

DATE OF MEETING JUNE 16, 2021

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

SUBJECT REOPENING OF BEBAN POOL

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with information regarding the impact of reopening Beban Pool in 2021.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to reopen Beban Pool on 2021-OCT-04 providing Provincial Health Orders permit.

BACKGROUND

Due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Staff submitted an Aquatics Reopening Plan on 2020-JUL-27 that recommended a phased approach in the event that a second wave of COVID might be experienced. The philosophy was that it would be easier to scale up, rather than scale back on services provided. Phase 1 included reopening the Nanaimo Aquatic Centre (NAC) by 2020-SEP-10, and Phase 2 suggested reopening Beban Pool dependant on demand and/or cost/benefit. Regardless of the plan, Staff were requested to submit "COVID operating budgets" for 2021, which aligned with revised operating schedules and Provincial Health Order (PHO) requirements. With an unknown opening date for Beban Pool, the decision was made to leave those costs out of the 2021 operating budget.

Revised operating schedules and requirements at NAC, and the closure of Beban Pool, has had an impact on individuals and user groups. Individuals have been required to pre-register for drop-in activities which accommodate fewer people than regular sessions, and user groups have had to adapt to decreased space, less availability of time, and reduced numbers of participants. Despite this, every effort was made to accommodate every type of individual and group usage (i.e. Aquafit, swim lessons, everyone welcome swims, length swimming, user group rentals, etc.). Every user group that wanted space, was offered space, although it may have been at different times, for different lengths of time, and unable to accommodate typical numbers of participants.

DISCUSSION

Demand to Reopen Beban Pool:

In terms of demand, most offerings at NAC were filled to capacity (as per PHO restrictions) September through May. Now that the warmer weather is arriving; the Kinsmen Outdoor Pool and Westwood Lake beachfront are opening up; and people are being encouraged to recreate outdoors; allowing for some spaces to open up at NAC for rentals.

A number of individuals and user groups have expressed their concerns over the continued closure of Beban Pool, particularly in light of the BC's Restart Plan which was announced on 2021-MAY-25. According to this plan, the province should be back to relatively normal operations estimated at 2021-SEP-07, depending on case counts, hospitalizations, and vaccination rates. Due to this plan, these individuals and user groups have expressed an interest in having the same accessibility to aquatic facilities that they were used to pre-pandemic.

To date, Staff has heard concern about the continued closure of Beban Pool from:

- a number of individual users (via email throughout the past 9 months);
- the Nanaimo White Rapids Swim Club (Attachment A);
- the Nanaimo Child Development Centre (Attachment B);
- the Nanaimo Diamonds Synchro Club (they are attending as a delegation, representing multiple user groups, on 2021-JUN-16).

Benefits of Reopening Beban Pool:

In terms of benefit, the supporting documents clearly show that some user groups are missing out on the significant benefits that aquatics services provide such as, access to the pool for rehabilitation services and the sustainability of their programs. Individuals have made similar comments about the importance of having more access to the pools for their own physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Timing of Reopening Beban Pool:

A very real challenge that is affecting all aquatics operations across BC since the pandemic began includes the loss of lifeguards to other employment, and the loss of certified lifeguards due to the lack of available training and recertification.

With the suggested reopening date of 2021-OCT-04 for Beban Pool, this will allow adequate time for:

- The return of lifeguards that have posted out into seasonal positions elsewhere in the City;
- The necessary training/recertification courses to occur; and,
- The hiring and training of new lifeguards to supplement the loss of qualified employees.

Kin Pool is typically open until the end of September which would allow for the provision of additional rental space for user groups up to the start of October 2021.

Costs of Reopening Beban Pool:

The following elements all factor in to the overall impact of reopening Beban Pool:

- The elimination of COVID operating protocols will mean that NAC will reduce operational expenditures, and increase revenues, which will help to offset the cost of reopening Beban Pool;

As per Attachment C, if Beban Pool reopens on 2021-OCT-04:

- If revenues are at 100% of 2019 levels, the overall impact to Aquatics will be a savings of \$98,660;
- If revenues are realized at 75% of 2019 levels, the overall impact to Aquatics will require \$83,735 of additional operating expenses;
- If revenues are realized at 50% of 2019 levels, the overall impact to Aquatics will require \$266,129 of additional operating expenses.

It is important to note that, over the course of the pandemic, Staff had the opportunity to reflect on, and re-evaluate the scheduling of programs and services in Aquatics in Nanaimo. As a result, when Beban Pool reopens, the public and user groups will experience a newly improved schedule with most school group, public, and therapeutic programming occurring at Beban. These changes, in addition to other enhancements which include the new public art inspired by the Nanaimo River estuary, celebrating local indigenous perspectives and culture, and the enhanced facility upgrades will create a warm, welcoming, and refreshed environment for the enjoyment of pool visitors.]

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to reopen Beban Pool on 2021-OCT-04 providing Provincial Health Orders permit.
 - The advantages of this option: That the Aquatics area can better meet community demand in Nanaimo, and provide a larger amount and variety of service to the community.
 - The disadvantages of this option: That there will be additional operating funds required for 2021.
 - Financial Implications: Financial scenarios are outlined on Attachment C and are based on both pools generating revenue to some extent. The projected deficit would be funded from surplus. If surplus is insufficient, the remainder would be funded from the General Financial Stability Reserve.
2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to reopen Beban Pool on 2022-JAN-02 providing Provincial Health Orders permit.
 - The advantages of this option: That the Aquatics operating budget does not require additional funds for 2021.
 - The disadvantages of this option: That the Aquatics area cannot meet the demand from the community.

- Financial Implications: None. Operating budgets for 2022 have yet to be established and will be based on pre-pandemic operations when developed.

3. That the Finance and Audit Committee provide alternative direction. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- Beban Pool has been closed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic due to Provincial Health Order restrictions.
- BC's Restart Plan is targeting to allow for regular aquatics operations by 2021- SEP- 07, providing that COVID numbers, hospitalizations and vaccination rates allow.
- Due to the loss of jobs during the pandemic, the number of qualified lifeguards available to work has declined. A reopening date of 2021-OCT-04 for Beban Pool will allow for the higher level of effort and time that is necessary to hire and train new lifeguards.
- With the return to more regular operations, decreased operating costs, and increased revenues at the Nanaimo Aquatic Centre will help to offset the cost of reopening Beban Pool.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Letter from the Nanaimo White Rapids Swim Club

ATTACHMENT B: Excerpt from emails with the Nanaimo Child Development Centre

ATTACHMENT C: Financial Impact on Pools of Step 4 of BC's Reopening Plan |

Submitted by:

Lynn Wark
Director, Recreation and Culture |

Concurrence by:

Richard Harding
General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Culture

And:

Laura Mercer
Director, Finance | |