

DATE OF MEETING JUNE 16, 2021

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SUBJECT **LEISURE ECONOMIC ACCESS PASS (LEAP) PROGRAM REVIEW
RECOMMENDATIONS**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with the recommendations resulting from the Leisure Economic Access Pass (LEAP) Program Review conducted in 2020 and 2021.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council approve of the program review recommendations provided by the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness and direct Staff to proceed with Phase 4 of the LEAP Program Review – Implementation.

BACKGROUND

At the 2020-MAR-18 Special Council meeting, a delegation was received expressing concerns about barriers to accessing the Leisure Economic Access Policy (LEAP) program. At that meeting, Council passed a motion to:

1. approve a review and update of the LEAP program in 2020; and,
2. refer the review of the program to the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness (ACAI) to develop recommendations for changes for Council's consideration.

A 4-phased review process was recommended to the ACAI. A small staff working group conducted **Phase 1 – Information Gathering**, and **Phase 2 – Information Review**. The findings were presented in a report to the ACAI on 2021-FEB-24. Phases 1 and 2 included; an overview of the City of Nanaimo's current LEAP program, a survey of current LEAP program participants, a comparison of financial assistance programs from other municipalities, a review of the Phase 1 REIMAGINE Nanaimo results, an update on local poverty statistics, and input from ACAI Committee members. At that meeting, Committee members recommended to receive the information for the LEAP Program Review for Phases 1 and 2 and approve Phase 3 to proceed.

Phase 3 – Development of Recommendations, was conducted by the staff working group and a report outlining 14 recommendations was taken to the ACAI on 2021-MAY-26. At this meeting, the committee held a discussion about the proposed recommendations and opted for Option 2 in the report; That the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness approve

the recommendations, with revisions, in the LEAP Program Review and recommend staff forward them to Council for consideration.

Revisions were minor, with the recommendation to change the name of the program eliminated, and two recommendations moved from implementation by September, to requiring further exploration.

DISCUSSION

In general, Phases 1 and 2 of the review, indicated that the framework for the financial access program is quite sound but in need of some refinement to make it more accessible to the community. Changes to the program administration, eligibility requirements, application and approval process, and the marketing and promotion of the program are being recommended.

Recommendations for Implementation by September

1. To make the application process easier, reduce supporting documentation to one piece of photo identification, proof of residency, and Notice of Assessment (NOA) from prior year.
2. To provide clarity around program eligibility, create an online self-assessment eligibility tool.
3. To eliminate the requirement to apply at a facility front desk, provide an online application form/process.
4. To ensure application and supporting materials are easily understandable, ask Literacy Central Vancouver Island to proofread revised application form and other related program materials.
5. To help reduce the stigma around applying for the program, offer private appointments for applicants who wish to discuss the program with a Recreation Coordinator.
6. To provide enhanced access to drop-in activities, create the option to renew the pass if 50 drop-ins are used prior to the end of the one-year term for the pass.
7. To ensure that community members are aware of the program, create a marketing and communications plan for the program which would include building relationships, and networking with potential community partners and key organizations.
8. To ensure that clients are aware of the option to register for four programs at a reduced rate, create enhanced program information materials.
9. To determine if program is having the intended impact, create some target measures for re-evaluation in one year.

Recommendations Requiring Further Exploration

10. To provide flexibility, approval could be acquired under special circumstances from staff (i.e. family is slightly above Low Income Cut-Off but has proof of undue hardship).

11. For specific demographics, whose financial situation is unlikely to change, consider changing the requirement to reapply, from every year, to every two years.
12. To potentially expand eligibility, do some research to determine what the impacts would be of including post-secondary students or, if there is a potential partnership opportunity with Vancouver Island University (VIU).
13. To provide alternate options of proof of need, research other documentation that could replace the requirement for the NOA such as, proof of Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), proof of disability assistance (Persons with Disabilities [PWD]), proof of Income Assistance or, a letter from an adjudicator/referral agency.

These changes to the LEAP Program will enhance the ability for those living at, or below, the low-income threshold to access pool, arena, drop-in gym and program services, which will be a huge benefit to these individuals and families.

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council approve of the program review recommendations provided by the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness and direct staff to proceed with Phase 4 of the LEAP Program Review – Implementation.
 - The advantages of this option: Implementation of the program recommendations will enhance community access to the LEAP program.
 - The disadvantages of this option: It will require a concerted effort from staff to implement the changes by September. Given the number of changes and reopening efforts necessary due to the pandemic, there may be a slight delay in full implementation.
 - Financial Implications: Any financial impact is nominal and can be covered in the current operating budget.
2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council approve of the program review recommendations provided by the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness, with some revisions, and direct staff to proceed with Phase 4 of the LEAP Program Review – Implementation.
 - The advantages of this option: That Council will have the opportunity to identify any other issues of concern that are not addressed by the recommendations as is.
 - The disadvantages of this option: Additional staff time, costs, or other resources may be required to implement and support the suggested revisions.
 - Financial Implications: Additional costs, that may not be able to be covered within the current operating budget, may be incurred depending on the revised recommendations.
3. That Council provide alternate direction.
 - The advantages of this option: Council will have the ability to provide alternate suggestions for program revision.

- The disadvantages of this option: Depending on the changes suggested, revisions to the program may take longer to implement, and require additional resources.
- Financial Implications: Dependent on the alternate direction.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Council recommended a review of the Leisure Economic Access Pass (LEAP) program in March 2020, and referred the review of the program to the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness (ACAI).
- The Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness (ACAI) worked with staff to complete Phases 1 through 3 of the review; information gathering, information review, and recommendations for program updates.
- Program recommendations are being presented to Council for consideration and include changes that will make the financial access program more accessible to the community.

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