



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

STAFF REPORT

To: Council

File No.: 7710-05

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: January 24, 2024

Subject: Aquatic Needs Strategy Update - Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool What We Heard Report and 75th Anniversary

PURPOSE:

To provide Council with an update of the Aquatic Needs Strategy to include a summary of the outdoor aquatic public engagement findings in the attached Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool What We Heard Report (Attachment 1) and request Council's approval to proceed with providing free public admission for the outdoor pool's 75th season in 2024.

BACKGROUND:

The Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool was built in 1949 and is turning 75 years old this year. It is nearing the end of its useful life and requires capital investment in its renewal or redevelopment in order to continue operating and serving the Comox Valley into the future. Due to ageing aquatic infrastructure in the Comox Valley, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and City of Courtenay partnered to complete an Aquatics Needs Strategy in order to:

1. Develop a 10-year aquatic services implementation strategy that takes into consideration indoor and outdoor aquatic services in the Comox Valley over a 25-year time frame;
2. Conduct an options analysis for the renewal, replacement, or relocation of either or both the CVRD Sports Pool and the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool; and,
3. Make recommendations on the future of aquatic facilities and services in the Comox Valley.

The Draft Comox Valley Aquatic Needs Strategy (the "strategy") (Attachment 2) was developed from a baseline review of existing aquatic services in the region, and input and feedback received from an extensive community engagement process. The engagement process included a public survey, aquatic facility user group survey, and online interest group workshops and interviews. The strategy was presented to Council at the January 11, 2023 Council meeting. The key findings of the strategy are:

- Existing aquatic facilities are well utilized and highly valued community spaces.
- Currently there is no need to increase water capacity (no additional pools / aquatic facilities) in order to meet community need.
- There is community demand for enhanced aquatic leisure and wellness experiences.
- There is a need to focus on enhanced accessibility at aquatic facilities.
- Alignment with regional environmental objectives is of key importance.

The Aquatic Needs Strategy identified three strategic objectives to guide the Comox Valley Regional District and the City of Courtenay in the delivery of aquatic services:

1. High quality aquatic facilities that are adaptable and responsive to community need.
2. Provide accessible, affordable and inclusive facilities and services.
3. Facilities and services are well planned, maintained and managed.

In addition to the key findings, the strategy presented four main aquatics facility options to be considered:

1. Status Quo: maintain all facilities in current locations and configurations
2. Relocate aquatic services (outdoor pool and CV Sports Centre) to the Comox Valley Aquatic Centre Site with the three sub-options to consider:
 - a) Include a Wellness Expansion at the CV Aquatic Centre Site
 - b) Include an Outdoor Pool Expansion at the CV Aquatic Centre Site
 - c) Wellness and Outdoor Pool Expansion at the CV Aquatic Centre Site
3. Build Out A New Site (consolidating all three existing pools)
4. New Outdoor Pool with two options to consider:
 - a) New Outdoor pool at new site
 - b) New Outdoor pool at existing site

The strategy provided three recommendations were provided in light of the fact that the CVRD would be responsible for decisions on indoor aquatic options while the City of Courtenay would make decisions regarding the outdoor pool. The recommendations recognized the benefits that could be sought be co-relocating aquatic services including operational efficiencies, capital cost efficiencies through shared infrastructure, and opportunity to address emerging community priorities with a new facility design.

1. For indoor aquatics, phase out of the operation of the pool at the CV Sport Centre and relocate the aquatic services through an addition to the CV Aquatic Centre – option 2(a).
2. For outdoor aquatics, close the outdoor pool and relocate the aquatic services to the CV Aquatic Centre through the addition of a new outdoor pool at that site – option 2(b).
3. For indoor and outdoor pool combined options, the recommendation is to have both jurisdictions consider combining indoor and outdoor pools facilities and services at the CV Aquatic Centre – option 2(c).

After council received the draft strategy, the draft report was posted on the CVRD and City's websites for a period of one month to receive public comment and feedback.

The Comox Valley Recreation Commission identified Option 2(a) as their preferred option and incorporated it into the Comox Valley Recreation Commission [Strategic and Capital Planning Reports](#). This option articulates the relocation of indoor aquatic services at the CV Sport Centre to the CV Aquatic Centre in five to seven years, resulting in the expansion or addition of a new pool at the existing CV Aquatic Centre. The medium-term implementation of this option provides time for the CVRD to consider further requirements, including any impacts arising from City of Courtenay decisions on the future of the outdoor pool.

At the July 12, 2023 Council Meeting, Council received for information the "[Comox Valley Aquatic Service Needs Strategy Update](#)" briefing note. The briefing note referenced that additional capacity scenarios regarding changes in use or access to the 19 Wing Base Pool or outdoor pool were to be included in an update

to the Strategy. The briefing note also, spoke to the need for additional public engagement regarding the future of the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor pool. While the Aquatic Needs Strategy received significant public engagement in the development phase, limited responses were received regarding the strategy's aquatic facility recommendations. Staff engaged RC Strategies to conduct additional public engagement in the Summer of 2023 specifically related to the future of the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool. With the conclusion of the outdoor pool public engagement the What We Heard Report is being presented along with the updated Aquatic Strategy to form the final Comox Valley Aquatic Services Strategy for Courtenay.

DISCUSSION:

The Draft Comox Valley Aquatic Needs Strategy identified the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool as an important community asset that should be maintained both from an aquatic services and community amenity perspective. It is also acknowledged within the strategy that the Outdoor Pool is nearing the end of its useful life and requires renewal, replacement or redevelopment for continued operation.

The provision of recreational opportunities, including outdoor aquatic recreation, plays a crucial role in enhancing the physical and social well-being of individuals and communities. Beyond facilitating mobility and physical therapy, fostering social connections, physical literacy, and community unity, imparting life safety skills, and nurturing athlete development, aquatic facilities can cater to a spectrum of needs. Particularly, outdoor pools hold the potential to advance broader community social objectives, such as promoting reconciliation, combating racism, and fostering inclusivity by minimizing barriers to access and encouraging social development.

Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool - Public Engagement

Based on the findings and recommendations of the Aquatic Strategy, the City undertook a public engagement to assess the public's response to the facility options put forward for the future of the outdoor pool by the Aquatic Needs Strategy.

A survey was created and made available to the public for a period of four weeks from August to September 2023. To maximize participation, the survey was supported by an extensive engagement strategy which included posters in the recreation facilities, dedicated project website, social media promotional posts and promotional boards displayed at the outdoor pool entrance and pool deck. Survey participants were directed to an interactive storyboard mapping presentation¹ that summarized the key findings of the Aquatic Needs Strategy, the geographic location of each potential option (if applicable), and highlighted key information on the outdoor pool for the public to consider before completing the survey.

Survey respondents were informed that the outdoor pool is nearing the end of its facility life and requires repair, renewal or redevelopment in order to continue to provide access to outdoor aquatic services into the future. Respondents were informed that there is need for approximately \$1 million dollars in capital investment to address current conditions, with additional undetermined costs related to leak remediation issues. Additionally, it was stated that the outdoor pool does not meet current accessibility requirements and is located on the flood plain, making redevelopment options more complicated.

¹ [The Future of the Courtenay & District Memorial Outdoor Pool \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

The storyboard presented the five options for the future of the outdoor pool that were identified through the strategy, including key messaging for the public to consider with each option including the approximate capital investment required based on estimates in the Aquatic Needs Strategy. This approach was undertaken to ensure that the public was well informed of the key findings and recommendations of the strategy before taking the survey. The five options presented for the future of the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool are outlined in Table 1:

Table 1: Outdoor Pool Facility Options

Outdoor Pool Facility Option	Location	Capital Budget Estimate
Option 1: Status Quo	At existing site: Lewis Park	\$1 Million plus cost for repair and leak remediation (TBD)
Option 2: New outdoor pool at existing indoor aquatic facility site.	Co-located at the CV Aquatic Centre	\$12 Million
Option 3: New outdoor pool	At existing site: Lewis Park	\$18.2 million for replacement
Option 4: New outdoor pool at new site	To be determined	\$16.6 million (does not include land cost)
Option 5: Closure of outdoor pool without replacement or relocation	N/A	\$1 million for decommissioning (pending further study to confirm cost).

More detailed information on each option can be found in Attachment 3.

Outdoor Pool Public Engagement – What we Heard Report

The Courtenay and District Outdoor Pool What We Heard Report (Attachment 1) builds on the engagement findings from the strategy and provides further public input on the delivery of outdoor aquatics in the Comox Valley and specifically on the future of the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool.

The public survey ran from August 14, 2023 date to September 12, 2023 and solicited over 1,800 responses from the community. An additional 884 comments were received in response to survey questions, which have been reviewed and presented in thematic findings. The number of responses as well as the substantial commentary provided by respondents are another indicator of the significant role this recreational asset plays in the community.

Survey Respondent Demographics

Respondents were asked to provide information regarding their place of residence, age, presence of children in the household and their ages, as well as how long they have lived in the region. Some key demographic highlights are summarized below:

Table 2: Place of Residence

Where do you live?		
	Survey Respondents	2021 Census*
City of Courtenay	54%	39%
Comox Valley Regional District	20%	34%
Town of Comox	16%	21%
Village of Cumberland	7%	6%
K'ómoks First Nation	<1%	N/A
Other	3%	-

Respondents were also asked to share information on their use of the outdoor pool. Two thirds of respondents visited the outdoor pool in the last two years. However, it is significant to note that over one third of respondents did not visit the pool in either or both of the last two years (2022 and 2023). This is a significant factor in considering the feedback and preferences of respondents regarding the future of the outdoor pool as it demonstrates its community value beyond just those individuals who access the service. While the survey responses indicate that there is greater use amongst the younger respondents, there is also multi-generational use of the outdoor pool.

Survey Key Findings

Respondents were asked questions to confirm the findings and recommendations of the Aquatic Needs Strategy and to seek clarity on preferred options for the future of the outdoor pool. Overall, the Outdoor Pool public engagement findings are fairly consistent with the engagement results of the aquatic strategy. As confirmed in the Aquatic Needs Strategy engagement, the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor pool is a highly valued community asset with three quarters of the respondents strongly agreeing that the outdoor pool is an important community facility.

Key Themes

The outdoor pool is widely recognized as a highly valued family friendly community asset that is centrally located. In considering the future of the outdoor pool, respondents indicated it is important to bear in mind the geographical distribution and accessibility of recreation facilities and amenities across Courtenay, and the Comox Valley. Respondents indicated some concern about the capital investment required, the existing location being on a flood plain, and expressed concern with the current lack of parking and connection to public transit.

The public is using the pool to experience fun and enjoyment, socialize, meet new people, exercise, and for physical well-being. A large number of respondents (80%) said they would sometimes pick the outdoor pool over an indoor pool. The preference for an outdoor pool use was mainly due to:

1. Providing a unique summer recreation activity;

2. Respite from summer heat; and
3. A preference for outdoor swimming.

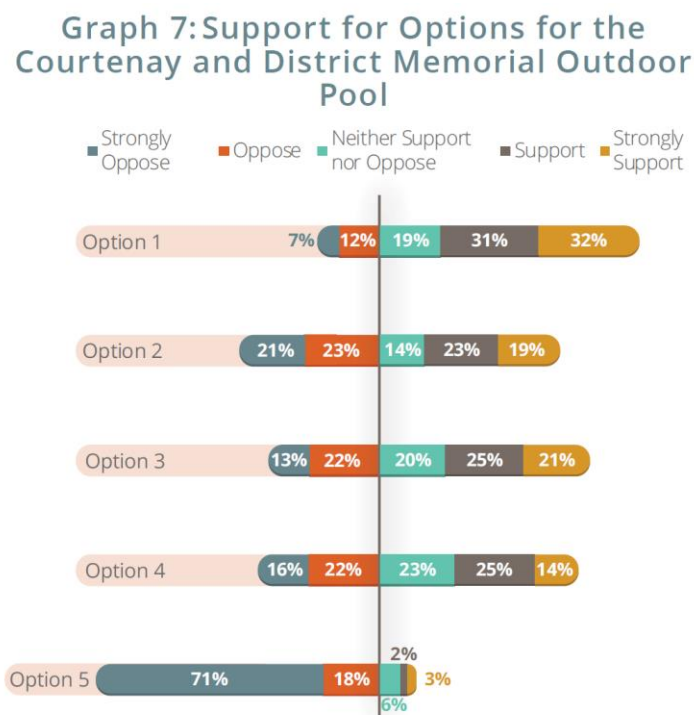
Respondents indicated they do not use the outdoor pool because of: crowding, lack of parking, the condition and cleanliness of the facility, or preference to swim in natural aquatic assets such as the ocean, lake, or river.

In summary, based on the feedback received, respondents confirmed the community value of the outdoor pool as they enjoy the outdoor aquatic experience and prefer it over indoor aquatics while provides an inherent social value. Barriers to use include issues with the current facility (condition, accessibility), crowding due to high use, and parking – suggesting that making improvements to the facility will increase its usage.

Survey Results – Preferred Options

The key objective of the Outdoor Pool public engagement was to garner feedback and understand preferences regarding the facility options for the future of the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool. Respondents were asked to rank their preference of the five presented options from least preferred to most preferred. The results are shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Graph 7: Support for Options for the Outdoor Pool

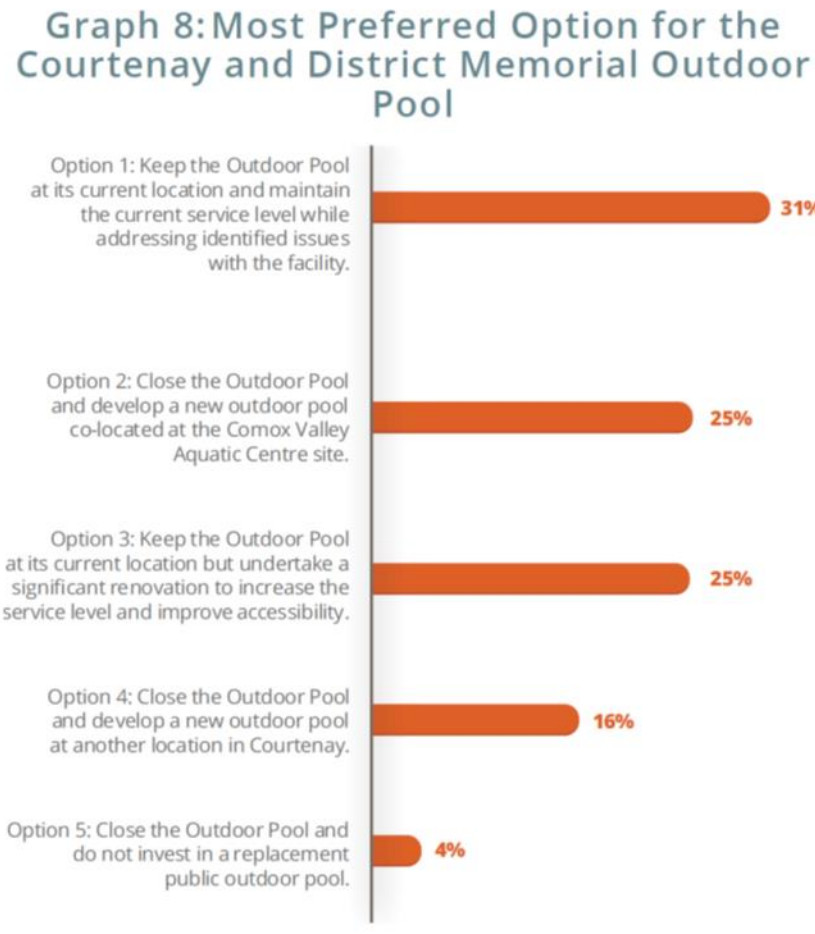


Results demonstrate that the preferred option is to maintain the Outdoor Pool at its current location and maintain the current service level while addressing identified issues with the facility, with the next most supported option being a significant renewal of the outdoor pool at its current location. These two

preferences are also strongly supported by those who did not visit the pool in 2022 or 2023. 89% of respondents opposed or strongly opposed the permanent closure of the outdoor pool.

Respondents were then asked to indicate their most preferred option, only being able to select one of the options for the future of the Outdoor Pool. The results are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Graph 8: Most Preferred Option for the Outdoor Pool



Results align with the ranking of options described above, with the most preferred option being the maintenance of the pool at its current location. This preference is closely followed by redeveloping the pool on site or redeveloping at the Comox Valley Aquatic Centre, followed by looking for opportunities for relocating it to another location. Only 4% of respondents indicated their preferred option was the permanent closure of the outdoor pool.

Responses were almost split in regards to where the outdoor pool should be located. Over half (56%) preferred an option where the outdoor pool remained at its current location (Option 1 – 31% and Option 3- 25%) while 41% supported the closure of the outdoor pool and development of a new pool at another location (Option 2 – 25% and Option 4 -16%).

Survey Results – Conclusions

Both the Aquatic Needs Strategy and the Outdoor Pool Public engagement have clearly and consistently demonstrated that the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool is a valued community asset, even by those residents who do not use its programs and services. It is clear from the public's response that there is strong support for outdoor aquatic services in Courtenay and the Comox Valley, and strong support for the continued provision of an outdoor pool. Over half of respondents to the Outdoor Pool engagement prefer the pool to remain at its current location, with the remaining half been split on relocating it to the Comox Valley Aquatic Centre or another location in Courtenay.

When the results of the preferred options are considered alongside the other survey responses and comments, as well as the community engagement results of the Aquatics Need Strategy, the following themes emerge regarding the future of the Outdoor Pool:

- It is a highly valued community asset that serves a wide demographic of individuals but requires improvements to meet today's needs:
 - Improved facility accessibility including change rooms and access to the pool
 - Improved amenities to enhance the experience, especially to increase leisure experiences
 - A need to address the feedback that the pool is too congested or busy for some and thus they choose not to use it
- The current location is centrally located and any relocation decisions should take into consideration the following:
 - Geographic distribution of aquatic services in Courtenay and the Comox Valley, with concerns raised over locating all services at one location (i.e. the Aquatic Centre)
 - Accessibility and parking, with consistent themes around transit access, sufficient parking, and ease of accessing by active transportation (i.e. walking or rolling), especially for children and youth
- Questions and concerns about the level of investment required, especially in light of its current location in the flood plain
 - Individuals indicated that their main reason for selecting option 1 as their preferred option was due to its lower cost implications

When asked to prioritize the factors that they think the City should consider in prioritizing investment in one facility or amenity over another, respondents indicated that community benefit was the most important criteria, followed by demand from residents and then overall costs of either maintaining or operating the asset.

Outdoor Pool Next Steps

With the completion of the Comox Valley Aquatics Needs Strategy and the Outdoor Aquatics public engagement, staff will incorporate the recommendations, feedback, and results into recommendations for Council's consideration regarding the future of the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool. This information will be considered alongside the results of recently completed condition assessments to provide options for Council's consideration regarding continued investment into the outdoor pool. Following Council's direction, staff will engage with the Comox Valley Regional District regarding financial considerations for the CVRD Recreation Grant Service as well as any impacts and considerations on service levels at CVRD aquatic facilities if applicable.

Report Back on Free Public Admission Pilot at the Outdoor Pool

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. At the July 23, 2023 Council Meeting, staff recommended 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. Following Council's direction, a free public admission pilot was offered at the Courtenay and District Outdoor Pool from August 8, 2023 until the end of the season on September 1, 2023.

Table 5 provides a summary of pool attendance in July versus August, 2023, comparing usage during regular admission fees in July and free public admission in August. Overall, there was an increase in users to the outdoor pool during the following scheduled program times: Lunch Lengths, Open Swim and Evening Lengths. Please note that admissions during the pilot were manually tracked versus those in July which are tracked through the Recreation registration software system or point of sale system and as such may not fully capture all actual visits or admissions.

Table 5: Public Admissions

Program	July 2023	August 2023
Early Bird Lengths	237	195
Lunch Lengths	315	334
Adapted Swim	165	143
Open Swim	3,252	3,888
Evening Lengths	68	71
Family Swim	72	40
Totals	4,109	4,671

Samples of public feedback from the free admission pilot was as follows:

"This is brilliant! I am one of those people who thinks all recreational facilities should be free. The people who need it the most can't afford to pay for multiple uses. Thank you for doing this."

"What a great group of people working at the outdoor pool!"

Anecdotal feedback also includes observations that the public accessed the outdoor pool at different times of day, including increased attendance in later hours of public swim sessions – likely due to cost no longer being a factor in attending the pool for shorter periods of time.

Table 6 Financial impacts of Free Admission Pilot

Outdoor Pool Annual Budget				
Revenue	2022 Budget	2022 Actual	2023 Budget	2023 Actual
				YTD (Unaudited)
Public Swimming	\$ 35,000	\$ 65,795	\$ 31,000	\$ 25,064
Lessons	\$ 30,000	\$ 15,296	\$ 49,000	\$ 52,952
Misc. Revenue	\$ 500		\$ 500	
Pool Rental	\$ 11,000	\$ 11,873	\$ 12,000	\$ 13,387
CVRD Operating Grant	\$ 96,700	\$ 96,700	\$ 101,500	\$ 101,500
Total Revenue	\$ 173,200	\$ 189,664	\$ 194,000	\$ 192,902

As summarized in Table 6, the financial impact of the free public admission pilot was approximately \$6,000 in reduced revenues for public swimming than budgeted for 2023.² No additional expenses were incurred as a result of the pilot.

The Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool continues to see increased participation and usage since its reopening in 2021 following its COVID-19 related closure in 2019. Along with the public feedback described above and the results of the free admission pilot program, it is clear that this is a valued community asset that provides access to critical life skills that contributed to drowning prevention, enjoyable and safe summer leisure opportunities, and serves diverse demographics within the community.

With the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool entering its 75th year of operation in 2024, it is staff’s recommendation that the free public admission pilot be extended to include the entire season in 2024 in celebration of this incredible community asset and its services. It is expected that the projected revenue reduction of free public admission for the 2024 season would be approximately \$31,000. If supported by Council, staff would incorporate the financial impacts into the 2024 Financial Plan for Council’s consideration.

POLICY ANALYSIS:

Parks and Recreation Masterplan, 2019

Recommendation 4.1.3: Plan for the short-term operation and long-term replacement of the outdoor pool with a communications and engagement process.

- Provide information to the community regarding the age and condition of the outdoor pool, the challenges of the location, and the maintenance and capital improvement costs.
- Undertake a feasibility study for replacing the outdoor pool activities
- Consult with the community regarding the options identified in the feasibility study

Official Community Plan, 2022

- Parks and Recreation Policy (PR3): Ensure appropriate and sufficient parklands, play spaces, and recreation infrastructure are provided as a form of essential social and ecological infrastructure to meet the needs of the community and accommodate growth.

² Note: the above financial summary is an excerpt from the year to date unaudited financial statements and may be subject to year-end adjustments.

- Parks and Recreation Policy (PR 13): Maintain and invest in Lewis Recreation, Lewis and Sims Parks as centralized, high –intensity regional recreation destinations intended to serve the indoor and outdoor creation needs of the community
- Parks and Recreation Policy (PR14): Continue to review plans for expansion or renovation of existing recreational facilities in accordance with the Parks and Recreation master plan and particularly within the Town and Neighbourhood Centres and Corridors.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The Aquatic Service Strategy project budget was in the 2023 Capital Budget with the City’s portion of the strategy funded through the CVRD Recreation Commission Grant Function. The Courtenay and District Memorial Pool community engagement carried out this past summer was funded through the 2023 Operating Budget.

The expected projected revenue reduction of free public admission for the 2024 season would be \$31,000

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

This project is a strategic priority for Recreation, Culture, and Community Services and has been identified in staff members' annual work plans. Involvement from other City departments is required as draft recommendations and implementation strategies are developed with the condition assessment of the outdoor pool being led by Engineering Services.

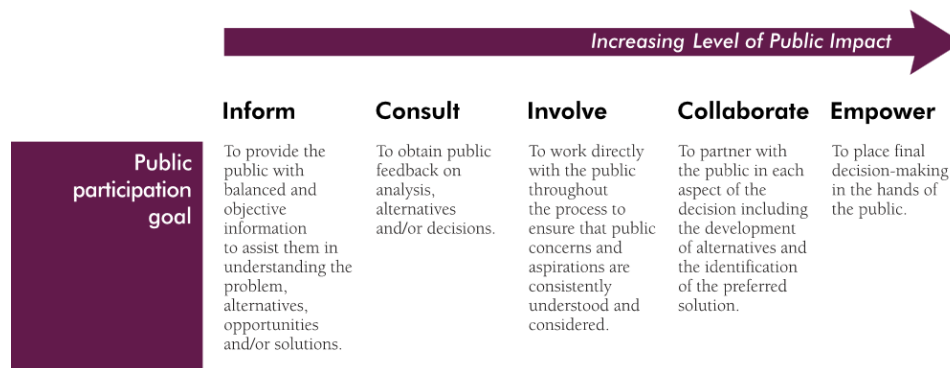
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Parks and Recreation - Complete recreation facilities need assessments and capital improvements: Florence Filberg Centre, Courtenay & District Memorial Outdoor Pool, Lewis Centre

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff consulted the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



OPTIONS:

1. THAT the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool What We Heard Report (Attachment 1) and the Comox Valley Aquatic Services Strategy (Attachment 2) be received for information to form the final Comox Valley Aquatic Services Strategy for Courtenay; and
2. THAT Council direct staff to include free public admission for the Outdoor Pool's 75th year in the 2024 Financial Plan.
3. THAT the Courtenay and District Memorial Outdoor Pool What We Heard Report (Attachment 1) and the Comox Valley Aquatic Services Strategy (Attachment 2) be received for information to form the final Comox Valley Aquatic Services Strategy for Courtenay.
4. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Courtenay and District Memorial Pool What We Heard Report
2. Comox Valley Aquatic Services Strategy
3. Outdoor Pool Options: Interactive Story Board Map Summary and Facility Options

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