



VANCOUVER AQUATICS STRATEGY & BLUE FLAG

Report Back

Regular Board Meeting
Monday, January 18, 2021



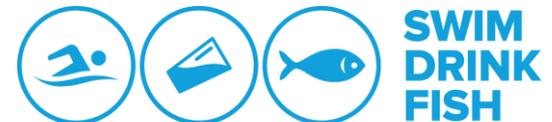
Purpose of Presentation

The purpose of this presentation is to provide additional program and financial information for Blue Flag certification in response to the motion titled “Vancouver Aquatics Strategy & Blue Flag” that was referred to staff on December 7, 2020.



Background – Blue Flag Certification

- Blue Flag is an internationally recognized program for beaches, boats, and marinas that offers tourism promotion value;
- To qualify for Blue Flag certification, applicants pay an annual fee and meet a series of environmental, educational, safety, and accessibility criteria that have been set by Denmark-based non-profit Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE);
- Since 2020, Blue Flags in Canada are administered on FEE's behalf by Swim Drink Fish (SDF), a non-profit organization working to connect people with water.
- In 2020, Canada had 29 Blue Flag beaches and 9 marinas; none west of Ontario; 3 previously certified in Manitoba chose not to renew.



- Blue Flag certification for Park Board beaches has been considered multiple times:
 - 2014 - a Board motion requested a feasibility study to identify potential beaches and marinas for Blue Flag certification;
 - 2015 - in a Board memo reporting back on the motion, staff outlined the estimated capital investments and ongoing operating costs that would be required to obtain and maintain certification; in recognition of the associated costs and staff resources required, and that Vancouver's beaches already had a favourable reputation, staff recommended monitoring for future consideration;
 - 2017 & 2019 - staff reconsidered following approval of the Biodiversity Strategy (2016), and then again as part of the OnWater Strategy (2019). In both cases, it was determined that Blue Flag certification was found to have limited benefits to the Park Board and beach users, so not pursued or included in policy.

- To achieve certification, a Park Board beach would need to meet 33 criteria set out by the Blue Flag program (only during the 4-month swimming season).
- According to discussions with SDF:
 - most criteria would already be met at most Vancouver beaches through the Park Board's current activities;
 - a few others would require additional steps and costs before certification could be achieved;
 - there is a sponsor offer to assist with implementation costs.
- The criteria are broken down into four categories:
 1. Environmental Education and Information;
 2. Water Quality;
 3. Environmental Management; and
 4. Safety and Services

In considering potential beaches for Blue Flag certification

- English Bay is part of the recently-initiated West End Waterfront Master Plan;
- Kitsilano Beach has had the most recent water quality closures per Vancouver Coastal Health guidelines;
- Jericho, Spanish Banks, and Locarno have single access chairs, but not mobility access mats.

Blue Flag Certification - Cost Estimates (Year 1)



Item	Implementation Costs (Year 1)	Staffing Costs	SDF Contribution (potential/proposed)
Application	\$1,650	\$1,200	
Environmental Education & Information (Criteria 1-6)	\$9,500	\$1,380	\$2,100
Water quality (Criteria 7-11)			\$1,800
Environmental Management (Criteria 12-26)	\$8,000	\$12,220	
Safety and Services (Criteria 27-33)	\$7,500	\$4,200	
Total	\$26,650	\$19,000	\$3,900

Total Estimated Year 1 Cost to Park Board: \$45,650

- The Blue Flag program has been considered before and was not included in Biodiversity Strategy, On Water, or VanPlay as it was determined that our environmental goals could be better achieved through other initiatives;
- In order to apply and meet minimum criteria, Park Board staff resources would need to be shifted from other projects, with limited tangible advancement of environmental objectives, increased safety, accessibility, or water quality improvements

- Water Quality, Environment, and Safety objectives of the program are priority for all parties.
- Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh are invested in sustaining the land and water, and well positioned to set priorities based on their expertise and ancestral ties to the land and water.
- Park Board can achieve an enhanced understanding of land and water-based matters by recognizing and respecting MST leadership, knowledge and concerns.
- To address water quality on beaches and more broadly, there could be a future cross-departmental (with City), intergovernmental effort to determine priorities and take action.

- Potential confusion among the public about water quality as Vancouver Coastal Health testing and advice will take priority:
 - Beaches will still be closed intermittently in the summer due to water quality issues;
 - Blue Flag flying juxtaposed against water quality advisory signage may cause swimmers to be confused.

- The Park Board appreciates that its current beach management practices meet internationally recognized certification criteria;
- Increased monitoring, understanding of sensitive nearshore habitats, and reducing dog activity on beaches could all be done respecting MST expertise, without establishing the Blue Flag required beach / park management committees;
- Vancouver beaches already enjoy an exceptional reputation and high visitation by locals and tourists through the swimming season.



Moved by Comr. Demers

Seconded by Comr. Irwin

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Vancouver Park Board direct staff to write to Swim Drink Fish to express our appreciation for their offer to assist with the Blue Flag award application process for the 2021 season, which included potential donor funding to cover some of the costs, and to advise that while pursuing this initiative is not aligned with our current service plan priorities and commitments to ongoing Reconciliation work, the Park Board looks forward to other collaborative opportunities to promote environmental stewardship and support our water quality goals.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

