



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

STAFF REPORT

To: Council
From: Director of Recreation, Culture & Community Services
Subject: Regional Recreation Pass and LEAP Pilot report back

File No.: 8000-00

Date: November 8, 2023

PURPOSE: For Council to approve moving the regional Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP) from a pilot project to a permanent program; and provide a recommendation to Council on the Regional Recreation pass pilot project.

BACKGROUND:

On January 28, 2019 Council directed staff to prepare a report investigating options and implications of a regional recreation pass pilot program for the Comox Valley.

On February 5, 2001 Council adopted the Recreation Access Policy 8000.00.01 to ensure all residents of the City of Courtenay have access to Recreation programs and services to support the development of healthy lifestyles regardless of ability to pay.

On November 1, 2021 Council adopted the following resolution:

THAT Council direct staff to implement a one-year pilot of the Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP) partnership with the Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, and the Comox valley Regional District (CVRD) to extend financial access to recreation benefits to youth regardless of residence."

The November 1, 2022 report to Council reported back on the pilot LEAP Program for youth that Courtenay Recreation partnered on with our regional municipalities and district. The one-year trial LEAP Program started January 1, 2022 and focused on improving accessibility for all (by changing the low-income threshold from the Low Income Cut Off to the Low Income Measure) and increased financial access to services for youth aged 18 and under.

On July 11, 2022 Council adopted the following resolution:

THAT based on the July 11, 2022 staff report, "Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP) pilot program expansion to include 19 years & over," Council approve OPTION 1 and direct staff to implement this pilot program in partnership with the Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland, and Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) for 2023 and report back on pilot results and future recommendations.

DISCUSSION:

Upon Council direction in 2019 to explore options for the creation of a Regional Recreation pass pilot project, Courtenay Recreation Staff began collaborating with the CVRD, the Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland's recreation staff to collect data and explore options which may work locally. However, due

to the COVID-19 pandemic which began in 2020 work was paused regarding further exploration of a regional recreation pass. Following the pandemic, it was recognized by staff and our regional partners that there was significant community need to create a regional program which addressed the financial hardships experienced by so many due to the pandemic and rising unaffordability. Therefore regional recreation staff worked collectively over the last two years to develop and bring forward recommendations to address financial accessibility through the implementation of pilot Leisure for Everyone Accessibility (LEAP) programs. The added benefit of initiating regional access programs in a phased approach, in addition to reducing financial barriers to recreation in the Comox Valley, was that it allowed each municipality to assess and develop the necessary administrative processes, with minimal financial impacts to each respective organization. As these financial access pilot programs were implemented staff returned to the exploration of a regional recreation pass in accordance with Council direction.

Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP) Pilot Project

On November 1, 2021 Council adopted a pilot project for LEAP, starting with children and youth in 2022 and expanding to adults in 2023, making LEAP available to all ages in the Comox Valley.

Courtenay Recreation currently provides the Recreation Access Program (RAP) to City of Courtenay residents in conjunction with the regional LEAP pilot program, both of which use Statistic Canada's Low Income Measure (LIM)¹ to determine eligibility. Courtenay's RAP provides annual subsidy amounts and 52 free drop-ins to eligible City of Courtenay residents. RAP annual subsidy amounts are allocated based on the age demographic categories of "child", "youth", and "adult" and are applied towards discounts on registered programs and memberships². The 52 free drop-ins provide access to a variety of recreation opportunities such as the LINC Youth Centre, fitness programs, Wellness Centre, and outdoor pool. LEAP provides low income Comox Valley residents with 52 free admissions to drop-in programs at each regional jurisdiction regardless of which municipality they reside in.

LEAP is facilitated between municipalities in the following way:

- LEAP application is brought to one of the participating municipal Recreation Reception Offices (Courtenay Recreation: Lewis Centre, Filberg Centre; CVRD's Sports or Aquatic Centre; Comox Community Centre; Cumberland Recreation) by applicant.
- Reception staff review application, issue LEAP pass from respective municipality for each family member
- Applicant selects which of/or all participating municipalities they wish to receive a LEAP pass from and the completed application form is then forwarded on from the municipality which completed the intake to the other partnered municipalities.
- The partnered municipalities then issue their own separate LEAP drop in pass and contacts the applicant for pick up.

¹ Statistics Canada. [Table 11-10-0232-01 Low income measure \(LIM\) thresholds by income source and household size](#)

² Courtenay Residents receive the following subsidies: Adults: 50% up to the annual amount of \$350, Youth: 75% up to the annual amount of \$400, Children: 75% up to the annual amount of \$450.

- Participants in the LEAP program could potentially receive up to 4 separate LEAP Drop-in cards if they select wanting one from each municipal recreation centre.
- Each municipality is responsible for the tracking, monitoring and reporting on LEAP usage.

LEAP is now in its second and final year of the pilot. As of January 1, 2023, Courtenay Recreation has issued a total of 772 LEAP memberships to date. Of the LEAP memberships issued to date (Jan. 1 – Oct. 1 2023) issued, 704 are adults and 68 are children.

Table 1: January 1, 2020 – October 1, 2023 LEAP and Recreation Access Pass memberships issued

	2020	2021	2022	2023 (Jan 1 to Oct 1, 2023)
LEAP Memberships Issued				
Children/Youth	N/A	N/A	113	68
Adult	N/A	N/A	N/A	704
Total	N/A	N/A	113	772
Recreation Access Pass (RAP) Memberships issued				
Family	223	137	376	50
Individual	103	58	198	6
Total	326	195	574	56
RAP Scholarships applied towards Courtenay Recreation Registered Programs				
Children	\$ 3,265.55	\$ 8,179.18	\$ 22,799.97	\$ 23,741.34
Youth	\$ 312.50	\$ 567.00	\$ 860.01	\$ 564.90
Adult	\$ 522.00	\$ 1,356.93	\$ 3,024.04	\$ 3,737.83
Total	\$ 4,100.05	\$ 10,103.11	\$ 26,684.02	\$ 28,044.07

Due to the success of the regional financial assistance program (LEAP), each local municipality and the regional district have moved forward with making LEAP a permanent membership within their recreation departments. Courtenay Recreation is the only municipality remaining in pilot status and staff are recommending it become a permanent financial access program for recreation in addition to our Recreation Access Program (RAP).

Regional Recreation Pass

With LEAP well underway and intermunicipal processes in place, regional recreation staff returned to exploring options for a regional recreation pass pilot. The initial step was to launch a public survey to assess the public’s interest in a regional pass and expectations of such a program. The survey was launched in March 2023, and gathered information on the potential demand for this type of membership, what types of services residents would like to gain access to, as well as their willingness to pay for a regional recreation membership.

The following highlights some of the survey findings:

- High survey response rate – 1,303 responses.
- 87% said they would be interested in a Regional Membership.
- 58% of respondents said they would *not* pay more for such a service

- 29% said they would only pay 10% more
- Less than 2% said they would pay 25% or more for a Regional Recreation membership
- Most accessed recreation facilities were: Comox Valley Aquatic Centre (77%); Lewis Community Centre (45%); Comox Valley Sports Centre (44%); Comox Community Centre (39%).
- Most used services were: Swimming (75%); Drop-in Weight Room (45%); Fitness Classes (35%); Skating & Hockey (27%).
- Family, followed by adults and then seniors were the membership options the majority of respondents were interested in.
- 48% were most interested in an annual membership option.

To further understand the demand and implications of pursuing a regional recreation pass, data was gathered on where current recreation membership holders lived compared to where they were purchasing their recreation memberships. Please see Table 1: Current Annual Memberships Sold by Each Organization.

Table 1: Current Annual Memberships Sold by Each Organization

Community of Residence	CVRD # of Memberships	Courtenay # of Memberships	Comox # of Memberships	Cumberland # of Memberships	Total # of Memberships	%
Comox	56	16	239	1	312	35%
Courtenay	119	258	74	8	459	51%
Cumberland	2	8	0	58	68	8%
CVRD	14	28	0	6	48	5%
Other	6	0	11	0	17	2%
TOTAL	197	310	324	73	904	

In looking at the total municipal recreation memberships purchased in the Comox Valley 51% of membership holders live in Courtenay and 35% live in Comox. However, when looking at memberships purchased in Courtenay and Comox, the vast majority of residents live within their respective local municipality (83% Courtenay, 74% Comox), demonstrating there is not a significant crossover between jurisdictions as individuals access membership services. Additionally, the total number of memberships purchased (n=904) represents a small percentage of the regional Comox Valley population.

Staff worked regionally to discuss a potential regional pass model based on the findings from the public survey and what was feasible to manage administratively within each municipality. Due to the current services offered within each municipality’s membership models, the services that could be included within a regional recreation membership would have to vary at each municipality and would not address all the requests identified in the public survey (such as group fitness classes). Services were selected based on current membership offerings, cost implications, and ability to track usage and would be as follows:

- 1) City of Courtenay – Lewis Centre
 - Drop in at the Wellness Centre
- 2) Comox Valley Regional District - CVRD Sports & Aquatic Centres
 - Drop in Swimming & Aquatic Fitness Classes
 - Drop in Skating and Hockey
 - Drop in Wellness Centre & Fitness Studio Sessions
- 3) Town of Comox - Community Centre
 - Drop in at the Fitness Studio
 - Drop in Racket Sports
- 4) Village of Cumberland - Recreation Centre
 - Drop in at the Fitness Studio
 - Drop in Racket Sports
 - Drop in Sports
 - Drop in at the Climbing Wall

Despite requests from the public survey to include group fitness, these services cannot be included as each municipality structures these programs and associated memberships differently, including program fees. Additionally, group fitness programs have incremental cost associations due to instructor costs that would have to be accounted for, and not all municipalities are able to consistently track usage.

Staff also reviewed the administrative requirements to implement a regional recreation pass, especially in light of the findings of the survey where 58% of respondents indicated they would not pay more for a regional pass and 29% said they would only pay 10% more. In order to minimize the administrative implications of a regional pass, the program would have to be structured as follows:

- Only Annual (12 month) adult memberships would be available for purchase
- For a pilot program, memberships would only be available for purchase from Jan. 1 – Mar. 31, 2024 in order for enable staff to analyse usage and make further recommendations in time for the following budget year.
- Pro-rated refunds would only be granted for medical reasons with a doctor's note or proof of relocation outside the City of Courtenay
- Registration for a regional recreation pass could occur at any facility, with the agency that sells the membership keeping the revenue from the sale
 - Registration information would then be shared with the regional recreation departments where memberships would need to be created within each municipality's registration system and membership cards would be issued by each location.
 - Additionally, if there were any changes to a membership, each municipality would need to make those changes independently within their own registration system.
- Each agency would need to track the number of regional recreation membership visits to their facility for future reporting purposes.
- Customers will still end up with four separate "swipe" cards - similar to the LEAP program.
- A regional administration group would need to be formed in order to continuously assess the program and address any issues that arise.
- All other recreation membership terms and conditions would apply as usual

It is important to highlight that each municipality and the regional district have their own registration software and licenses. Even in the case where the same software system is used, the systems cannot share

information inter-municipally, meaning that each regional pass will require up to four times the work of a regular pass at a single facility.

To capture the administrative requirements to implement such a regional pass, it was determined that regional recreation pass needs to cost at least 15% more than a regular recreation pass. As each jurisdiction has different membership rates, it was determined that the 15% would be applied to the most expensive membership, which is currently at the CVRD; this is to ensure that no jurisdiction would be required to reduce fees or be undercut due to the lower price of a regional partner. The CVRD annual membership fee is \$495 per year, making an annual regional recreation membership \$569.25 per year.

The 15% additional fee however does not account for the added value a regional recreation pass offers to the customer (access to additional facilities and programs), nor would it account for the increased facility maintenance and equipment costs associated with increased usage. Therefore, ideally a 25% increase would be applied which would result in the cost of an annual regional recreation membership being \$618.75.

It is anticipated that for a participant to see value in purchasing an annual regional membership, their participation in services offered at various regional facilities would be greater than, and more affordable than the purchase of dual annual memberships or a combination of an annual membership and a punch card (10/11 visits). A customer would have to be a very high user of ice, aquatic, and or fitness services offered between municipalities to make the purchase of a regional pass worthwhile as compared to using a punch card for those add on services. See Table 2 for a chart comparing the costs of dual membership with the combination of an annual membership and purchase of a punch card:

Table 2: Intermunicipal Combination memberships cost comparative:

Regional Recreation Membership		Municipal annual Membership Combinations	Combined Costs	Annual Membership (listed first in naming) combined with punch card from separate municipality	Combined Costs
CVRD Annual Pass	\$495	CVRD & Courtenay	\$855	CVRD & Courtenay	\$560
CVRD Annual Pass + 15%	\$569	CVRD & Cumberland	\$675	Courtenay & Comox	\$421.65
CVRD Annual Pass + 25%	\$619	CVRD & Comox	\$844	Cumberland & CVRD	\$234.90

Based on the above analysis and the results of the community survey where the vast majority (87%) indicated they would not pay more than an additional 10% for a regional pass staff are recommending to Council that direction be given to not proceed with the implementation of a regional recreation pass. The membership data provided by each municipality demonstrates that the vast majority of residents are accessing facilities within their local jurisdiction and that the number of individuals who would benefit from a regional recreation pass is very small and limited to those who can afford to pay an increased fee. The administrative requirements to operationalize the program are not insignificant and staff recommend that

these resources continue to be dedicated to enhancing the accessibility of recreation programs and services through the removal of financial barriers.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

LEAP

As outlined in the July 11, 2022 Staff Report to Council those participating in the LEAP program have had no direct cost or financial impacts on Courtenay recreation as participation has been successfully integrated into existing drop in programs and has not increased staffing costs or negatively impacted revenues. Revenue and expense targets are adjusted annually through the financial planning processes and will continue to be monitored throughout recreation's program review cycle.

Regional Recreation Membership:

As outlined above, if Council directs staff to proceed with a pilot regional recreation pass pilot program, the framework discussed by the regional partners will result in revenues from the purchase of regional recreation passes staying with the jurisdiction where the pass was purchased. This is in line with examples sourced from Southern Vancouver Island where a similar program is in place. After the pilot year, staff would review participation and attendance rates to assess the financial impact of the program and make recommendations moving forward on the program structure. There is a small financial risk to the City that revenues may decrease if memberships are purchased elsewhere while usage remains static or increases, resulting in increased costs.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Recreation, Culture, and Community Services are responsible for the development and implementation of recreation fees and services. The facilitation, tracking, and intermunicipal communication required to administer the Regional Recreation membership would be greater than LEAP and would be in addition to current work levels. Each visit resulting from the regional membership would have to be tracked and reported on annually, recreation centres would be required to share applications (in accordance with Privacy legislation) as well as communicate and collaborate on refunds and suspensions.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

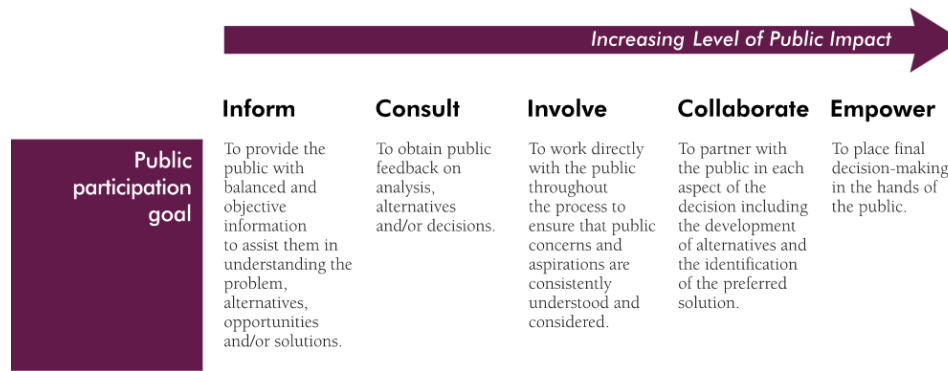
This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Parks and Recreation - Evaluate impact of Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP)
- Parks and Recreation - Review recreation programs and engage with community on current and future needs, changing demographics

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public input was solicited through the administration of the March 2023 survey to gauge community interest and willingness to pay.

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



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CONCLUSION:

It is staff's recommendation that the regional Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP) become a permanent service offering for Courtenay. It is serving many residents in the Comox Valley and is continuing to grow. It has minimal financial and administrative impacts on the City and addresses key priorities such as reducing barriers to participation and improving access to healthy activities. Staff recommend that further exploration or implementation of a regional recreation pass be ended as it has high administrative demands and is expected to serve a very small number of community members.

OPTIONS:

To be made separately:

1. THAT Council approve making the Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP) a permanent financial access program for all ages in Courtenay Recreation.
2. THAT Council direct staff to not implement a regional recreation pass and focus regional efforts on further development of LEAP to increase financial access and reduce barriers to recreation.

2. That Council approve making LEAP a permanent program for Courtenay Recreation and provide alternate direction to staff on the the regional recreation pass.

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

Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)