



July 17, 2018

MEMO TO : Sadhu Johnston
City Manager, City of Vancouver

FROM : Malcolm Bromley
General Manager, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **Swimming in False Creek**

Dear Sadhu,

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with an update on the quick start initiative to assess the feasibility of swimming in False Creek.

Background

In June 2017, City Council passed a motion that seeks to make the water in False Creek swimmable by summer of 2018. In response Vancouver Park Board staff have launched a quick start initiative to investigate the feasibility of offering a swimming activation in False Creek and after a high level review of potential locations, have identified the harbour at David Lam Park as a high potential site for activation, either for public swimming or as an aquatic playground.

Location

David Lam Park is located in Downtown Vancouver on the north side of False Creek, opposite Charleson Park. The proposed location is approximately 9000m² in size and falls within two water lots on the south side of the park in central False Creek. The proposed location is sheltered from the busy False Creek vessel traffic and features comparatively favorable water currents compared to east False Creek. The proposed location and swimming activation area is outlined on Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Physical location for the proposed swimming activation.



Project Approach

At present, there is one designated swimming beach, Sunset Beach, located at the mouth of False Creek. Prior to the activation of an additional swimming site within False Creek, several factors must be addressed given the area's historic and current uses and legal framework.

Staff have launched a multi-phased project that will evaluate the feasibility of a swimming activation at the proposed location. The scope of the project includes: a comprehensive water quality assessment; a comprehensive site safety and feasibility assessment that considers all site factors in addition to regulatory and licensing approvals; as well as a determination of onshore amenities and ongoing operational services needed to support a swimming activation.

Water Quality Assessment

Metro Vancouver conducts regular water quality sampling in False Creek as part of the Lower Mainland beach sampling program. Determinations of whether water quality is suitable for designated uses (e.g., swimming, paddling, etc.) are made by Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH). VCH has advised that they would not be supportive of any swimming activation in east False Creek given the results of the current water quality sampling program.

Regarding the proposed swimming activation at David Lam Park in central False Creek, VCH has advised that while potentially possible, they do not support a 2018 beach swimming activation given the need for further assessment. In particular, they advise that additional water quality data is needed at the proposed site during the summer swimming season over a 2-3 year timeframe in order for a proper determination to be made.

Staff have worked with VCH to develop an appropriate site-specific assessment study, including additional on-site sampling, and this work is currently underway. Should the initial 1-2 years of summer sampling produce favorable results; staff will retain a consultant to conduct a comprehensive site safety and feasibility assessment.

Site Safety Feasibility Assessment

The scope of the study will include a detailed safety and feasibility assessment, including recommended mitigation measures for reducing risk across multiple components including: a hydrographic/bathymetric survey; an environmental impact evaluation; an impact assessment of the City of Vancouver Engineering Department's sea water intake for the nearby fire suppression system; and an archeological review. Other considerations will include access and on-shore amenities; licensing and permitting; operational requirements; and all other pertinent factors in order to develop concepts for a range of swimming activation possibilities.

The consultant will be provided with the results of the water quality risk assessment for inclusion into their overall safety analysis. The resulting study will make recommendations for the most suitable option for a swimming activation in False Creek and will develop design drawings and outline an implementation plan including a high level budget and schedule.

Based on a preliminary review of the site, the following three options have been identified as possible activation options for review by the consultant in the site safety feasibility assessment.



Option 1 - Swim area demarcated with buoy line (without in water structures)

This option represents a basic swim area, delineated by a buoy line that would enable public swimming in the area.

Option 2 - Swim area with raft(s) and/or/ dock(s)

This option aims to design a focal point for swimming through in-water structures such as rafts or docks that offer relaxation opportunities to bathers. Beach rafts that are deployed seasonally at Kitsilano, Jericho and Locarno beaches are an example of this type of activation. This option will also require an anchoring system, which is typically made up of lock-blocks that sit on the seabed. The consultant will review existing City and Park Board infrastructure and assets to determine if they can be used or repurposed for the new activation.

Option 3 - Water Playground

There is an interest in offering a water playground feature at this location in order to provide a unique outdoor attraction not available elsewhere in the Vancouver area. To that end, staff have initiated a discussion with Wibit Canada, a water playground structure vendor. This option will require a comprehensive anchoring system on the seabed. The consultant will work closely with the vendors to determine the feasibility of acquiring and using a water playground product at this location.

Licensing and Regulatory Approvals

False Creek is a very busy waterway and in high demand for use and navigation by many recreational and commercial users. The water lots in the proposed location shown in Figure 1 are leased by Concord Pacific Developments, and staff are currently in discussions with the company to access this location for recreational water activity.

Staff have initiated discussion with Transport Canada and will work with the consultant to obtain the appropriate permit approvals contingent on the recommended option proposed for a swimming activation. In 2008, the Boating Restrictions Regulations that applied to False Creek were replaced by Vessel Operation Restriction Regulations (VORR). In 2009, Transport Canada, Marine Branch Pacific Region and the City entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that allows the City to administer and enforce the VORR to improve safety and to ensure unrestricted access to all users of False Creek. It is anticipated that any long term swimming activation in False Creek would require a VORR application, which is expected to take between 2-3 years.

Next Steps

Due to the comprehensive nature of the data collection phase recommended by VCH, staff will pursue water column data collection in the summer of 2018 and 2019. If favorable results are received from these samples, staff will initiate the site safety and feasibility assessment study targeted for the fall of 2019. An update will be planned for winter 2020.

Park Board staff will continue to explore additional options for swimming activations in and around Vancouver, including False Creek, through VanSplash – Vancouver’s Aquatic Strategy. The purpose of VanSplash is to develop a 25 year vision and implementation plan for all aquatic services. This also includes innovative approaches for new outdoor facilities, such as natural



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pools or urban ocean swimming, as well as enhancing services at beaches, wading pools, and spray parks. Phases 1- 3 of the strategy are complete and in the coming months, Park Board staff will be creating an external, citywide advisory committee to assist in reviewing the strategy before bringing it back to the Park Board for decision in 2019.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Malcolm Bromley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Malcolm Bromley
General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

si/rm/clc

Copy to: PB Senior Leadership Team
PB Communications