

**REPORT**  
***Parks & Recreation Department***  
***and***  
***Office of the CAO***

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** July 10, 2023

**From:** Dean Gibson  
Director of Park and Recreation  
**File:** 2308944

Lisa Spitale  
Chief Administrative Officer  
**Item #:** 2023-479

**Subject:** **Response to Council Motion Re: Parks and Recreation registration process**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

THAT Council receive this report for information.

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**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide a response to, and outline the implications of, Council's March 27, 2023 motion regarding exploration of opportunities to improve the equity and accessibility of the Parks and Recreation registration process.

**SUMMARY**

In response to the motion supported by Council on March 27, 2023, staff are providing an update on registration process changes implemented by staff for summer 2023 registration, changes proposed for winter 2024 and options to further engage with the community regarding the registration process through the update to the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan.

**BACKGROUND**

On March 27, 2023 the following motion was supported by Council for further review of work plan implications, timeline and budget impacts:

**WHEREAS** the City of New Westminster is committed to increasing equity and accessibility in the City’s policies and programs; and

**WHEREAS** there is a consistent demand for affordable, high quality recreation programming throughout the City;

**WHEREAS** the City’s Parks and Recreation current registration process presents a number of challenges to registrants including the time of registration, access to a credit card, access to technology, the reliability of registration software, waitlist management, and others;

**BE IT RESOLVED** that Council direct staff to explore opportunities to improve the equity and accessibility of the Parks and Recreation registration process and report back to Council with options to address the current challenges.

As per the terms of Council Procedure Bylaw No. 6910, respecting notices of motion, any motion arising out of a notice of motion must not take effect unless the following conditions are met:

- a) The Chief Administrative Officer, in consultation with senior staff, has submitted a report within three Council meetings on the feasibility of that motion considering any budget and work plan implications including, but not limited to, staff capacity, financial, policy, administration, feasibility, operational, legal, etc.;
- b) Council has considered the budget and work plan implications of the motion in light of any strategic plan adopted by Council; and
- c) Council has passed a motion to authorizing the budget and work plan set out in the Chief Administrative Officer’s report.

**DISCUSSION**

Access to recreation programs in the City of New Westminster is facing increased demand since prior to the pandemic. Staffing shortages and facility closures have impacted the quantity of programs that the City can successfully and safely run. The higher demand for programs and lower supply of some programs has taxed the current registration process for end users. In early spring 2023, prior to Council’s motion, staff had already begun to implement changes to make the registration process more equitable and accessible.

Challenges observed by staff and reported by patrons at that time:

- Phone lines – registrants wishing to call must call individual facilities with the hope of reaching a customer service representative. There are no opportunities to wait in a singular citywide cue for a tele-customer service agent. Pending on what facility a registrant calls, they may receive quicker access to a customer service representative than a customer who called earlier.

- Those who have access to technology and credit cards have quicker and greater access to high demand courses than those who do not.
- Registration time had been set for 8:30 am which conflicted with school drop off time for many families.
- During high volume seasons (i.e. summer), registrants struggled to successfully and concurrently register for skill development courses as well as day camp registrations as both opportunities had high demand.
- Registrants had the ability to register for multiple skill development sessions at one time, only to have to withdraw when the participant did not complete the required skills in the class.
- Recreation registration software configuration was not optimized for customer convenience.
- Recreation registration software was not configured to be fully mobile device-friendly.
- Waitlists were not effectively being utilized by residents.

### Council Motion

*Council direct staff to explore opportunities to improve the equity and accessibility of the Parks and Recreation registration process and report back to Council with options to address the current challenges.*

As part of the Parks and Recreation department's ongoing customer service improvements and in response to Council's March 27 motion, changes have been implemented for the summer 2023 registration season to improve the equity and accessibility of registration process. These changes include:

- A. Create separate registration days for day camps and all other programs** – This summer, summer camp registration launched May 11 and all other programs June 8. This allowed those registrants looking for programs as an alternative to care (i.e. day camps), equal opportunity to register for other recreation programs.
- B. Initiate a new registration launch time of 10:30 am** – This time does not conflict with school drop off and allows registrants greater access to their laptops or PC's.
- C. Initiate pre-requisites in skill based progressive lessons** – By initiating pre-requisites, registrants cannot register for multiple sets of progressive skill-based lessons at one time. A lesson must be marked as complete in the software before the registrant can register in the next level. This provides opportunities for more families to successfully register for at least one lesson set per season.
- D. Marketing campaign in facilities, online and social media to promote how to prepare for registration day** – This communication included information on: being prepared by knowing your program choices, how to load a credit using cash or credit onto an account for quicker access to courses, changes in registration times and days, how to utilize waitlists for the registrants' benefit etc.

- E. **Waitlist management** – As the City on-boards new staff, supervisors are able to create additional program sets as demand arises. By consistently reviewing waitlist numbers, staff can create new shifts to meet the demand of registrants in high demand programs.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The work to review and refine the City's registration process is ongoing. In spring of 2023, the Parks and Recreation department hired a recreation management software systems consultant to do an audit of the set-up of our existing recreation software operating system (Xplor). Currently in the process of assessment, next steps in changes to be implemented over the coming fall and winter seasons include, but are not limited to:

- A department-wide review of program naming conventions - To allow for the use of simple English and remove confusing descriptors. Consistency in program naming conventions will allow for a registrant to easily search for courses using key words and find courses more easily while navigating the registration platform.
- Create an easier, more intuitive landing page for programs.
- Enabling functions of the software not yet utilized – i.e. scheduled payments, combined classes, electronic funds transfer (EFT) for payment
- Continue to explore opportunities to engage a centralized call line and system for heavy registration days – This system would need to have dedicated staff during the first few busy days of registration to handle the queue. If required, financial considerations for system changes would be introduced as part of 2024 or 2025 budget deliberations.
- Ensure Xplor software is configured to be more mobile-friendly so registrants can feel comfortable registering from their mobile device.
- Utilize subject matter experts from the staff team to continually report back on deficiencies in the system as they arise.
- Include engagement with the community around the registration process as part of the update to Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Current changes to the department's registration process have been accommodated within the current operating budget. Future development opportunities to explore the use of a centralized phone line and associated staff for registration days will be introduced as part of 2024 or 2025 budget deliberations as required.

**OPTIONS**

Options for Council's consideration include:

1. Recieve this report for information.
2. Provide staff with alternative direction.

Option #1 is recommended.

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Staff has had preliminary discussions with IT regarding the potential for a dedicated phone line to be activated for high volume registration days. This discussion will proceed further in the fall.

**CONCLUSION**

In the early spring of 2023, the Parks & Recreation Department staff team had identified challenges and was implementing changes to address those challenges for the summer 2023 registration. Multiple changes were implemented prior to the summer registration dates. Initial feedback from staff and registrants regarding the implemented changes have been favourable and have begun to have the desired effect in creating more equitable access for programs and services.

**APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:

Corrinne Garrett, Senior Manager – Recreation Services and Facilities

This report was approved by:

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer

Dean Gibson, Director of Parks and Recreation