

City of Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Aquatic Services Review
 Vancouver, BC
 October 2001

Executive Summary

Objective

In July 2000 Roger **Hughes + Partners** Architects, in conjunction with PERC and a full team of engineers, were charged with developing an imaginative and comprehensive 10-15 year strategy to reconfigure the Park Board's aquatic services and facilities to meet current and future local and city-wide needs in a cost-effective and fiscally sustainable manner.

Public Survey

The Consultants conducted a random **public mail-out survey** in January 2001 which indicated, with notable consistency across demographics, that:

- two thirds of the 309 respondents use swimming pools, primarily for recreation, fitness and learn-to-swim lessons
- more than half the respondents cited the need for new or improved swimming pools in Vancouver
- more than half the respondents were willing to support some level of tax increase for swimming pools
- **there was strong agreement that everyone benefits from public swimming and that pools are essential to the quality of life in Vancouver**

Facilities Assessment

The consultant team in concert with Park Board staff assessed, on a comparative basis, the condition of the major existing indoor and outdoor pool facilities. The indoor facilities, averaging 32 years in age, were found to be in varying condition but as a body were assessed to be **reaching the end of their useful lifespan in the next 10 years**. Structurally, 3 of 9 were scored "high priority" on the NRC seismic priority index. Facilities were ranked according to their overall condition and the urgency of their need for attention as follows:

- **Percy Norman (most urgent)**
- **Killarney**
- **Renfrew**
- **VAC**
- **Kerrisdale**
- **Britannia**
- **Kensington**
- **Lord Byng**
- **Templeton (least urgent)**

The major outdoor facilities, with significantly less infrastructure, were assessed to be in better overall condition.

Systems Issues

Among key System Issues affecting the delivery of aquatic services are:

- Total **system usage**, currently around 1,400,000 swims per year, although theoretical *capacity* including maximum use of off-peak time could be up to 2,000,000 swims
- **operating costs**, with the recovery rate for indoor pools at about 44%, average cost per swim at \$4.57, revenue at \$2.10 and net public subsidy at \$2.47

- these subsidy and recovery rates are significantly poorer than in surrounding communities that have invested in new aquatic complexes
- **Functionality Issues** shaping newer facilities and working to limit the practical lifespan of aquatics facilities, including **Accessibility, Health Issues, Flexibility, Regulation Standards, Play Features, and Sustainability**

Enhancement Strategies

Service Enhancement Strategies were based on the description of an optimal service profile stemming from public survey input, proposing:

- the development of **recreational swimming in a centralized model**
- the maintenance of **basic lessons, fitness and training swimming in a decentralized (neighbourhood) model** correlating generally with the current distribution of facilities in Vancouver
- **an increase of 70% in pool usage over the next 10 years** (current usage 1,400,000 swims per year plus 700,000 for latent demand/swimmers returning to the system plus 300,000 for population growth equals target usage of 2,400,000) this increase represents a change from the current 2.5 swims per capita per year to approximately 4 swims per capita per year, in line with the low end of the range for Western Canadian centres.

Public Display of Options

Based on the Service Enhancement Strategies and some basic limiting Assumptions, the team generated **a series of schematic Options for reconfiguring Vancouver's Aquatic System**. The Options ranged from de-centralized to centralized systems, complete with comparative data on uses, costs, and capacity. The Options were presented to the two staffed public displays in popular central shopping malls, and subsequently at displays and staffed Open Houses in eight Park Board facilities. Public comments of preferences were solicited, recorded and tabulated. The results showed, again with remarkable consistency:

- **overwhelming support for doing something substantial** in the way of reinvestment in different swimming pools
- **Options 2 and 4 were by far the preferred options**, regardless of display location and demographics of respondents
- **there is public support for the idea of at least one large, multi-purpose aquatic centre** in addition to a number of neighbourhood pools distributed around the city.

Recommendations

The consultant recommends:

- **substantial reinvestment in the aquatic system immediately and continuing over the next ten years** (in the order of \$26 to \$28 million initially, \$50 to \$52 million total)
- **providing capacity for up to 2.4 million swims per year**, prioritizing recreational swimming, and optimizing fitness swimming (lanes), swim lessons, therapeutic swimming, swim club training and other rentals
- **a combination of neighbourhood, community, and city-wide facilities**, such that the majority of Vancouver residents will live within about 2-3 km of a public indoor pool
- **implementation in two or more phases starting now** and continuing intensively over the next ten years

Implementation

The preceding recommendations can best be implemented in two phases **based on the urgency of need of the existing aquatic facilities**, and based on combining facility types to achieve maximum initial public impact and valuable usership statistics relevant to subsequent development.

Phase 1 (immediate):

- *Percy Norman* Redeveloped as a City-Wide Pool
- *Killarney* Redeveloped as a Community Pool
- *Renfrew* Redeveloped as a Neighbourhood Pool

Assessment: Once the Phase 1 facilities are operational, study use data to determine if Phase 1 is working in practice, and use projections are confirmed or exceeded, then proceed with:

Phase 2 (completed within the next 10 years)

- *VAC* Redeveloped as a Community Pool
- *Kerrisdale* Redeveloped as a Neighbourhood Pool
- *Lord Byng* Redeveloped as a Neighbourhood Pool
- *Templeton* Redeveloped as a Neighbourhood Pool

The City could choose to close Britannia and/or Kensington as surplus capacity or continue their operation. We recommend that the decision on these two facilities be deferred until the Assessment of Phase 1 operations, at which point usage figures will provide further direction.

Competition Facility

The need for quality regulation training accommodation for swim clubs is a priority. The need for a high level competition facility is debatable, given the number of competition facilities in the Lower Mainland and the Province which now compete to bring major events into BC.

The team recommends that **quality training provisions for swim clubs, to appropriate regulation standards**, be incorporated into all new or retrofit projects. The team further recommends that the Park Board not attempt to compete with the surrounding communities and Vancouver Island for the highest level of competitive events. Instead, **the major competitions should be left to existing or planned competition pools in the region and the province.**

Outdoor Pools

The existing major outdoor pools (Kitsilano, Second Beach, New Brighton and Maple Grove) **should be maintained for long term operation.** Mount Pleasant and Sunset outdoor pools should be closed as they wear out and as new indoor/outdoor opportunities are developed to replace them. No new stand-alone outdoor pools should be developed.