

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation

FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT: AQUATIC SERVICES REVIEW

RECOMMENDATION

A. THAT the Board endorse the objectives for aquatic renewal described in Aquatic Services Review report, consisting of the following elements:

- One large-scale, destination 'city-wide' pool oriented towards family recreation and leisure;
- Two 'community pools' providing specialized features such as therapy, longer length or outdoor swimming; and
- Four 'neighbourhood pools' modernized versions of the local indoor pools currently in the Park Board inventory, and focusing on swim lessons, fitness and training.

B. THAT this model of aquatic services be the framework for capital decision making related to Capital Plan and other major funding opportunities, and with an evaluation of outcomes after the first phase of implementation.

POLICY

There is no applicable Board policy.

BACKGROUND

The Board commissioned an Aquatic Needs Study which reported out to the Board on November 5, 2001. The Executive Summary of this report is attached as Appendix A.

On receipt of the Aquatic Services Review report, the Board approved a motion to "undertake a process to communicate the report to partners, stakeholders, and the public." Staff followed up on this motion in three ways:

1. The Review capital recommendations were formally presented and explained, in the context of long range renewal plans for recreation facilities generally, at a capital

planning workshop on December 8, 2001 attended by Community Association presidents.

- 2. A media event was held at Percy Norman Pool on Wednesday, January 23, 2002 covering the recommendations of the Aquatic Services Review, including its proposed two-phased implementation strategy.
- 3. A four-panel display (Appendix B) outlining the review recommendations and proposed implementation strategy was placed at all Park Board pool locations. Public feedback was invited by means of comment sheets, which listed seven questions relating to the report recommendations. An electronic version of this display and the comment forms were also made available on the Park Board website.

DISCUSSION

The Aquatic Services Review concludes that Park Board's system of swimming pools is nearing the end of its useful lifespan and advances a vision of a reconfigured aquatic system for the City. This vision, at an estimated implentation cost of \$50 - \$52 million, involves the following facility components:

- One large-scale, destination 'city-wide' pool oriented towards family recreation and leisure;
- Two 'community pools' providing specialized features such as therapy, longer length or outdoor swimming; and
- Four 'neighbourhood pools' modernized versions of the local indoor pools currently in the Park Board inventory, and focusing on swim lessons, fitness and training.

These seven new pools have a capacity of about 2.4 million swims per year, up from the 2.0 million swims per year accommodated by nine pools today. Two pools in the current inventory would not be upgraded, but either closed or retained as "surplus to capacity."

Staff recommend that the Board endorse the vision of the Aquatic Services Review, with an allowance for flexibility with respect to implementation possibilities. Commitment to proceed with the renewal process has been reinforced by the extensive consultation process which has taken place through the course of the Aquatic study and by the feedback received in response to the website and display information on the study conclusions.

A total of 917 comment sheets were filled out expressing opinions on the aquatic renewal initiative. The breakdown of responses to the seven questions on the sheets is shown in Appendix C. These results should *not* be interpreted as a scientific survey, since the respondents were self-selected from a population representing mostly current aquatic facility users. However, the public response to the Aquatic Service Review display reinforces the following observations:

• There is strong approval for the rebuilding initiative proposed in the Review, even when

the associated costs per household are identified. This expressed support is also consistent with the findings of the earlier household survey, showing that a majority of respondents were willing to accept a property tax increase to upgrade Vancouver's public pools.

- Respondents are not only willing to bear the cost of rebuilding the aquatics system, but are also strongly in favour of increasing its capacity.
- Opinions are most divided on the Review recommendations not to provide for top level national and international competitions, and to not replace the outdoor pools at Mount Pleasant and Sunset when they wear out.

The tabulation of the comment sheet responses was examined by the Aquatic Review Committee, a group composed of a cross-section of pool partners and stakeholders which has monitored the aquatic study since its inception. The Review Group discussion highlighted the following perspectives on the Aquatic Services Review recommendations and user/public responses to these recommendations:

Competitive Swimming

The exclusion of a high level competitive capacity in the aquatic renewal plan generated considerable concern, albeit from a minority of respondents. However, it appears that many regard a competitive facility to be synonymous with a 50 meter tank, and interpret this recommendation to mean the elimination of longer length swimming in our system. In fact the Review explicitly calls for the retention of a 50 meter length capacity within the Vancouver system.

It bears emphasis that the new pools recommended in the Aquatic Services Review will provide excellent club training and accommodate local meets much better than our existing facilities. The Review advises that the Board commit its resources to meeting these objectives and also to provide for recreation swimming, swim lessons and fitness. While the highest level of competitive event would not be met by the proposed service configuration, this demand represents a very small percentage of overall potential use and would be very costly to address.

Neighbourhood Outdoor Pools

The proposal "not to replace the City's Outdoor Public Swimming Pools at Mount Pleasant and Sunset when they wear out" generated the most mixed response of any of the Review recommendations. More 'disagree' responses to this statement were recorded than 'agree' responses, although the number of 'don't know' responses was also very high.

Mount Pleasant and Sunset pools have been kept open well beyond their expected lifespan, by a high annual investment of money and staff time. They are wearing out and, based on the cost involved and the attendance they generate, do not merit replacement in their present form.

Yet the level of attachment amongst pool patrons to outdoor swimming should not be disregarded. Inclusion of some means to perpetuate the outdoor swimming experience should be incorporated into the design brief for one or more of the new pools.

Service to the Northeast Quadrant

Noting the proximity of Templeton and Britannia pools, the Aquatic Review suggests that the latter could be "closed or operated as surplus to capacity." Unfortunately, this recommendation fails to acknowledge the unique operating structure at Britannia. Though Park Board staff are involved in its operation, Britannia Pool is in the jurisdiction of the Britannia Community Services Society, and any planning relating to the pool's future must be undertaken with the Britannia Board of Management..

Jurisdictional matters aside, the apparent duplication of aquatic services in the northeast of the City remains a valid issue. The reasoning behind the recommendation to retain Templeton was that this facility currently registers in better condition overall, and that its site is less constrained with respect to rebuilding and expansion possibilities. However, the Britannia Board of Management, along with many facility users and several members of the Review Group, disagree with this conclusion. They point to the advantages of Britannia as a highly visible, multi-service site, over Templeton as a stand alone facility with access limitations. The observation is also made that neither facility has the individual capacity to accommodate the number of swimmers now served by both pools.

Staff therefore propose that the original recommendation of the Aquatic Review with respect to Britannia and Templeton pools be reframed on the basis of a closer assessment of an appropriate long term service configuration for the Grandview Woodlands and Hastings Sunrise neighbourhoods. This assessment will be conducted in consultation with the affected communities prior to undertaking any aquatic renewal project in the northeast quadrant.

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to approve the reconfiguration of aquatic services recommended by the Aquatic Services Review report, to be followed by an evaluation of outcomes after the first phase of development.

Prepared by:

Planning and Operations Board of Parks & Recreation Vancouver, B.C. PR/mv

Appendix A

AQUATIC SERVICES REPORT

"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 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 life span 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.

System 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 \$2.54.
- 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 life span 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 and fitness 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 on 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

- 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
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Renfrew Redeveloped as a Neighbourhood Pool

Assessment: Once the Phase I facilities are operational, study user 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 Board defer the decision on these two facilities 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."