



August 11, 2021

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Donnie Rosa - General Manager, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **Outdoor Lifeguard Shortage - Management Plan - Board Briefing Memo**

Dear Commissioners,

Further to the [June 30 update regarding the outdoor lifeguard shortage](#), the purpose of this memo is to advise of the management plan the Park Board's Aquatic Services team has developed to address the continuing significant shortage of available waterfront certified lifeguards for the 2021 summer season.

Background

As noted in prior updates, the current lifeguard shortage is a systemic outcome resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted private, public, municipal, provincial and national aquatic operations. Some of the contributing factors include, but are not limited to, significantly reduced BC Lifesaving Society lifeguard training opportunities for new staff development, Lifesaving Society recertification extensions, career changes, availability of enhanced Employment Insurance benefits, and comfort levels associated with returning to work during the pandemic.

The Park Board's Outdoor Aquatic Services typically employs 190-240 auxiliary lifeguard positions annually, in addition to 36 temporary full-time staff. Presently, less than 130 auxiliary staff members have returned to outdoor aquatics, creating a deficit of 60-110 positions. To help address this deficit, the team has offered increased training opportunities and completed two auxiliary hiring processes. These efforts have not bridged the ongoing resource gaps.

This continued shortage affects the ability of the Outdoor Aquatic Services team to ensure staffing levels and safety supervision is maintained at the Park Board's thirteen (13) outdoor aquatics sites: three (3) outdoor pools, nine (9) beachfronts and one (1) lakefront. On a daily basis, there continues to be a shortage of between 5-15 lifeguards to meet the minimum staffing requirements (two lifeguards per waterfront) for the 13 sites. This does not take into account the additional staffing requirements for evening support, or when temperatures rise and increased numbers of people attend waterfront areas. At present, only about 15-20% of hired and trained lifeguards are available to work on a daily basis.

As outlined in the June 18 briefing memo, the Outdoor Aquatic Services team piloted a [lifeguard deployment prioritization plan](#), which involved relocating lifeguards based on volumes at each of the outdoor beach locations should a shortage occur that day. Although this short-term fix was useful initially, the breadth and depth of the staffing shortage remains significant and requires a different approach for the remainder of the 2021 outdoor aquatics season.

Outdoor Lifeguard Services Management Plan

To address the expected ongoing staffing shortage, the Outdoor Aquatic Services team has developed a plan to maintain the minimum staffing levels required at all supervised swimming sites on a consistent basis. To continue to prioritize service delivery at the sites that attract the largest attendance, the plan is to reduce the overall number of lifeguard supervised swimming areas for the remainder of the season. Staff have identified Trout Lake and Sunset beaches as



lower impact sites for temporarily suspending lifeguard services based on the following rationale:

Trout Lake:

- ongoing challenges with elevated E.coli counts resulting in Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) mandated closures;
 - closed for 5 weeks during the summer 2020 season
 - currently closed now; has not been staffed since July 9;
- overall swimming usage low; prior to closures, # of swimmers fluctuated from 0-10.

Sunset Beach:

- ongoing challenges with elevated E.coli counts resulting in VCH mandated closures;
- typically has lowest usage for swimming compared to other beaches along the Sunset to Third beach strip;
- impact of not lifeguarding is mitigated by the proximity of a supervised area at the adjacent English Bay Beach (busiest beach along that strip);
 - intent is to staff English Bay at a higher level to enable expanded lifeguarded swimming zones and provide availability of back-up for staff in the event of an emergency or incident.

Reducing access to outdoor pools is not being considered as these facilities offer the opportunity to swim in a safe, accessible, and controlled environment for over 5,000 people daily and any closures would greatly impact young families, seniors and individuals with a variety of access considerations. Additionally, it is expected that attendance at these facilities will increase in August as COVID-19 restrictions continue to relax.

Next Steps

The current plan is to leave Trout Lake as an unsupervised swimming site for the remainder of the 2021 season (still closed to swimming due to E.coli). If the staffing situation does not improve, then lifeguard supervision at Sunset Beach will also be removed for the remainder of the season. These changes will not impact the total weekly hours of the temporary full-time lifeguards; some worksite and specific shifts may need to be adjusted to support coverage at the high use areas.

The Outdoor Aquatic Services team is working with Communications to ensure a plan is in place to inform the public of any service changes and which beaches have supervised swimming options available. We believe this plan will allow the beaches and outdoor pools to operate safely for the remainder of the season.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donnie Rosa".

Donnie Rosa (*they/she*)
General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

/sk/pf/ts/clc

Copy to: PB Leadership Team, PB Recreation Leadership Team, PB Communications