

DATE OF MEETING FEBRUARY 24, 2021

AUTHORED BY LYNN WARK, DIRECTOR, RECREATION AND CULTURE  
PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE

SUBJECT LEAP PROGRAM REVIEW – PHASES 1 AND 2

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To provide the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness with the results of Phases 1 and 2 of the Leisure Economic Access Policy (LEAP) program review.

### **Recommendation**

That the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness receive the information for the LEAP Program Review for Phases 1 and 2 and approve Phase 3 to proceed as outlined.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the 2020-MAR-18 meeting, Council approved a motion to approve a review and update of the Leisure Economic Access Policy (LEAP) program in 2020; and refer the review of the program to the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness (ACAI) to develop recommendations for changes for Council's consideration.

At the 2020-JUL-29 ACAI meeting, Staff presented a phased review process for consideration and the committee passed a motion that the ACAI approves of and conducts the review process, as presented, for the LEAP program.

## **DISCUSSION**

As per the report presented to Finance and Audit Committee at the meeting held 2020-MAR-18, the purpose of the LEAP Program Review is to:

- Assess if the program continues to meet the needs of the community;
- Update the purpose of the program;
- Determine financial criteria for program access;
- Identify barriers to participation;
- Define target populations;
- Determine services to be included and not included;
- Identify financial impact of proposed changes.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE CITY OF NANAIMO'S CURRENT LEAP PROGRAM

The LEAP Program was established in 1993 with the purpose of ensuring that:

*“All citizens of Nanaimo shall have access to programs and services provided by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture, regardless of ability to pay.”*

The program was originally intended to ensure that children from economically disadvantaged families had access to recreation services. Eventually, the program grew to include economically disadvantaged adults to help support an active, healthy lifestyle.

Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements and reside within the City of Nanaimo; the District of Lantzville; or in Electoral Areas A (Cranberry, Cedar, South Wellington); Area B (Gabriola Island); and Area C (Extension, East Wellington).

Financial need is determined according to the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs.

Applicants are required to provide:

- A completed LEAP application
- A Notice of Assessment (NOA) from the previous tax year
- Photo identification
- Proof of Residency
- A T1 General if NOA Line 150 is less than \$9,000
- A Child Tax Benefit Statement
- Other Income Declarations (i.e. child support, investments, rental revenue, etc.)

The program entitles participants to:

- **50 free admissions per year** – valid for public swim / skate sessions, aquafit classes, weight rooms, and/or drop-in sports at Oliver Woods Community Centre.
- **4 program discounts per year** – valid for 50% off, up to a maximum of \$40 per program or Rec Pass
- Free skate and helmet rentals at public skating sessions and lessons

## DECREASE IN PROGRAM USAGE – FROM 2011 TO 2020

The number of applications approved annually has reduced from 2,556 in 2011 to 579 in 2019, representing a 77% decrease in applications.

- Adult admissions: scans decreased from approximately 33,000 to 12,000, representing a 63% decrease in participation
- Child admissions: scans decreased from approximately 15,000 to 2,500, representing an 83% decrease in participation

This downward trend in participation verified the need for a full review to determine if the program continues to meet the needs of the community. Creating a more rigorous application process

may have contributed to a decrease in applications; however, the information gathering phase was designed to determine if there were any other contributing factors.

It is important to note that there are a variety of free and low cost programs, events and services provided by the Recreation and Culture Department. These opportunities provide a much broader range of experiences than the LEAP Program allows for. An inventory of these programs is provided in Attachment A.

The LEAP Program Review consists of four phases: information gathering; information review; a revised program proposal, and the revised program implementation.

Phases 1 and 2, information gathering and information review, are now complete and included a survey of current and past LEAP participants, a review of financial assistance programs from other comparable municipalities, a review of the Phase 1 REIMAGINE Nanaimo survey results, and the provision of some poverty (low income) rates in Nanaimo. This information is presented as follows:

## SURVEY OF LEAP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

In 2019, there were 579 applications approved for the LEAP Program, which provided passes for a total of 765 adults and 235 children. A representative sample size of 10% was selected and 60 telephone surveys were conducted with previous and current program participants (responses outlined on Attachment B).

The survey results indicate that:

- The majority of program participants heard about the program through friends/family, agency referral or the Activity Guide.
- More than half of the people found the application process quick and easy, the other half found it a bit time consuming and had trouble collecting all of the required documentation.
- Cost, physical accessibility, and transportation were the top barriers identified as limiting participation in recreation.
- 98% of the respondents indicated that the program was very/somewhat important to their family.
- The majority of the respondents agreed that the 4 program discounts / year were reasonable, although several commented that they didn't know about the 4 discounted programs/year.
- Overall, respondents indicated that they are grateful for the program but many commented that more than 50 free admissions would be welcomed.

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FROM COMPARATOR MUNICIPALITIES

The following communities were selected to use as comparators with the City of Nanaimo; including, City of Prince George, City of Kamloops, Town of Ladysmith, Regional District of Nanaimo and the City of Victoria (Attachment C).

An analysis of the comparison between communities indicates the following similarities and differences:

	<b>SIMILARITIES WITH MOST COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>DIFFERENCES WITH MOST/SOME COMMUNITIES</b>
Financial Criteria	<p>Family household income must be below the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs (LICOs). A family is defined as <i>“all persons living in the same dwelling and related by blood, marriage, common-law relationships or adoption”</i>.</p> <p>Each person 19 years and older, living in the household, must provide a Notice of Assessment, as the total gross household income is the determining factor for qualification</p>	
Supporting Documentation	<p>Most communities require applicants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apply once/year</li> <li>• provide photo ID</li> <li>• provide proof of residency</li> <li>• provide previous year’s Notice of Assessment</li> </ul>	<p>Nanaimo’s requirements for supporting documentation are more rigorous, also asking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T1 General</li> <li>• Child Benefit Statement</li> <li>• Other income declarations</li> </ul>
Administration		<p>Some communities have referral agencies, or adjudicators, that process applications or support the process of application in some way. Application approval responsibilities vary from front desk staff to dedicated Recreation Program Coordinators, and occur at City Hall or Recreation Centre locations.</p>
Eligibility		<p>Post-secondary students are eligible in some communities and not in others – in Nanaimo they are not eligible.</p>

In relation to the LEAP Program, this information suggests that the City of Nanaimo's program is quite similar to other municipalities and perhaps needs only a few small tweaks to improve delivery.

## PHASE 1 REIMAGINE NANAIMO RESULTS

Preliminary results from the Phase 1 REIMAGINE Nanaimo public engagement surveys indicate that the top four limitations preventing participation in Parks, Recreation and Culture activities are:

1. Time/schedule restraints
2. Lack of, or location of, facilities
3. Cost/fees
4. Lack of information

These restraints seem to be addressed with suggestions for more:

- Drop-in and outdoor experiences
- Amenities within local neighbourhoods
- Access to waterfront activities
- Online presence for classes, networking, and information sharing

All of which would provide opportunities that would more easily fit into busy schedules, be closer to home or accessible from a variety of locations, be free or low cost, and help to share information about the variety of opportunities available.

In relation to the LEAP Program, these results suggest that there are additional ways of removing barriers which can be considered in facility, amenity, program and event planning. As well, it indicates that it may be worthwhile to consider a wider variety of promotional methods for LEAP, and for free and low cost opportunities, including going to where the people are to promote the program.

## POVERTY INFORMATION

According to technical research, for the Vital Signs Report, "there were 17,860 people in the Nanaimo Census Agglomeration living in poverty (based on CFLIM-AT) in 2017" (Technical Research Report, November 2019). Of these, 4,120 were children between 0-17 years, and 2,670 were seniors (65+). Compared with 2012 the number of children living in poverty actually decreased by 12.7% and the number of seniors living in poverty increased by 115.3%. It can be assumed that the remainder of the population living in poverty (11,070) includes adults between the ages of 18-64.

Census data also identifies specific areas with higher rates of children living in poverty, as well as specific populations with higher rates of poverty.

In relation to the LEAP Program, this information confirms that a financial assistance program is still relevant. It also provides important information about target populations and areas that could be addressed in different ways to support awareness of the LEAP Program or, to provide

alternative methods of service provision. Some examples would include partnering with a neighbourhood association to provide a location specific program such as the Harewood Playground Program or, promoting the Community Program Development Grants more that support initiatives such as the Salish Storm Hockey Program. This community development approach to programming could be further developed by the Recreation Coordinator team.

The information collected and reviewed through Phases 1 and 2 will inform Phase 3, which will provide recommendations for program revisions. The financial impact of the program was not touched on in this report. Phase 3 will provide a clear synopsis of the financial impact of any recommended program changes.

Attachment D provides a list of suggestions for program revisions that have already been received from ACAI Committee members and community members. Committee members are welcome to offer more suggestions via discussion following the presentation of this report, or by written submission to the Legislative Services Department by 2021-MAR-15.

These recommendations will be considered for the Phase 3 report which will be brought to the ACAI meeting scheduled for 2021-APR-28. |

## **OPTIONS**

1. That the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness receive the information for the LEAP Program Review for Phases 1 and 2 and approve Phase 3 to proceed as outlined.
  - The advantages of this option: Aligns with the direction given by Council in 2020 and with the review process approved by ACAI at the meeting held 2020-JUL-29.
  - The disadvantages of this option: None.
  - Financial Implications: None.
  
2. That the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness receive the information for the LEAP Program Review for Phases 1 and 2 and recommend a revised process for Phase 3 of the review.
  - The advantages of this option: Aligns with direction given by Council in 2020.
  - The disadvantages of this option: Deviates from the process previously approved by ACAI at the meeting held 2020-JUL-29.
  - Financial Implications: None.

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- Council directed the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness to conduct a review of the Leisure Economic Access Policy (LEAP) Program.
- Phases 1 and 2 of the review are complete and included information gathering and review of current practices; programs in comparator communities; information collected during REIMAGINE Nanaimo Phase 1; a survey of current LEAP pass holders, and the review of some current poverty statistics.
- Information gathered for Phase 1 and 2 of the review will be used to inform Phase 3 which will provide recommendations / options that will ensure the program remains relevant to the community.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

ATTACHMENT A: Inventory of Free & Low Cost Parks, Recreation and Culture Opportunities

ATTACHMENT B: LEAP Program Participant Survey Results

ATTACHMENT C: Review of Financial Assistance Programs from Comparator Municipalities

ATTACHMENT D: Summary of Suggested Revisions for the LEAP Program

#### **Submitted by:**

Lynn Wark  
Director, Recreation and Culture

#### **Concurrence by:**

Richard Harding  
General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Culture