



November 3 2025.

**To:** The Honourable Mayor and Members of Prince George City Council

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**From:** Shane Milne  
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**Subject: Urgent Review of Mitigation Measures for the Two Year Prince George Aquatic Centre Closure (Threat to Competitive Aquatics and Community Well being)**

Dear Mayor and Council,

The Prince George Barracuda Swim Club, on behalf of its athletes, their families, and the wider network of Northern BC aquatics, and acknowledging the severe impacts on all competitive and recreational aquatic user groups (including the Prince George Pisces Swim Club and the Water Lillies Synchronized Swimming Club) writes to address the critical consequences of the Prince George Aquatic Centre (PGAC) closure, scheduled for January 1, 2026, until early 2028.

We acknowledge and fully support the necessity of the \$37 million infrastructure upgrades to extend the life of the PGAC. This facility is a vital community asset. Furthermore, we wish to commend the Aquatic Program Staff for their professionalism and accommodating approach in negotiating the highly limited pool time available at the Canfor Leisure Pool; their efforts are appreciated and must be separated from the high level planning decisions regarding this closure.

However, the current mitigation plan, which hinges on redirecting all competitive programs to the Canfor Leisure Pool, is not a sustainable solution. It constitutes an existential threat to the PGBSC and is poised to inflict severe, long term damage on aquatic sports across the entire Northern region.

## **1. The Crisis for High Performance Athletics and Training Quality**

The single most critical impact is the immediate degradation of training standards for our competitive athletes.

- **Substandard Training Environment:** The Canfor Leisure Pool is fundamentally not equipped to support a competition level program. We will be training without essential competitive infrastructure, including proper starting blocks and electronic timing systems. This compromises the quality of every practice, making it impossible for our athletes to practice race starts and turns under accurate conditions.

- **Decimation of Athletic Potential:** The lack of a 50 meter pool and reliance on the smaller 25 meter lanes, combined with reduced pool access, will significantly reduce the fitness and performance of Barracuda athletes over a crucial two year period. Coach Jerzy Partyka confirms this long term impact will jeopardize the swimming careers of our high performance individuals.
- **Loss of Regional Hub:** The PGAC is the central competitive hub for all SwimBC clubs in Northern BC. Partner clubs across the region, such as those in Quesnel, Williams Lake, Terrace, Smithers, Kitimat, and Prince Rupert, rely on our facility for competitive meets and training access. Its closure means the entire Northern region loses this vital resource, effectively cutting off development for a significant population of regional athletes.

## 2. Existential Threat to Club Viability and Financial Health

The closure creates a dual financial burden of lost revenue and increased operating costs, directly threatening the PGBSC's ability to operate sustainably.

- **Financial Blackout:** Our club's financial model is heavily dependent on hosting meets. The two year closure eliminates this critical revenue stream entirely, creating an unrecoverable deficit that threatens our solvency.
- **Membership and Program Cuts:** Limited pool space may require us to cut training groups and will result in a significant drop in overall membership. Crucially, the lack of a moveable shallow floor at Canfor means we cannot run our Swim School program effectively for the youngest members as young as 5 and 6, creating a two year gap in developing future swimmers and instructors. This will also put additional stress on the city's resources to deliver their own swimming programs for young children which becomes a water safety issue within our community.
- **Coaching Retention Risk:** The ensuing financial instability and increased administrative stress due to limited pool access will make it extremely challenging to maintain our high quality coaching staff. The loss of experienced coaches will only compound the crisis, leading to further program degradation.

## 3. Community Equity and Athlete Well being

The consequences of this closure extend into the homes and well being of our member families.

- **Critical Resource for City Events:** Our clubs (PGBSC, Pisces, etc.) are vital partners in the City's strategic ambitions, particularly the bid for the 2030 Special Olympics Canada Summer Games. We are the sole local source of required certified officials for the two largest swim meets in the North. Destroying this volunteer infrastructure jeopardizes the City's ability to credibly bid for and execute these high profile competitions.
- **Financial Barrier to Competition:** For athletes committed to competitive swimming, the only recourse will be to travel extensively to venues outside of Prince George for proper training and meets. This creates a severe financial burden on families, effectively

building an inequitable barrier that excludes talented athletes whose families cannot afford constant travel.

- **Mental Health Impact:** Many of our children and youth are highly dependent on the club's routine, stability, and social connection for their mental health. This prolonged and disruptive closure removes a critical support structure at a vital time in their development.
- **Long Term Interest Reduction:** The collective deficiencies will have a long lasting, negative impact on reducing overall interest in aquatic activities in our city, jeopardizing community engagement and future swimming enrollment for years to come.

#### 4. Expert Warning: The Officials Crisis and Historical Precedent

Based on the perspective of **Larry Chrobot, World Aquatics (AQUA) Referee**, and his 25 years of experience, this closure represents an unacceptable level of risk:

- **Officials Decertification:** No swim meets for two years means there is "little ability to train officials (complete the levels of certification), practice on deck and complete mandatory evaluations." Officials have annual requirements to stay certified. This loss will be devastating, leading to a club that must "start from scratch" on recruitment and training post closure.
- **Increased Costs:** Running a typical high level meet requires approximately 60 certified officials per day. If the local volunteer base is depleted, the club may be required to pay for external officials to travel to Prince George to staff meets, drastically increasing our operating expenses. Alternatively, the financial burden of travel for our local volunteers to obtain certifications will fall unfairly upon them.
- **Club Extinction Risk:** The length of this closure is nearly unprecedented. The club closures witnessed in Williams Lake following a similar temporary pool displacement serve as a chilling precedent; that club "basically went to zero swimmers and has spent years trying to rebuild," confirming this length of disruption can be fatal to a not for profit organization.

#### Conclusion and Call to Action

While the City has committed \$37 million to fix the facility, we must ensure that the cost of that repair is not the permanent destruction of the competitive aquatics community. **The current plan, which entails a complete two year shutdown of our 50 meter competition facility, forces our competitive programs into an inadequate 25 meter pool and represents an unacceptable failure of infrastructure planning.**

We urge City Council and management to move beyond simple scheduling accommodations and commit to the following **constructive and collaborative measures**:

1. **Investigate Phased Renovation & Shorter Downtime:** We strongly request that the City, in partnership with user groups, immediately explore a phased renovation strategy. This approach should prioritize the critical repairs that directly affect the operation of the

main pool, with the goal of achieving a significantly shorter closure period for the competitive tank, while allowing less critical, exterior, or non pool specific renovations to occur in successive phases.

2. **Commitment to Partnership for Competitive Readiness:** To mitigate the loss of hosting revenue and training quality, we ask for a formal commitment to a partnership with user groups (like PGBSC) to equip the Canfor Leisure Pool (CLP) for functional competitive events. This requires investing in temporary or modular starting blocks and timing equipment at the CLP, making the venue viable for hosting essential meets during the PGAC closure.
3. **Strict and Transparent Reopening Timeline:** Maintain the commitment to a strict timeline for the PGAC reopening and allocate all necessary resources to prevent further delays that would compound the damage and extend the athletic and financial hardship.

The future of competitive swimming in Prince George and the human infrastructure required to support high profile City events depends on your urgent action to mitigate these catastrophic impacts. We look forward to discussing these urgent matters and working collaboratively toward a solution that safeguards the well being and athletic futures of our community's youth.

Sincerely,

**Redacted**

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