



# City of Richmond

## Report to Committee

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

**Date:** September 2, 2022

**From:** Elizabeth Ayers  
Director, Recreation and Sport Services

**File:** 11-7000-01/2022-Vol  
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**Re:** Instructor/Lifeguard Recruitment Initiatives

### Staff Recommendation

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.

Elizabeth Ayers  
Director, Recreation and Sport Services  
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REPORT CONCURRENCE		
<b>ROUTED TO:</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER</b>
Finance	<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 March 29, 2022, Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee meeting staff received the following referral:

1. *That staff look into the training and hiring of more lifeguards and instructors, and creating a program to support the training costs for low-income Richmond people or Richmond youth from low-income families, and report back.*

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 Strategy #4 An Active and Thriving Richmond:

*An active and thriving community characterized by diverse social and wellness programs, services and spaces that foster health and well-being for all.*

*4.1 Robust, affordable, and accessible sport, recreation, wellness and social programs for people of all ages and abilities.*

This report also supports focus area #6 of the City of Richmond's Recreation and Sport Strategy 2019-2024:

*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.*

### Analysis

#### Background

Combined, the four City of Richmond swimming pools have an annual attendance of approximately 880,000 people. In order to operate these pools safely, approximately 300 instructors/lifeguards ("lifeguards") are employed annually. In addition to their responsibilities of keeping patrons safe in the swimming pools, lifeguards provide swimming instruction to approximately 9,700 individuals each year, the majority of which are children. Aquatic staff also support other programs including birthday parties and special events.

There has been an ongoing lifeguard shortage across the country for many years, which was exacerbated by the pandemic due to the lack of training and certification courses being offered. This has forced many municipalities to scale back pool hours and limit the number of lessons available despite pent up demand.

Although faring better than some other lower mainland cities, the lifeguard shortage has also affected Richmond. Staffing shortages have resulted in a limited reduction in operating hours in 2020 to 2021 and the early part of 2022. Currently, staffing shortages are being managed through the use of overtime and by limiting the availability of some water features to specified times. Importantly, there has been an ongoing reduction in the number of children's swimming lessons

being offered in City swimming pools since they re-opened in 2020 and this reduction continues today.

### Ongoing Initiatives

There is no single solution to the lifeguard shortage, time to recover from the pandemic period will help, however staff believe a multi-pronged approach is required. Two initiatives that are already in progress and providing some relief are as follows:

#### *Increased training opportunities*

In 2021, a total of 176 Instructor/Lifeguard training courses were offered in Richmond pools and in 2022 a total of 226 courses have been offered to date which represents a 20% increase in the number of courses offered over 2019. Staff have actively recruited 96 new instructors/lifeguards from these courses in 2021 and 2022. So long as there is sufficient demand for the courses, staff will continue with this initiative.

#### *Creation of new aquatic positions*

Staff have identified two opportunities to address the shortage of staff through the creation of new auxiliary job positions. These positions will perform work currently provided by lifeguards, and will be accommodated within existing budget allocations.

The first position is a Swimming Instructor. Currently, Richmond requires all instructors/lifeguards to teach swimming lessons as well as perform the duties of a lifeguard. This new Swimming Instructor position will appeal to individuals who are either not interested in lifeguarding and only want to teach swimming lessons, or allow an individual who has completed their swimming instructor certifications to start working while continuing with their lifeguard courses.

The second position is an Aquatic Attendant. The primary function for this entry-level position will be to operate the waterslides at Watermania and South Arm Pool, as well as perform the functions of an activity leader for birthday parties and special events. This position will appeal to individuals who have completed their lifesaving courses but have not yet completed their instructor or lifeguard certifications. It will allow individuals to start working while continuing with their lifeguard and swim instructor courses and will also provide them valuable experience for training as a lifeguard.

### Instructor/Lifeguard Course Subsidy Program

In addition to the initiatives listed above and in response to the Council referral, staff are proposing to create a subsidy program for lifeguard training courses to allow select individuals from low-income households to pursue a career or a position as a lifeguard. This initiative would operate on a one-year trial basis, which would allow staff time to evaluate the effectiveness and viability of the program.

Becoming a lifeguard requires extensive training and successful completion of several courses in lifesaving, lifeguarding, first aid and swimming instruction. The time commitment for the courses is 165 hours at a total cost of approximately \$2,500 which can be a barrier to individuals, particularly those from low-income households.

Under the guidelines of the Recreation Fee Subsidy Program (RFSP), residents who qualify based on their financial situation receive a 90% discount on registered programs up to a maximum of \$300 per year in subsidy for children and youth (18 years and under) and up to a maximum of \$100 per year in subsidy for adults and seniors (19 years and over). As the RFSP is intended to support participation in “basic recreation” activities, advanced courses, such as lifeguard training courses, are ineligible under the current guidelines for the RFSP subsidy.

The Instructor/Lifeguard Course Subsidy Program proposes to subsidize eligible Richmond applicants up to 90% of the total course fees of \$2,500. The estimated annual cost to provide subsidy to 15 individuals would be \$33,750. The Instructor/Lifeguard Course Subsidy Program application would align its financial criteria and administrative practices with the RFSP to ensure a consistent approach between the two programs.

In addition to the financial screening, the Instructor/Lifeguard Course Subsidy Program would also include an applicant interview to determine suitability and commitment of eligible applicants to completing all of the required courses. Staff will monitor the successful applicants throughout their participation in the program and all graduates will be given an interview and considered for an instructor/lifeguard position with the City of Richmond.

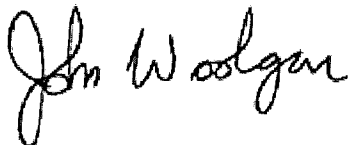
Staff would report back to Council in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2023 to provide an update on the impact of the trial.

### **Financial Impact**

The cost to subsidize lifeguard training courses for low-income Richmond residents on a one year trial basis for 2022/2023 will be \$33,750. The proposed funding source for this initiative is the Council Contingency account.

### **Conclusion**

Richmond swimming pools provide enormous benefits to residents including exercise, leisure play, social connectivity as well as teaching children how to swim. To address the lifeguard shortage, staff are developing additional strategies that will attract new instructors/lifeguards to maintain service levels in the pools. The process to become an instructor/lifeguard takes considerable time and money to complete all of the necessary courses, which can be a barrier to those individuals who may not have the financial ability to pay for the courses. The addition of a subsidy program will be an important component in attracting additional staff to the profession and ensure Richmond continues to meet the aquatic needs of the general public.



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