



October 11, 2023

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Jay Deo – Manager, Recreation Services, City-Wide

SUBJECT : **Outdoor Pools Reservation System - Board Briefing Memo**

Dear Commissioners,

This memo provides the Board with an update on the reservation system for outdoor pools and a brief summary of the 2023 outdoor pool season.

Overall, the 2023 outdoor pool season was successful. Although staffing availability challenges persist, there was increased use based on available staff. The warm weather in July through September created high demand for Park Board beaches and pools, serving as effective cooling options for many patrons throughout the summer.

Highlights of the season included staff successfully supporting the Alcohol in Beaches pilot, opening Kits Pool for nearly a full season (after closure due to major maintenance), and staff working collectively with Parks to manage the drum circle events at Third Beach safely.

Background

Broadly, the principles that guide operational decisions for Outdoor Pools are equity, access, safety, participation, experience, and diversity of programming.

Since 2018, Outdoor Aquatic Services has been exploring ways to address ongoing operational challenges at high-demand Park Board outdoor pools while considering the above principles.

Operational challenges outlined by staff and patron feedback include lengthy in-person queueing, warm weather impacts during queues, and diversifying patron access due to extended stays for those admitted.

On warm weather days, resulting in lengthy delays for entry, staff also observe more incidents of patron heat exhaustion, anger and violence outbreaks, and aggressive and disrespectful behaviour towards Park Board staff.

The pandemic accelerated the introduction of a reservation system at outdoor pools, which staff feel supports improvements around many of the current operational challenges.

Reservation System Feedback and Response

Since implementing the reservation system, patron feedback has varied. Patrons have expressed concerns about:

- reduced session times vs full-day access;
- accessibility of the reservation system;
- lack of in and out privileges;
- queuing in line



Staff's rationale for implementing the new reservation system supports the following benefits:

- reducing in-person queuing; entry via reservations is typically processed within 10 to 30 seconds, whereas no reservations usually take 1 to 4 minutes per client due to payment processing.;
- reducing the probability of volatile patron behaviour towards others and staff due to faster queues, especially during warmer weather;
- Increasing and diversifying access to Park Board outdoor pools by creating session times (i.e. 2.5 hours vs staying all day);
- allowing patrons to guarantee access while still having a drop-in option;
- maintaining safe lifeguard/patron ratios to comply with 2021 Lifesaving Society of Canada recommendations for Park Board outdoor pools;
- maintaining facility cleanliness by providing time between sessions to "reset" the facility

Based on the above patron feedback, staff are looking to improve the reservation system by:

- Increasing educational campaigns for the reservation process;
- Advertising the phone reservation option;
- Reviewing in/out privilege process and feasibility;
- Reviewing signage and queuing process to improve communication and education

Reservation System Key Data

For the 259,253 visits that occurred at the outdoor pools in 2023, the outdoor pool reservation system currently allows:

- 80% of space to be reserved for drop-in three days in advance
- 20% of space available for drop-in registration

As a sample, Kits Pool in 2023 had the following reservation spots filled:

Date Range	Days	Reservation %
May-August	All days	92%
July-August	All days	116%
July-August	Weekends (Saturday/Sunday)	169%

Note - Drop-in capacity can exceed 100% if staff draw from unused reservation spots, allowing patrons to enter if some leave during a session, if there is capacity in the water as some are attending but not swimming, or if we have more than expected staff to allocate.

- Reservation spots fully utilized across all pools: 72%

Note - Reservations fully utilized represent out of all reservation drop-in spots allocated to reserve advance (all facilities, dates, and times), 72% out of 100% are reserved.



What Is Important About This Data?

- There are diverse registration options for patrons, providing for accessible participation;
- Outdoor pools have high attendance throughout the summer, especially on weekends or when the weather is more favourable (July/August). Reservations ensure patrons don't queue for a prolonged period in warmer weather;
- Reservations are almost always fully utilized, showing the demand and adoption for the system, especially during warmer weather;
- Total visits at outdoor pools have declined in 2023 vs. 2019. Resulting factors include new lifeguard-to-patron ratios and lack of staffing impacting capacity and operating hours.

Summary

Vancouver outdoor pools create a unique environment, providing destination locations that attract participants locally and internationally.

The reservation system allows patrons to quickly and efficiently enter these high-demand facilities while diversifying access so more patrons can benefit from Park Board outdoor pools.

Staff focus for the 2024 season is on improving awareness of the reservation system and implementing trend-based adjustments that further enhance patron experience. Outdoor Aquatic Services continues to work internally and with partners across the sector to address overall staffing constraints, which are consistent industry-wide. Increased staffing availability and staff will increase reservations and drop-in slots, alleviating some patron concerns about the system.

Additionally, a recreation-wide services internal program audit is underway to evaluate how staff can best deliver Park Board recreation programs and services. An audit outcome will likely focus on gathering qualitative patron experience feedback (including registration processes), allowing for consistent data collection and review from a wide scope of outdoor pool users.

Staff will review current and future feedback trends to adjust processes to support providing the best patron experience to those attending outdoor pools.

Regards,

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