



**To:** Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services  
Committee

**Date:** April 2, 2026

**From:** Keith Miller  
Director, Recreation and Sport Services

**File:** 11-7125-01/2025-Vol  
01

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

**Staff Recommendation**

That the report titled “Aquatics Instructor and Lifeguard Subsidy Program Update”, dated April 2, 2026, from the Director, Recreation and Sport Services, be received for information.

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

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

## Staff Report

### Origin

At the Regular Council meeting held on October 11, 2022, Council approved the following motion:

1. *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," dated September 2, 2022, from the Director, Recreation and Sport Services; and*
2. *That \$33,750 be allocated from the Council Contingency account for the lifeguard subsidy program as outlined in the staff report titled "Instructor/Lifeguard Recruitment Initiatives," dated September 2, 2022, from the Director, Recreation and Sport Services.*

At the Regular Council meeting held on May 13, 2024, Council approved the following motion:

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.*

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the aquatics instructor and lifeguard subsidy program (the Program).

### Background

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City experienced a shortage of lifeguards and swimming instructors (lifeguards), largely due to the reduced availability of training and certification courses during that time. In addition, many existing lifeguards moved on to other careers. One of several recruitment initiatives implemented to increase access to qualified lifeguard candidates was the introduction of the Program to support Richmond residents facing financial barriers in 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.

The Program trial was launched in May 2023, to enable Richmond residents from low-income households to obtain relevant training to pursue a career as a lifeguard. Additional funding was approved by Council in March 2024, to continue the Program past the trial period.

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 City’s Recreation Fee Subsidy Program;
- 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;
- Demonstrate motivation and commitment to completing all training courses required to become an aquatics instructor or lifeguard; and
- Demonstrate interest in a career or position in aquatics with the City.

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, the Program provides each candidate with a 90 per cent subsidy for each required course. Staff monitor the candidates throughout their participation, and all graduates are provided with the opportunity to apply for a position in Aquatics with the City.

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

**Analysis**

While the Program has been actively promoted, implemented and administered since its launch in 2023, overall outcomes to date have been limited, as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Subsidy Program Results – May 2023 to June 2026

Subsidy Program Results	
Total No. of Applicants	70
No. of Applicants Approved	53
No. of Candidates Withdrawn	13
No. of Candidates Active	17
No. of Candidates Completed	23
No. of Candidates Applied for Employment	16
No. of Candidates Hired	10

Over the three-year period, the number of applications indicates sustained interest among eligible Richmond residents; however, the Program has yielded only modest progress toward its objective of increasing the supply of qualified lifeguard candidates to support the City’s recruitment needs.

A program of this nature requires significant time, effort and commitment from participants. The Program was designed to provide a supportive pathway for external candidates requiring financial assistance to obtain required aquatic certifications and transition into City employment. However, results indicate attrition at multiple stages: some candidates withdrew before

completing courses, and others did not proceed to apply for City employment after completion. In total, 13 candidates withdrew for reasons such as scheduling conflicts, changes in personal availability, or lack of interest or commitment.

Of the 23 candidates who completed the program, 16 applied for employment with the City and progressed through the recruitment process. Ten candidates were hired, which resulted in three Instructor/Lifeguards, as well as five Aquatic Attendants, and two Swimming Instructors due to minimum age and training requirements. One of the candidates who was hired is no longer employed with the City. Additionally, candidates hired through the Program have only moderately contributed to addressing critical scheduling gaps, thereby reducing the Program's overall effectiveness in meeting operational staffing needs.

In addition to these considerations, subsidized aquatic training and certification are no longer required to address aquatic instructor and lifeguard recruitment needs. As the City is no longer experiencing a lifeguard shortage, Aquatics hiring needs have stabilized and pre-pandemic staffing levels have been exceeded.

The Council-appointed Aquatic Advisory Board (Board) discussed the future of the Program at their meeting held on March 17, 2026. The Board unanimously supported the conclusion of the Program noting that although it has provided opportunities for some Richmond residents to access subsidized lifeguard training, alternative recruitment strategies are no longer necessary. As such, the Program will be concluded at the end of the year. The Board encouraged staff to keep them apprised of lifeguard labour market conditions and, if required, would consider recommending the reinstatement of the Program to address aquatics hiring needs.

### **Financial Impact**

Funding for the Program, totaling \$78,750, was approved in two stages: \$33,750 in October 2022, from the Council Contingency account, and \$45,000 as a one-time additional level in the 2025 Operating Budget. This funding is anticipated to be fully utilized by the end of the Spring 2026 season.

In order to support the 17 currently active candidates to complete the required courses through December 31, 2026, incremental costs of up to \$10,000 will be accommodated within existing operating budgets, and no additional funding is required.

### **Next Steps**

New applications are no longer being accepted and the Program will be concluded by the end of the year. Current active candidates will be permitted to continue completing the required courses through December 31, 2026, to support progression toward potential aquatics employment with the City.

To support a smooth transition, staff will develop and implement a communications plan to inform prospective and current candidates of the Program's conclusion. This will include updates to the City's website and direct communications to active candidates outlining the supports that remain available through 2026.

Additionally, lifeguard labour market conditions and operational indicators will continue to be monitored, and staff will report back to Council should reinstatement of the Program be warranted.

### **Conclusion**

While the Program generated meaningful interest among Richmond residents and helped reduce financial barriers for individuals seeking aquatic training and certifications, overall results and market conditions indicate that an ongoing subsidy initiative is no longer required. Participation and completion have been lower than anticipated, and the number of new hires attributed to the Program has been modest relative to the expenditures. Given these outcomes, the Program will conclude, while continuing to support current active candidates through December 31, 2026, to complete required courses. Staff will focus on alternative recruitment approaches and will continue to monitor aquatics labour market conditions, reporting back to Council should future conditions warrant reconsideration of the Program.



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