



October 13, 2019

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: VanSplash: Vancouver Aquatics Strategy - Report Back

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Vancouver Park Board approve the proposed “VanSplash: Vancouver Aquatics Strategy”, attached as Appendix A and as outlined in this report, which includes recommendations for indoor & outdoor pools, beaches, spray parks, and aquatic innovation to guide both the planning of aquatics facilities in Vancouver and the submissions to the City’s capital planning process (10-year Capital Strategic Outlook and 4-year Capital Plan); and
- B. THAT the Board direct staff to report back annually on the implementation of the 25-Year Vision.

REPORT SUMMARY

Vancouver’s pools, beaches and spray parks are vital in providing healthy recreation opportunities and connections to community.

“VanSplash: Vancouver Aquatics Strategy” (VanSplash) is the result of a three-year long process to guide the delivery of aquatics in Vancouver for the next 25 years. It proposes enhancing and renewing existing pools and aquatic amenities, growing the capacity of the system and providing continuous service delivery. When VanSplash came to the Board for decision in 2017, it was referred back to staff with some proposed amendments for further consideration. A Board-appointed VanSplash Advisory Group was established for an additional phase of community engagement.

The message “Vancouver Needs More Pools” and the vision of “building communities of aquatics users for a lifetime” were heard loud and clear. This report provides an overview of the proposed VanSplash strategy, which has been revised to reflect the feedback received and the insights of the VanSplash Advisory Group.

BOARD AUTHORITY / PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Per the [Vancouver Charter](#), the Park Board has exclusive jurisdiction and control over all areas designated as permanent and temporary parks in the City of Vancouver, including any structures, programs and activities, fees, and improvements that occur within those parks.

On March 11, 2002, the Vancouver Park Board approved the [Aquatic Services Review](#).

In December 2017, the Board received a staff presentation on the proposed [VanSplash: Vancouver Aquatics Strategy](#) and heard from 48 speakers over two days; decision was deferred to [January 2018](#).

- Jan 29/18 – Board approved new full-sized outdoor pool to be co-located with new Marpole Community Centre in Oak Park; [referred proposed amendments](#) to the strategy back to staff “for further consideration, including the role of neighbourhood pools in relation to the qualitative experience they offer residents”;
- Nov 19/18 – Board approved [selection process for VanSplash Advisory Group](#); established in response to Jan 2018 referral to staff;
- Jul 30/19 – Board received presentation of [VanSplash Advisory Group report](#).

On July 23, 2018, the Board approved [Reports 1 & 2 of VanPlay](#), Vancouver’s Parks and Recreation Services Master Plan. Report 2, “[10 Goals to Shape the Next 25 Years](#)”, includes the following goals that are supported in VanSplash:

- Goal 1: Grow and renew parks, community centres and recreation assets to keep pace with population growth and evolving needs;
- Goal 3: Prioritize the delivery of resources to where they are needed most;
- Goal 8: Foster a system of parks and recreation spaces that are safe and welcoming to all; and
- Goal 10: Secure adequate and ongoing funding for the repair, renewal and replacement of our aging parks and recreation system.

On October 9, 2019, the Board approved [Reports 3 & 4 of VanPlay](#), representing the final two Master Plan components. VanSplash supports Bold Move 1: “Equity”, which is outlined in Report 3 “[Strategic Bold Moves](#)”.

BACKGROUND

In 2002, the Vancouver Park Board approved the Aquatic Services Review, setting the stage for future planning of Vancouver’s aquatics system. The Review focused on meeting current and future demand, fiscally sustainable operations, and balancing local and city-wide services. Over the following decade, the Park Board implemented the Review’s recommendations, including renovating Renfrew pool (2005), building Killarney pool (2006), and building a new large-scale facility at Hillcrest (2010). Increasing demand for a range of aquatic services, a need for upgrades and major life-cycle replacements, population growth, and changes in demographic and user trends together pointed to the need for a new city-wide plan to guide delivery of aquatics facilities.

In December 2017, the Board received a staff presentation and heard from speakers on the proposed [VanSplash: Vancouver Aquatics Strategy](#). In January 2018, the Board approved co-locating a full-sized outdoor pool as part of the Marpole Community Centre renewal in Oak Park, and proposed a number of amendments to the strategy recommendations, which were all referred to staff. Staff were also directed to further consider “the role of neighbourhood pools in relation to the qualitative experience they offer residents”. In response to this direction, an additional phase of engagement was undertaken with the establishment of a [VanSplash Advisory Group](#).

VanSplash Advisory Group

The goal of the Advisory Group was to obtain broad perspectives and input from a range of stakeholder and user groups, as well as from members of the public who access a variety of aquatics services.

Members were short-listed by a third-party neutral facilitator and appointed by the Board. The Advisory Group was comprised of 19 volunteers from a wide variety of aquatics interest areas and from all parts of Vancouver. The group met nine times over six months (January to June 2019), and logged over 400 collective hours of meeting time and review of the proposed VanSplash Strategy. All meetings were facilitated by the neutral third-party. At a Special Park Board Meeting held on July 30, 2019, the Advisory Group presented its [report](#) to the Board.

The Advisory Group's findings informed the revised recommendations in the proposed VanSplash Strategy. These revised recommendations were shared with the group at a meeting held on September 17, 2019, and then the recommendations were further refined based on additional feedback collected at that meeting.

DISCUSSION

The VanSplash Aquatics Strategy proposes a city-wide approach to planning for the future of aquatics in Vancouver. It focuses on a network of amenities including indoor and outdoor pools, beaches, wading pools and spray parks, as well as innovative approaches for aquatics service delivery. VanSplash supports the following:

- ensure future facilities provide the capacity required;
- deliver the desired community focus heard throughout the public process;
- maintain or improve geographic coverage of facilities and amenities;
- serve both existing population and new population in expected growth areas;
- respond to an aging population and other demographic changes; and
- provide a flexible and resilient system that will enable facilities to adapt to changing needs.

The proposed strategy (Appendix A) provides recommendations across five categories of aquatic services:

- Indoor Pools: 12 recommendations;
- Outdoor Pools: 9 Recommendations;
- Beaches: 5 Recommendations;
- Spray Parks & Wading Pools: 6 Recommendations; and
- Innovation: 10 Recommendations.

VanSplash offers a 25-year vision for the delivery of aquatic services in Vancouver and is meant to inform the Capital Planning process by identifying funding needed for future renewal and growth-related facility development. VanSplash is informed by a technical study, a precedent review, and an engagement process that included community, stakeholder and staff consultation, as well as input from the VanSplash Advisory Group.

The VanSplash Advisory Group's mandate was to review and comment on the following topics raised by the public and the Board:

- content of the proposed VanSplash Strategy, with a focus on the strategy's recommendations;
- amendments proposed by Commissioners at the January 29, 2018 meeting; and
- concerns raised by residents who spoke at the December 2017 meetings.

The Advisory Group was an effective forum for discussing complex issues, trade-offs, and the city-wide needs of current and future Vancouver residents. Its feedback focussed on the following elements of VanSplash:

- Overall Strategy;
- Strategy Vision, Principles and Goals;
- Individual Strategy Recommendations (Indoor Pools, Outdoor Pools, Beaches, Wading Pools and Spray Parks, and Innovation); and
- Advisory Group suggestions not included in Strategy Recommendations.

The majority of the group's input was incorporated into VanSplash. Staff reviewed the feedback through the lenses of city-wide equity and accessibility, operational efficiency, land availability, and capital planning considerations. As a result, 17 of the strategy's 38 original recommendations were revised, and four new recommendations were added. The revised recommendations are identified in the proposed strategy (Appendix A), with highlights provided below.

Highlights of Advisory Group Comments and Changes to Recommendations:

Following are highlights of the group's comments, with details on how recommendations were changed.

1) An overarching message was "we need more pools."

- The Strategy provides a strong argument for new and renewed aquatics facilities to address the urgent capacity required in Vancouver;
- The Strategy's Vision has been revised to *building communities of aquatic users for a lifetime*;
- A mission has been added to *deliver a wide range of accessible aquatics experiences for residents and visitors that support Vancouver as a highly-livable, world leading coastal city*.

2) The Advisory Group had in-depth discussions on definitions and values throughout their process.

- A glossary has been added for clarity;
- Facility scale terms have been revised from *Neighbourhood, Community, and City-Wide to Small, Medium, and Large*, to better communicate the intentions of the Strategy;

- A Design Considerations section has been added, meant to ensure facilities planning considers the qualitative experiences of pool users such as those heard throughout the engagement process;
- A new Facilities Planning Practices section summarizes standard Park Board processes for aquatics facilities planning.

3) The Advisory Group emphasized the need for having a mix of pool sizes and experiences in the system.

- Indoor pool recommendation 1 was revised to read: *“support a balanced delivery model that includes Small pools as well as Large facilities to deliver a greater diversity of aquatic experiences”*;
- Indoor pool recommendations 6 and 8 were revised so the services offered at Connaught and Vancouver Aquatic Centre (VAC) will be determined through engagement and facility design;
- Outdoor pool recommendation 3 was revised to recommend lane swimming in all new outdoor pools.

4) The Templeton and Lord Byng pools are important to their communities.

- Indoor pool recommendations 5 and 7 continue to support operation of Templeton and Lord Byng Pools. Feedback from the group included that *Templeton and Lord Byng pools will remain open for a minimum of 5 years following replacement facilities at Britannia and Connaught Park becoming fully operational. Meaningful community engagement and a thorough impact study will be completed.*

5) Outdoor pools are popular facilities.

- Recommendation 8 is to *investigate renovations to Hillcrest outdoor pool to provide lane swimming while balancing existing leisure components*;
- Recommendation 9 is to *investigate the feasibility of operating (an) outdoor pool(s) with extended season.*

6) The need for a new facility capable of hosting sport training and competition events was recognized.

- Indoor pool recommendation 12 was added to *conduct a feasibility study to build a facility providing sport training, leadership training, hosting of large sport and recreation events, as well as skill development and fitness swimming.*

Also appended are the Current State Report, a detailed analysis of the existing condition of the aquatics system (Appendix B), Public Engagement Report including the Advisory Group report (Appendix C), and Precedent Report outlining inspiring work done by others (Appendix D).

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

VanSplash’s 25-year vision includes rough order of magnitude capital costs. Large capital investments are needed to build and renew aquatics facilities, which require evaluation in the context of competing Park Board and City of Vancouver priorities.

While the 25-year vision provides a clear recommendation for the number of new and renewed aquatics facilities, the ability to deliver on these recommendations is dependent upon the Park Board's financial capacity. Vancouver is a growing city, experiencing a number of pressures for services and associated facilities; difficult trade-offs between competing priorities may be required resulting in changes to noted timelines and deliverables expressed in the recommendations. VanSplash will guide submissions to the City's 2023-2032 Capital Strategic Outlook, 2023-2026 Capital Plan, 2027-2030 Capital Plan, and associated Annual Budgets.

VanSplash also outlines that operating costs for aquatic facilities must be offset by a combination of revenue and contributions from the Park Board's operating budget. Operating Costs of aquatic facilities vary widely depending on age, condition, amenities, and co-location with other recreation facilities. For example, the estimated annual operating cost for an indoor pool currently ranges anywhere from between \$0.3M and \$2.0M.

CONCLUSION

Aquatics services provided by the Park Board can play a transformative role in the day-to-day lives of the Vancouverites. Vancouver's passion for aquatics has been evident through the strong interest in engagement shown throughout the project, including through the Advisory Group process. "VanSplash: Vancouver Aquatics Strategy", proposes a 25-year vision for the future of aquatics through a city-wide planning approach. It makes the case for the significant capital investment needed to deliver the proposed facilities. VanSplash recommendations are aimed at increasing capacity and continuous service delivery responsive to the needs of aquatics facilities users. Through revised and enhanced recommendations, the strategy now includes the input of the VanSplash Advisory Group. For every new or renewed facility, it recommends meaningful engagement during the planning process with the community centre associations, communities, and all stakeholder and user groups affected.

VanSplash provides a bold, progressive, and inclusive vision for both Vancouver's current residents and for those to come. It will be foundational to maintaining and building aquatics as an essential part of Vancouver's health, well-being, and social connectedness.

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