



Date: June 5, 2001

**TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation**  
**FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: Senior Fees - Leisure Access Program Review**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the Board receive this report as information.**

## **POLICY**

In 1992, the Board adopted the Economic Access Policy with the goal “to ensure that all citizens of Vancouver shall have access to basic services provided by the Board of Parks & Recreation regardless of ability to pay.”

## **BACKGROUND**

At the January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001 meeting of the Park Board, staff were directed to review the Leisure Access Program with the intent of closing the gap between the middle and lower income seniors. Concern focused on the Board’s current determination of low income for Leisure Access eligibility; specifically that it may require adjusting in light of the general fee increase to the Park Board’s “senior” rates.

Currently, those individuals who receive income assistance or meet the National Council of Welfare’s Low Income Cut-off (LICO see Appendix A) are eligible for the Board’s Leisure Access Program. Using these criteria, approximately 17% or 85,000 of Vancouver residents are eligible for Leisure Access Cards. In 2000, approximately 23,000 Leisure Access Cards were issued - 15,000 to individuals receiving income assistance and 8,000 to individuals who met the low income criteria. This usage rate parallels the general population’s usage rate for community centre facilities (i.e., approximately 33% of Vancouver residents use community centre facilities).

It is important to note that the Leisure Access Card program applies specifically to Park Board programs and services. These programs and services include free admission to swimming and skating sessions and a 50% reduction to swimming and skating lessons, fitness centre, racquetball and pitch and putt golf courses admissions (see LAC Flyer - Appendix B). Community centre programs (e.g., sport activities, arts programs, seniors programs, etc.) are offered by local Community Associations and these Associations are responsible for determining the program fees. Thus, community centre programs are not included in the Leisure Access Program. However, most Community Associations have a discount or reduced fee policy. While these policies vary depending on the individual site, most of the Community Associations accept Leisure Access Cards as proof of need.

## **DISCUSSION**

The review of the Park Board's Leisure Access Program with respect to qualification for seniors involves highlighting the principles of the Board's Economic Access Policy, investigating measures for determining low income as well as reviewing other cities access policies.

### **Economic Access Policy**

The Board's Economic Access Policy is based on the principle that all Vancouver residents should have access to basic recreational service regardless of their ability to pay. The eligibility criteria for Leisure Access Cards are residents who either receive income assistance or meet the Board's low income criteria. The Policy is based solely on one's ability to pay as defined by income and/or family income and is not influenced by age, disability or other any other demographic.

### **Low Income Cut-off Figures (LICO)**

The Park Board uses the low income cut-off (LICO) data as provided by the National Council of Welfare. LICO represents levels of gross income where people spend disproportionate amounts of money for food, shelter and clothing. This determination of low income is based on Statistics Canada information and is adjusted based on the size of the family unit and the population of area of residency.

The National Council of Welfare's LICO figures represent one of the higher benchmarks to define low income. The higher the cut off figure, the more people qualify for the benefits. In addition, the LICO figures are widely accepted as a measure of low income. Burnaby and Surrey Parks and Recreation departments use these figures to define low income. In addition, the End Legislated Poverty organization also recognizes the National Council of Welfare's LICO figures as a measure of low income.

### **Other Cities Economic Access Policies**

Staff reviewed the economic access policies and programs from various Park and Recreation Departments across Canada. All of the cities contacted had a policy statement with regard to removing economic barriers to participation in leisure services. Generally, all fee programs and services were eligible for subsidy although most cities had a maximum access limit as defined either by a number of programs or dollar value to an individual or family over a defined period of time. Access criteria and procedures were similar for all cities. An individual or family on financial assistance would qualify immediately and 'others in need' would have to show proof of low income before being issued a card. Most cities use National Council of Welfare low income cut-off estimates. There were no exceptions made such as age, disability and all cities referenced low income as criteria for eligibility - i.e., no programs had special qualifying criteria for seniors.

### **Should seniors have a different eligibility criteria to “close the gap”?**

Based on the principles of the Park Board’s Economic Policy, income should be the sole determination for eligibility for the Leisure Access Program. The decision to focus the eligibility criteria solely on income and not other demographics ensures that access to the Program is fair and equitable to all residents. To single out seniors based solely on their age would create inequities within the Program (i.e., single parents, disabled, etc.).

### **SUMMARY**

The Vancouver Park Board should be proud of their Economic Access Policy as it is one of the more progressive access policies in Canada. The Policy provides residents access to basic services regardless of their ability to pay which ensures that all citizens of Vancouver have an opportunity to reap the benefits of recreation. Seniors in need are accommodated through the Policy’s income assistance or low income cut off criteria.

### **Smart Card Up-date**

The Board asked staff also to investigate the introduction of all-in-one civic Smart Card. This investigation will begin in the fall of 2001 and will involve staff from both the City and Park Board Information Technology departments.

Prepared by:

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