



Media Release

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON
3400 – 30 Street
Vernon, BC
V1T 5E6

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: February 26, 2020

MEDIA CONTACT: Christy Poirier, Manager, Communications & Grants

TELEPHONE: 250-550-3539

Greater Vernon Recreation Services to increase lifeguard hours to meet national safety standards

Greater Vernon Recreation Services is taking a balanced approach to cover additional lifeguarding costs to meet the *National Safety Standards* of the Lifesaving Society of Canada. This includes a small reduction in operating hours and a moderate fee increase for the aquatics area.

Effective January 1, 2020, the number of lifeguards on the deck increased when there are more than 80 patrons in the Vernon Aquatic Centre, as per the *National Safety Standards* of the Lifesaving Society of Canada.

Previously, pool operators in BC were following the lifeguard-to-bather ratio standards recommended by the BC & Yukon Branch of the Lifesaving Society, as identified in the *BC Guidelines for Pool Operations*. In late 2019, Recreation Services learned the BC & Yukon Branch updated its recommendations to follow the *National Safety Standards*.

“Recreation Services has changed its staffing practice to meet this new standard,” said Doug Ross, Director, Recreation Services. “This provides a safe environment for aquatics patrons and limits potential exposure to liability for the City.”

The change is estimated to require an additional 1,300 hours of guarding each year, which will cost an estimated \$43,000 more than what was budgeted for the operation of the Aquatic Centre in 2020.

Greater Vernon Recreation Services provides its services and programs to the Greater Vernon area. During the 2020 budget presentations, Recreation Services made a number of Service Level Adjustment requests to all partners of the Greater Vernon *Recreation Facilities & Programming Service Agreement*, which includes the District of Coldstream, Electoral Areas B & C and the City of Vernon. Most of the requests related to endorsed recommendations from the Greater Vernon Recreation Master Plan.

Each partner was asked to support its proportional share of the \$43,000 needed for the additional lifeguarding hours: \$6,801 for Coldstream, \$3,400 each for Areas B & C and \$29,444 for City of Vernon. The request for additional funding was supported by Vernon City Council, but

was not approved by the District of Coldstream or Electoral Areas B & C, as they did not want to open the current Agreement.

As established within the *Recreation Facilities & Programming Service Agreement*, a unanimous vote is required to approve any amendment to the Agreement. While the City respects the decision of its partners to not open the Agreement, Recreation Services was then required to find other means to fund or resource the additional lifeguarding hours.

The Agreement does allow for unexpected shortfalls throughout the year to be covered by reserves; however, the City is required to submit a balanced operating budget at the start of the calendar year. With this, the City did not feel it was prudent to rely on reserves for an ongoing operational cost, such as increased lifeguarding hours.

“In order to fund this shortfall responsibly, we advised against a drastic reduction of operating hours or a significant fee increase,” said Ross. “Instead, Recreation Services recommended a balanced approach by reducing limited operating hours and instituting a moderate fee increase.”

Starting March 2, 2020, the pool will close 30-minutes earlier Monday – Thursday, and 1-hour earlier on Friday for the remainder of the year. In the months of July and August, weekend afternoon swims will be cancelled, which eliminates the summer *Toonie Swim* time. The reduced hours of operation will generate an estimated \$23,000 in savings.

Additionally, Recreation Services recommended a 4% increase for admissions and fees for the aquatics area, to make up the additional estimated \$20,000 required for the staffing change. Now that City Council has approved the recommended increase, Recreation Services will bring forward an amendment for the Recreation Services Fees and Charges Bylaw. The new fees are expected to take effect on April 1, 2020.

“While this is extremely unfortunate, individuals identified as being financially disadvantaged through our Affordable Access Pass program can still receive a 75% discount when attending the normal public swim times,” said Ross.

The City of Vernon is solely responsible for operational decisions regarding Greater Vernon Recreation Services. The City funds 68.4% of the recreation service, while the District of Coldstream funds approximately 16% and Electoral Areas B & C fund approximately 8% each. The current Agreement is in place from 2019-2023.