

Date: June 13, 2007



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Aquatic Program Review

RECOMMENDATION

A. THAT the Board accept the Aquatic Program Review – Task Force Report (Appendix A) and instruct staff to implement the various program, financial and operational changes outlined in the Report;

B. THAT the Board approve the following Pool Allocation – Priority for Use Policy:

<i>First Priority</i>	<i>Public Swim Sessions and Instructional Programs</i>
<i>Second Priority</i>	<i>Minor Sport and Children/Youth Clubs</i>
<i>Third Priority</i>	<i>Adult Sport Groups</i>
<i>Fourth Priority</i>	<i>Commercial Groups</i>

POLICY

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation is granted the authority to manage park and recreation activities through the Vancouver Charter. Specifically, the Charter grants the Park Board the responsibility for establishing, maintaining and operating indoor and outdoor swimming pools (Section 489 – swimming pools). Services or programs provided in these facilities include public swim sessions and learn-to-swim programs, as well as rental opportunities for aquatic clubs and groups. These programs and services are considered core services for the Park Board – i.e., these services and programs are aligned with the Park Board’s mandate.

The Board approved the Aquatic Services Review – 2001 as the basis for the physical renewal of the Board’s aquatic facilities. On April 25, 2005, the Board approved the work plan for the Aquatic Program Review.

BACKGROUND

The Aquatic Services Review’s strategies for indoor pools were based on the description of an optimal service profile stemming from public opinion survey input proposing:

- the development of recreation swimming in a more centralized model (destination or city wide pools);
- the maintenance of basic lessons, fitness and training swimming in a decentralized model (current distribution of “neighbourhood” pools);
- an increase of 70% in pool usage over the next 10 years (currently at 1.4 million swims per year, increasing to 2.4 million swims).

Based on these strategies, the Aquatic Services Review’s recommendations included:

- a substantial reinvestment in indoor aquatic facilities over the next 10 years;
- a new or rebuilt indoor pool system with a capacity of 2.4 million swims per year, prioritizing recreational swimming and efficiently and effectively programming fitness swimming, lessons, therapeutic swimming, swim club training and rentals;
- a rebuilt system consisting of three types of indoor pool facilities: neighbourhood pools (25m tank), community pools (two tanks, leisure component) and city wide, destination pool (two to three tanks, multi-purpose aquatic facility).

Since this Review, the Board has undertaken a major retrofit of Renfrew Pool as a neighbourhood pool and rebuilt Killarney Pool as a community pool. The new Killarney Pool consists of a 25m tank as well as a leisure pool. A replacement for Percy Norman Pool is slated for completion in 2009 and is being rebuilt as a city wide destination facility consisting of a 50m tank, a leisure pool, fitness centre and outdoor pool.

As a companion piece to the Aquatic Services Review, the Park Board initiated an *Aquatic Program Review* in 2005 to guide the operation and programming of the Board’s indoor pools. The Review was directed by a Task Force comprised of representatives of a cross section of aquatic users as well as Park Board staff. The goal for the Task Force was to update and recommend a comprehensive aquatic program and allocation policy for the Board’s consideration. This programming and policy renewal will enable the Board to achieve the following objectives:

- operate aquatic programs and facilities in an equitable and cost effective and fiscally sustainable manner;
- meet the performance objectives of the 2002 Aquatic Services Review (increase of 70% in pool usage with a focus on recreational swimming);
- provide aquatic users and stakeholders with the opportunity to influence future policy development.

The following principles served as the framework for program and policy development and evaluation:

- access and equity – in terms of pool time as well as fees and charges;
- efficiency of use – both in terms of time and space;
- diverse programming – a balanced aquatic program;

- financial sustainability – for both the Park Board and users;
- youth programs – recognition of Park Board’s role in the delivery of minor sport (in partnership).

During the past 18 months, the Task Force met regularly to discuss pool scheduling and allocation as well as financial sustainability issues associated with the provision of indoor pool facilities. The Task Force reviewed the current provision of indoor pool facilities and the programming schedules, as well as profiled existing users of indoor pools. The group reviewed the Board’s allocation policy vs. current practices, discussed issues and concerns from both the user’s and staff perspective and examined and evaluated best practices from other city’s allocation policies and practices (Surrey, Richmond and Langley). Topics reviewed under financial sustainability included an analysis of revenues (sources, fees and charges schedules, market pricing, best practices from other municipalities) as well as an analysis of expenditures (payroll for guarding, office and maintenance function) and the relationships between payroll and revenues.

The Task Force’s Report is a detailed summary of their work (Appendix A). Two of the major outcomes from this Review are the establishment of baseline data from which future aquatic programming and operational decisions can be based and evaluated and the recognition of both internal and external best practices which can be applied to the aquatic operations. The Task Force is forwarding a series of recommendations for the Board’s consideration.

DISCUSSION

The significant research and review conducted by the Task Force has resulted in a broad range of recommendations which can be grouped into three headings: programming, financial sustainability, and future directions. In addition, the Task Force is recommending that the Board adopt the following policy for the allocation of use of indoor pools:

First Priority	Public Swim Sessions and Instructional Programs
Second Priority	Minor Sport and Children/Youth Clubs
Third Priority	Adult Sport Groups
Fourth Priority	Commercial Groups

This allocation policy is aligned with the guiding principles outlined for the review: access and equity, diversity in programming, special consideration for youth programs, partnership, etc. In addition, this policy is aligned with priority of use policy approved in other cities.

Programming Recommendations

A key finding of the Review is the interrelationship between the facility size, amenities provided, and programming offered and the impact that these factors have on revenues generated and expenditures incurred: larger facilities with support amenities (fitness centres, teach pools, dive tanks) allow for a diverse program and these facilities are most efficient to operate – e.g., 50m pool, 25m pools with fitness centres, etc. Other key learning's included:

- current programming is adult focused;
- the extensive lesson program offered is at the expense of public swimming opportunities for families and children;
- current schedules for 25m pools are too standardized and do not provide for a diverse aquatic program.

Based on these findings, the Task Force made recommendations in the following areas:

1. Programming for Indoor Pools

To achieve both program diversity as well as operating efficiencies, the Task Force recommends that pool schedules reflect local demographics as well as district/city wide requirements. On a district or city wide level, it is recommended that pool schedules provide a more diverse range of programming both in terms of time and day, including more public swim opportunities for families.

2. Aquatic Club Use

Based on Priority of Use Policy outlined earlier, minor sport is to be given priority over adult club in the allocation of pool use. This recommendation is consistent with other Park Board allocation polices (rinks, fields, etc.). The Task Force has also made a series of recommendations which define minor sport qualifications and pool use measures, give priority to local over non local groups, and allocate club pool time on a district/city wide level.

3. Aquatic Advisory Committee

To assist in implementing the programming policies and operational changes as well as acting as a resource for aquatic issues, the Task Force is recommending establishing an Aquatics Advisory Committee.

4. Statistics and Pool Use

For better measurement of performance as well as better decision making, it is recommended that the Park Board accurately record pool use. The Task Force

recognized that this should be achieved through the implementation of the new recreation software system – Safari.

Financial Recommendations

Analysis focused on both revenues and expenditures and a key learning was that pool expenditures have been increasing at a higher rate than revenues. Reasons for this discrepancy were attributed to changes in staffing levels especially for guarding. Other learning's from the financial analysis included:

- 50m pools are more efficient to operate than 25m pools;
- 25m pools with fitness centres recover more of their operating costs as compared to a 25m pool;
- there is an inconsistency in the funding of office and maintenance functions at the various pools;
- the Board's current fee schedule is comparable to other cities for pool admission but significantly lower for club use;
- the current fee schedule for club use does not differentiate between minor sport use and adult use.

Based on these findings, the Task Force made recommendations in the following areas:

1. Fee Schedule

The Task Force supported the Park Board's policy of establishing a fee and then discounting the fees for youth activities. While the Task Force recognized that adult clubs should pay more than youth clubs for pool use, they recommended that staff and the advisory committee continue to work with user groups to establish municipal market rates for prime and non-prime time use for both adult and youth clubs.

2. Standardized Accounting

For better measurement of performance as well as better decision making, it is recommended that the Park Board standardize the accounting of revenues and expenditures for indoor pools.

3. Operating Standards for Guarding, Office and Maintenance Functions

To ensure that indoor pools are operated in an efficient manner, standards for guarding, office and janitorial functions should be developed and maintained. A core funding review for individual indoor pools should be conducted once the standard accounting practices have been developed and implemented.

Future Direction for Aquatics

To achieve the objectives outlined in both the Aquatic Services and Aquatic Program Reviews, the Task Force recommends the Board focus on the following directions:

1. Increased public swims and overall attendance

To be achieved through: scheduling and program differentiation (previously outlined); programming of special events and equipment use; and increased marketing at both the local and city wide level.

2. Staff training and selection

Provide training with emphasis on leadership and fun; shift from a “guarding” to a “leisure” culture; management support for leadership training.

3. Partner with Minor Sport

Continue to develop and foster partnerships with minor sport groups to ensure program diversity.

4. Facility and Equipment Improvements

Increase equipment at all pools (inflatables, climbing walls, etc.); consider fitness centres, family change rooms, and office reconfigurations when renovating existing pools.

5. Maintenance of Pools

Ensure proper maintenance of change rooms and showers, deck surfaces and the physical plan as this is as important to the swimming experience as providing good customer service, scheduling and equipment.

6. Supervision and Overall Planning

To ensure overall implementation of the recommendations, a direct reporting relationship on aquatic issues between the pool programmer and the Supervisor of Aquatics should be established.

STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION

Aquatic clubs, Community Associations, various staff groups as well as CUPE 15 have been asked to comment on the Task Force’s recommendation. For the most part, the feedback has been supportive and positive. In addition, a number of stakeholders have expressed interest in serving on an aquatics advisory committee.

Concerns raised through the consultation process were relatively minor: standardizing admission rates (Killarney is higher); lower the age qualifier for senior's rates; further defining guarding and staffing ratios. A number of these issues could be forwarded to the proposed aquatic advisory committee for comment or review.

SUMMARY

Staff recommend approving the Policy – Priority of Use for Indoor Pools as well as endorse the other recommendations contained in the Final Report of the Aquatics Program Review (Appendix A) as a framework for the operation of the Board's indoor pools.

Implementing this policy and these recommendations will assist in ensuring that aquatic programs and facilities are operated in an equitable, cost effective and fiscally sustainable manner as well as meet the performance objectives of the 2002 Aquatic Services Review (increase of 70% in pool usage with a focus on recreational swimming).

The Aquatic Program Review represents an impressive process of involving stakeholders in policy and operational decisions. Staff would like to thank the various representatives for volunteering to serve on the Task Force.

Prepared by:

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