



June 24, 2025

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : General Manager, Board of Parks and Recreation

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

Dear Commissioners,

With outdoor pool season in full swing following the opening of Kits Pool this past weekend, concerns regarding the reservation approach to swim slots continue to be received.

While many point to COVID as the reason for the change to the reservation model, staff note observations going back to 2018 necessitating a review of our pool access processes in order to better support equitable and safe use of these facilities. The key changes that were implemented included the shift to a primarily reservation-based system (roughly 80% of supply allocated to reservations, and the remaining 20% for drop-in), and to defined swim session lengths.

While we appreciate this access policy isn't preferred by all swim users, staff note that it has been accepted and appreciated by most, and we do continue to adjust to feedback received – of note, early morning length swims have been increased from 45 to 90 minutes and public swims from 1.5 hours to 2.5 hours.

The below provides a summary of what necessitated these changes, the benefits we've realized, and other considerations.

What Made the Change Necessary

- **Inequitable access under first-come, first-served model**
 - Early arrivals often stayed for long periods, limiting access for others throughout the day.
 - Residents without schedule flexibility—such as families, seniors, or those relying on transit—were disadvantaged.
- **Health and safety concerns during heat events**
 - Long outdoor lineups (often several hours) during high temperatures resulted in heat-related first aid incidents and safety risks for patrons. Higher temperature days have also proven to generate the highest demand for access, exacerbating this issue.
- **Operational inefficiencies and public dissatisfaction**
 - Uncertainty about entry discouraged some residents from attempting to attend.
 - Parking expenses incurred without guarantee of pool access.
 - Operations were unable to adjust staff operations to right size for weather or other factors as there was limited ability to predict drop in demand.

Benefits of the Reservation System

- **Improved safety and health outcomes**
 - Significant reduction in heat-related incidents due to elimination of extended outdoor waiting.
- **Greater predictability for users**
 - Residents can confirm access before travelling or paying for parking. This is particularly beneficial for residents travelling further to this destination pool.
 - Supports planning for families and individuals with limited flexibility.
- **Increased turnover and equitable access**
 - Time-limited sessions encourage turnover, allowing more people to access the pools each day.
- **Drop-in access still available**
 - 20% of each session's capacity is held for drop-in users.
 - In 2024, only two days saw 100% reservation bookings across all sessions, indicating availability during most time slots.

Remaining Challenges & Considerations

- **Reduced overall capacity due to health regulations**
 - BC Health Act and Lifesaving Society revisions lowered the lifeguard-to-swimmer ratio from 1:100 to 1:60. This has reduced the number of swimmers that can be safely accommodated per session.
- **Peak time limitations**
 - High-demand sessions—especially during heat waves—do fill quickly, limiting access for spontaneous visits.
- **Ongoing public feedback and adaptation needs**
 - While most users report satisfaction with the system, we continue to monitor usage trends and adjust operations as needed to improve accessibility.

We do believe there remains enough flexibility in the system for individuals who prefer the drop in approach. In 2024, only two days saw 100% reservation bookings across all sessions. Typically, it takes a day or two for the most popular time slots (noon and 3pm) to sell out, with the exception being in cases of known hot weather forecasts.

Lastly, outdoor pools remain one of the most subsidized user-fee based services offered by the Park Board (fees recover ~40% of direct costs of operation). Through the reservation and time slot system, more users have been able to access the pool, resulting in increased revenues and reducing the overall burden on taxpayers – this aligns with the Park Board's [Comprehensive Fee-](#)



[setting Framework](#), which takes a benefits-based approach to user fees on a continuum based on who benefits.

We remain committed to providing safe, equitable, and enjoyable access to outdoor aquatic facilities and will continue evaluating the system to best meet the needs of all Vancouver residents.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "SJ" followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

Steve Jackson

General Manager, Board of Parks and Recreation – Vancouver Parks and Recreation

Copy to: PB Leadership Team
PB Communications
City Manager's Office