaks when booked 7:30 - 9:00 pm	Kayaks when booked 7:30 - 9:00 pm	Evening lanes 7:30 - 8:30 pm	Evening lanes 7:30 - 8:30 pm		Lengths & Water Jogging 9:30 - 1:30	
					Open Swim 1:30 - 4:30 pm	

Please note: pool closed June 17 - 18

July 3 - August 13 *schedule subject to change*

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Early Bird Lengths 5:30 - 8:45 am	Early Bird Lengths 5:30 - 7:30 am				Swim Fit 8:30 - 9:30am	Family Swim 8:30 - 9:30 am
Lessons 9:00 - 11:30 am						
Lengths Swim 11:45 - 1:30 pm (½ pool 12 - 1:30 pm)					Private Lessons 9:30 - 11:30 am	
Aquafit 12:15 - 1pm	Adapted Swim 12-1:30pm	Aquafit 12:15 - 1pm	Adapted Swim 12-1:30pm	Aquafit 12:15 - 1pm	Lengths & Water Jogging 9:30 am - 1:30 pm	
Open Swim 1:30 - 4:30 pm						
Evening Lanes 7:30 - 8:30pm	Evening Lanes 7:30 - 8:30pm	Evening Lanes 7:30 - 8:30pm	Kayaks when booked 7:30 - 9:00 pm	Splash Birthdays 6-7pm		

August 14 - September 1 *schedule subject to change*

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Early Bird Lengths 5:30 - 8:30 am					Swim Fit 8:30 - 9:30am	Family Swim 8:30 - 9:30 am
Lessons 9:00 - 11:30 am						
Lengths Swim 11:30 - 1:30 pm (½ pool 12-1:30 pm)					Private Lessons 9:30 - 11:30 am	
Aquafit 12:15 - 1pm	Adapted Swim 12-1:30pm	Aquafit 12:15 - 1pm	Adapted Swim 12-1:30pm	Aquafit 12:15 - 1pm	Lengths & Water Jogging 9:30 am - 1:30 pm	
Open Swim 1:30 - 7:00 pm						Open Swim 1:30 - 4:30 pm
Evening Lanes 7:30 - 8:30pm	Evening Lanes 7:30 - 8:30pm	Evening Lanes 7:30 - 8:30pm	Kayaks when booked 7:30 - 9:00 pm	Splash Birthdays 6-7pm		

Admission	Single Admission	Children 3 - 12 yrs \$3.25	Youth 13 - 18 yrs \$4	Adult (19+) \$6.25	Older Adult (55+) \$5.25	PWD \$3.25
	10-Use Card	\$30	\$35	\$55	\$46.50	\$30
	Season Pass	\$100	\$117	\$187	\$158	\$100

Please note:
 • Children under 7 years must be accompanied by someone 16 years or older & be within arm's reach.
 • Length swim is for ages 12 & up
 * Friday September 1 Open Swim closes at 4:30 pm