



Media Release

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Update on Recreation and Parks Fees Assessment process

The City of Vernon is continuing its process of formally reviewing the policy for setting user fees and charges for Recreation and Parks facilities, programs, and services.

The review, which has been led by an independent third-party consulting group, is taking place based on a key recommendation from the 2018 Recreation Master Plan, with the following reasons for the doing the study:

- To remain fiscally responsible with public dollars;
- Achieve an appropriate balance of user fees and tax support; and
- The policy can be used to communicate the reasoning for fee levels.

According to the Master Plan recommendation, the review was deemed a *medium term, medium priority*, meaning it should take place within five years of the Master Plan being completed, which is 2023.

As part of the review process, the consulting group conducted a thorough assessment of Recreation and Parks user fees and charges with the following steps:

- **March 2023:** gathered background data and historical context from the City of Vernon and benchmark communities throughout BC (including neighbouring Okanagan communities); compared fees and charges of nine (9) municipalities with Vernon; and finalized plans for a consultation process with the public, user groups, and interested parties
- **April 2023:** a comprehensive consultation process began which included:
 - Seven (7) focus group meetings with user groups and interested parties
 - Three (3) workshops with key City of Vernon staff
 - Three (3) pop-up events at the Vernon Farmers' Market, Village Green Shopping Centre, and the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce Community Expo
 - A public survey, which was available online and in hard copy
- **June 2023:** A draft assessment was prepared for staff to review, in preparation for a report back to Council

Consultant recommendations

Council received the consulting group's report and recommendations at its July 17, 2023 Committee of the Whole meeting.

During that presentation, the consultants noted it's not possible to compare municipalities directly, as each community sets fees and charges in consideration of multiple factors including size of tax base, operating costs, local financial pressures, industry, and more. However, at Council's request, a comparison of fees from other communities will be presented at the August 14, 2023 Council meeting.

The consultants also confirmed more than 130 facility user groups and interested parties were invited to participate in focus groups; 35 people attended the seven focus group opportunities and 21 completed user group questionnaires.

Some of the key recommendations in the consultant's report include:

- Hold Recreation and Park Fee increases at CPI for 2024. Recommend a 5% increase for 2024 effective January 1, 2024.
- Establish a 2-year cycle for the Fees & Charges Bylaw.
- Establish a discretionary grant process to assist groups in hosting major community events.
- Schedule an Event Coordinator and/or Parks Caretaker so they are on duty when major tournaments and events are taking place.
- Consider allocating a portion of the Municipal Regional District Tax Program (MRDT) funds collected from hotel room rentals in Vernon to be used to enhance and maintain City facilities and amenities used for sport hosting tournaments and events.
- Review recreation programs for premium and low-cost options.
- Review the Accessible Access Pass Program and survey other local municipalities.
- Review low and no-cost options for core recreation activities such as swimming and skating.
- Develop an a la carte menu for additional services fees (e.g., access to technology, set up and take down, field lining, additional mowing of sports fields and diamonds).
- Establish annual users' meetings to discuss fees, tournament dates, maintenance priorities, etc.
- Review service levels and staffing requirements, especially for tournaments and special events.

Next steps

In addition to the consultant's report, Council has also received letters from community organizations, with further input on Recreation and Parks fees and charges, facility operations, programs, and services.

"Now that all this information has been received, Council has directed staff to bring a report back to the August 14, 2023 Council meeting, with recommendations on how to move forward," said Acting Mayor Akbal Mund.

“That report will include the information from the independent third-party consultant’s findings and recommendations, as well as the letters from the community organizations. All of it will be in front of Council for review and discussion, and to inform our decisions going forward.

“Council wants to reassure citizens we have heard you. The decisions we are making about Recreation and Parks fees, charges, programs and services are not made lightly. Careful and thoughtful attention is being given to all input that has been received and Council is committed to making decisions that most appropriately fund and support the operation and maintenance of Recreation and Parks facilities, programs and services, to best serve the community as a whole.”