

# STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

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**DATE:** February 11, 2021

**TO:** MAYOR AND COUNCIL

**NAME AND TITLE:** Adam Davey, Director of Community Services and Public Safety

**SUBJECT:** Four Seasons Leisure Pool: Future Options

**ATTACHMENT(S):** None.

## RECOMMENDATION(S):

THAT Council provide DIRECTION to Administration on the future of the Four Seasons Leisure Pool (FSLP). Two options to consider are:

- a) Permanently shutdown the Four Seasons Leisure Pool and plan for demolition; OR
- b) Maintain the current status of Four Seasons Leisure Pool for future limited reopening consideration, following the partial resumption of leisure activities.

## PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to address the feasibility of permanently closing and demolishing the Four Seasons Leisure Pool in 2021 (as opposed to 2022/23, following the opening of the new Downtown Pool).

## BACKGROUND & DISCUSSION:

On March 16 2020, Four Seasons Leisure Pool (FSLP) and the P.G. Aquatic Centre (PGAC) closed due to Covid-19. On September 8<sup>th</sup> 2020 the PGAC reopened with reduced operations and the FSLP remained closed. Prior to Covid-19 the Aquatic Division averaged 400,000 swim visits annually applying a budgeted full time equivalent (FTE) staffing of 44 to maintain service levels. With a high number of student employees, the total staffing count under normal operating conditions for the City's two pools is approximately 86 (full-time, part-time and casual). Due to Covid-restrictions in 2020, 86,000 swim visits occurred, requiring 27 FTE positions. This works out to approximately 43 staff (full-time, part-time and casuals). The demand for pool use remains high with 35 weekly swim blocks available for registration. All of the swim blocks become fully booked between two and six weeks in advance. The swim visits to the Aquatic Centre average 7,500 customers monthly under current Provincial restrictions.

In deliberation of permanently closing and demolishing the Four Seasons Pool, the following impacts ought to be considered.

## Swimming Lessons:

An important function of Four Seasons is to provide swimming lessons for residents. In 2019, FSLP had 141,000 pool visits and of that total, 60% were children and youth participating in the Red Cross Learn to Swim Program. Learning to swim and water safety skill development for children is a valuable service assisting in the prevention of drownings. Since March 16 2020, swimming lessons have not occurred due to the pandemic along with other programs such as Aquafit and lifesaving/lifeguarding courses. Residents have been patient with the reduced pool services however there is a growing desire for programs to resume. To alleviate some of that pressure, limited swimming lessons are planned to resume in May at the Aquatic Centre ensuring all safety related Covid-19 protocols and best practices within the aquatic industry occur. The Sunday morning 'Everyone Welcome' swim blocks will be removed to allow pool space for swimming lessons which will accommodate approximately 20% of the total demand for lessons experienced in a normal operating year (the impact of the resumption of limited swim lessons comes at the cost of less 'Everyone Welcome' swim availability).

## New Downtown Pool Operations:

In 2016, an Aquatic Needs Assessment (ANA) was submitted to the City from DIALOG DESIGN and pool specialists Counsilman-Hunsaker (Aquatics For Life) providing direction on current and future aquatic services required in Prince George (ANA is available here):

[https://www.princegeorge.ca/City%20Hall/Documents/Aquatic%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report%20\(FINAL%20REVISED\).pdf](https://www.princegeorge.ca/City%20Hall/Documents/Aquatic%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report%20(FINAL%20REVISED).pdf)

The ANA provided the foundational considerations of the new downtown pool operations. Given the expected high demand for service at the new pool, expanding operational hours comparable to PGAC is recommended,<sup>1</sup> resulting in an approximate increase to the Aquatics FTE count by 6.5.<sup>2</sup> A full year of operations is required to confirm the actual recapture rate as both revenue and expenses are determined by facility usage. An interim budget is recommended for the first year of operations at the new pool in order to accurately assess true operating costs.

The correlation between current staffing levels (one pool with limited operations) and staffing levels to operate the new pool in concert with PGAC (full operations) is important as the longer operations remain scaled down the more difficult it is to scale up again. For example, should FSLP shut down permanently approximately 55 qualified new hires will be required for full operations (of the new pool) bringing the total to 100 employees (FTE count of approximately 50.5, compared to 44 in budget 2020). The Aquatic Division has been fortunate to provide all advanced leadership training in-house versus seeking contract instructors that are not local. This method has provided sufficient qualified applicants to fill job postings at the pool. Due to Covid-19, most leadership courses were cancelled in 2020 and are just beginning to restart this March under modified conditions. PG lifeguards and instructors are primarily high school and university students and it takes an average of one year for applicants to be qualified for an entry-level position at the pool. An additional one-year of experience is required for an entry-level supervisory position. By keeping FSLP closed, it is probable that positions

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<sup>1</sup> Based upon historical information from the opening of the Aquatic Centre in 1994, initial customer demand is expected to be high (degree of novelty, and a new waterslide). For further context, when the FSLP opened following the expansion – which included a waterslide – historical photos depict lineups extending outside the building.

<sup>2</sup> Should the City opt to maintain the same operating hours at the new pool per the FSLP's hours, the FTE enhancement drops to approximately 3.5 (above FSLP levels). Again, this is an estimate and may change depending on usage and programming.

posted will exceed qualified applicants resulting in the new pool being unable to provide full levels of service (reduced programs) for approximately the first six months of operations.

### **Pool Closures:**

The Aquatic Centre shuts down for five weeks annually for operational repair, capital improvement, draining/filling of the pools and general maintenance. This year's 2021 shutdown dates are September 7<sup>th</sup> to October 10<sup>th</sup>. While PGAC is closed for maintenance, FSLP expands hours of operations to accommodate demand for pool use. Should FSLP permanently close, residents will not have a pool to attend over the five week maintenance closure.

The 2022 BC Summer Games in PG is scheduled for July 21<sup>st</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> and is just over one month before the new pool is planned to open. The Aquatic Centre will host competitive lane swimming and artistic swimming (synchro) during the games. Should FSLP close, residents will not be able to swim over the dates of the games or at a minimum have significant restrictions on swimming during the Summer Games.

The Aquatic Centre capital building envelope improvement project is set to begin the design phase this year and the physical enhancement of the building will commence after the conclusion of the BC Summer Games. An estimated four-month facility closure may be required to complete the exterior and interior betterment of the facility. Service demand will be high particularly during the first year of operations at the new pool and should FSLP not be available during the PGAC refurbishment, levels of service for residents will be substantially reduced. Pool rental groups such as the swim clubs will be negatively affected and potentially further hamper the ability to rebound from Covid-19 having already gone through reduced operations (simply put, if FSLP were to be permanently shut, aquatics programming and user-groups will experience a significant reduction in services for most of 2020, 2021 and 2022).

### **Budget:**

The 2021 FSLP budget is set at \$458,941. Of that amount, \$218,924 are "transfers", which are internal revenues/expenses between different City divisions. A reduction in the transfer expenses of one division means the reduction of transfer revenues in another division, meaning a net zero reduction for the City. District Energy (DES) makes up the bulk of the transfer expense, with the remainder being for Sewer and Water. In the case of DES, the City is under contractual obligation to purchase a minimum amount from Lakeland for the "fuel" of the district energy system. While this contractual obligation prevents a significant reduction in DES utility service costs, there is some potential for minimal savings. The majority of the remaining \$240,017 in operational expenses cannot be fully realized unless the building is decommissioned and demolished. Total actual savings of permanent closure of the FSLP are estimated at the \$150,000 - \$200,000 range. Simply put, mothballing the FSLP still carries costs. In order to minimize these costs as much as practical, should Council opt to permanently close the FSLP, Administration recommends demolishing the facility as soon as possible to ensure there are no further operational and maintenance support costs (such as boarding up broken windows, maintaining security and public safety. For example, the roof repair last year cost approximately \$30,000, to prevent falling shingles and roof debris. A mothballed facility still incurs some of these costs to ensure the safety of passersby).<sup>3</sup> Assuming Council opts for permanent closure, a staff report will be brought back outlining demolition timeline, process, budget, details and so forth.

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<sup>3</sup> Another example is broken windows. During 2020, two large windows were broken and replaced (vandalism). A demolished facility prevents vandalism and repairs. On the other hand, the City could reduce maintenance costs to a mothballed facility by using plywood to board up the next broken window.

**To assist in the decision making process, a Qualitative Cost Benefit Assessment is provided:**

Option	Cost	Benefit
<b>Permanently Close Four Seasons in 2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant decrease in swim lessons. Put simply, some families may not have the opportunity for most of 2020, 2021 and 2022 (first come, first served basis, and lessons are sequential in progression: level 1, 2, 3...require the preceding level to register).</li> <li>• No pool (5 weeks) during this year's maintenance shutdown (September 2021).</li> <li>• Potential staffing shortages and an imbalance of experienced vs. inexperienced staff.</li> <li>• Potential of reduced programming until staffing is at full levels.</li> <li>• Lump sum training cost vs. spread out (all new hires require approx. 60 hours of on-site training prior to working independently. With FSLP closed, approx. 55 staff will require this prior to the new pool opening).</li> <li>• Increased service demand during a portion of the PGAC building envelope upgrade (new pool grand opening; high degree of novelty).</li> <li>• Require substantial restart monies in 2022 in addition to a budget enhancement to meet new pool service demand (hiring and training of staff needs to begin approximately 4-6 months prior to the new pool opening date).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost savings (\$150-200k per calendar year. Note that Q1 2021 is halfway complete).</li> <li>• Opportunity to demolish FSLP early and further offset the FSLP expense (Note: requires RFP process; no "immediate" delivery).</li> <li>• Reduces the overall building maintenance count (i.e., the City is currently committed to the maintenance of more buildings than we have the capacity to effectively manage).</li> </ul>
<b>Maintain Four Seasons and Reopen as Necessary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expense up to \$458,941 for a building that is providing no current community value (<i>note: this is a budget accounting amount; it does represent an actual savings amount should the facility permanently close. Actual savings amount in the \$150-200k range</i>).</li> <li>• Require restart monies in 2022 in addition to a budget enhancement to meet expected service demand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides optionality for swimming to occur during PGAC pool closures i.e. annual maintenance; summer games.</li> <li>• Provides optionality for increased services as desired (flexible re-start options).</li> <li>• Provides capacity for normal programming, swim club use, and swim lessons.</li> <li>• Provides improved aquatic staff retention in preparation for the new pool.</li> </ul>

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

There are both costs and benefits to permanently closing the Four Seasons Leisure Pool. Some of these are outlined in the above qualitative cost benefit assessment. The permanent closure of the FSLP may result in an eventual annual operating savings of some \$150,000 - \$200,000. Administration is seeking Council's direction on the future of the FSLP.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**

Adam Davey, Director of Community Services and Public Safety

**PREPARED BY:** Jim Worthington, Manager of Aquatics Division

**APPROVED:**

Walter Babicz, Acting City Manager

Meeting Date: [2021/02/22]