



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee **Date:** March 21, 2024

From: Keith Miller, Director, Recreation and Sport Services **File:** 11-7143-01/2024-Vol 01

Re: **Aquatics Instructor and Lifeguard Subsidy Program Update**

Staff Recommendations

1. That a subsidy program for aquatics instructors and lifeguards, as outlined in the report titled "Aquatics Instructor and Lifeguard Subsidy Program Update", dated March 21, 2024, from the Director, Recreation and Sport Services, be endorsed; and
2. That a one-time additional level request to continue the subsidy program for aquatics instructors and lifeguards be considered in the 2025 budget process.

Keith Miller
 Director, Recreation and Sport Services
 (604-247-4475)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Finance Department	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Community Social Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Human Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

At the Regular Council meeting held on October 11, 2022, Council endorsed the following resolutions:

That a subsidy program for lifeguard training courses be developed on a trial basis as outlined in the staff report titled “Instructor/Lifeguard Recruitment Initiatives”; and

That \$33,750 be allocated from the Council Contingency account for the lifeguard subsidy program.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the impact of the trial and to seek Council’s approval for the continuation of the aquatics instructor and lifeguard subsidy program.

This report supports Council’s Strategic Plan 2022–2026, Focus Area #6 A Vibrant, Resilient and Active Community:

Vibrant, resilient and active communities supported by a wide variety of opportunities to get involved, build relationships and access resources.

6.1 Advance a variety of program, services, and community amenities to support diverse needs and interests and activate the community.

6.3 Foster intercultural harmony, community belonging, and social connections.

6.4 Support vulnerable populations through collaborative and sustainable programs and services.

This report supports the Recreation and Sport Strategy 2019–2024, Focus Area #6 Community Capacity Building:

Collaborations, partnerships and volunteerism are strengthened to expand the reach and impact of recreation and sport in Richmond.

6. Develop and implement career awareness, preparation and development strategies to attract and educate new leaders.

This report also supports the 2021–2031 Collaborative Action Plan to Reduce and Prevent Poverty in Richmond, Strategic Direction #1 Reduce and Prevent Poverty:

1.4 Expand work experience, mentorship, and upskilling opportunities for residents at risk of or living in poverty

Background

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City experienced a shortage of lifeguards and swimming instructors (lifeguards). This was largely a result of reduced training and certification courses being offered during that time. One of several initiatives implemented to increase access

to qualified lifeguard candidates was the introduction of a subsidy program for Richmond residents who face financial barriers to completing the training required to become a lifeguard.

Becoming a lifeguard involves extensive training and successful completion of several courses in lifesaving, lifeguarding, first aid and swimming instruction. The maximum time commitment to complete all courses required to become a lifeguard is currently 180 hours, at a total estimated cost of \$2,500. As the courses are progressive and taken in sequence, the cumulative training typically takes three to six months on average to complete.

Aquatics Instructor and Lifeguard Subsidy Program Trial

The “Instructor/Lifeguard Subsidy Program” (the Program) trial was launched in May of 2023 to address the lifeguard shortage by enabling Richmond residents from low-income households to pursue a career as an aquatics instructor or lifeguard. The Program aligns with the criteria used by the City’s Recreation Fee Subsidy Program to assess financial need. Once approved, the Program provides each candidate with a 90 per cent subsidy for each course.

In addition to being a Richmond resident, applicants must meet the following criteria to be eligible for the Program:

- Financial eligibility requirements that align with the Recreation Fee Subsidy Program;
- Successfully completes an in-person swim assessment, including:
 - Evaluation of swimming strokes and fitness, and;
 - Ability to swim 400 metres continuously using recognizable swimming strokes;
- Demonstrates motivation and commitment to completing all training courses required to become an aquatics instructor or lifeguard; and
- Demonstrates interest in a career or position in aquatics.

In addition to the financial screening and skills assessment, each applicant is interviewed to determine their suitability and commitment to completing the required courses. Once approved, staff monitor the candidates throughout their participation, and all graduates are given a job interview and considered for a position in aquatics with the City of Richmond.

The Program is being promoted on the City’s website, to Recreation Fee Subsidy Program participants, at the Community Services Pop Ups, and through community organizations, including Richmond School District No. 38.

Aquatics Instructor and Lifeguard Subsidy Program Trial Results

A program of this nature has a limited target audience and, as already noted, takes time, extensive effort and commitment to complete. Since its launch last May, the Program trial has yielded favourable results, as listed in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1: Subsidy Program Trial Results – May 2023 to March 2024

Subsidy Program Trial Results	
Total No. of Applicants	20
No. of Applicants Approved	16
No. of Applicants Under Review	0
No. of Candidates in Program	13
No. of Candidates Completed Program	3
No. of Candidates Hired	2*
Total Spent to Date	\$11,600
Total Projected Cost (to December 31, 2024)	\$14,000
Total Estimated Cost for Current Candidates	\$25,600

*One additional candidate is currently going through the hiring process.

The results indicate that there is interest in the Program and, while preliminary, it is anticipated that most, if not all, candidates completing the Program will be offered employment with the City.

Proposed Continuation of the Aquatics Instructor and Lifeguard Subsidy Program

Due to the success of the trial and continued interest in the Program, it is recommended that the City continue this initiative through 2025, in accordance with the following eligibility criteria:

- Applicants must meet financial eligibility requirements that align with the Recreation Fee Subsidy Program;
- Applicants must successfully complete an in-person swim assessment, including:
 - Evaluation of swimming strokes and fitness; and
 - Ability to swim 400 metres continuously using recognizable swimming strokes;
- Applicants must demonstrate motivation and commitment to completing all training courses required to become an aquatics instructor or lifeguard; and
- Applicants must demonstrate interest in a career or position in aquatics with the City of Richmond.

Upon approval and acceptance into the Program, the following conditions will apply:

- Candidates will be provided a 90 per cent subsidy on courses required for employment as an aquatics instructor and lifeguard with the City; and
- Candidates must complete the required training within 18 months of approval.

Furthermore, staff recommend a limit of 20 candidates per year, as this is a number we anticipate being able to provide employment for. If approved, staff will continue to review and evaluate the impacts of the Program over the next 18 months, including an assessment of future staffing needs in Aquatics, as well as emerging staffing needs in other areas of the City.

While there is no longer a critical shortage of trained lifeguards in British Columbia, the City of Richmond continues to be in need of additional aquatics instructors and lifeguards. To that end, there is proven interest in the Program and continued investment in training for those that would not otherwise be able to afford it, thus increasing the City’s access to committed and trained aquatics professionals. The Program aligns with several Council approved strategies, including

the Recreation and Sport Strategy (2019–2024), and the 2021–2031 Collaborative Action Plan to Reduce and Prevent Poverty in Richmond.

Lifeguarding is an exciting job that promotes teamwork, develops leadership and communication skills, and encourages fitness and well being. It is a position that requires skill, commitment and extensive training, and comes with flexible employment. Lifeguarding can be considered as a career option, or as excellent training for careers in a variety of fields including local government, education, firefighting, or health care.

Financial Impact

There are enough funds remaining from the previously approved allocation from the Council Contingency account for the Program through 2024.

Operational costs for the Program are projected to be \$45,000 in 2025. Upon Council endorsement to continue the subsidy program, a one-time additional level of \$45,000 to support the Program costs beyond 2024 will be submitted for consideration with the 2025 budget process.

Conclusion

A subsidy program for aquatics instructors and lifeguards has proven to be of interest to residents of Richmond. An ongoing commitment to the Program will provide significant financial support for residents from low income households to attain the training required to achieve meaningful employment as a lifeguard. Furthermore, the Program will support the recruitment of aquatics instructors and lifeguards by providing the City with a greater number of committed and trained professionals to support the delivery of quality aquatic services across the City.



Kirsten Close
Manager, Aquatics and Community Wellness
604-238-8041