

CITY OF FORT SASKATCHEWAN

Harbour Pool Swimming Lesson Registration

Purpose:

To provide Council with information regarding swimming lesson registration practices as it relates to resident versus non-resident policies.

Background:

Council approved the following resolution at the April 6, 2016 regular Council Meeting:

That Council direct Administration to bring back a report by June 1, 2016 with policy proposals outlining the possibility of aiding in aquatic program subscription issues by looking at an advance registration period for residents.

The City of Fort Saskatchewan provides a variety of high quality aquatic program opportunities to ensure citizens are able to learn about aquatic safety in a fun, welcoming atmosphere. The Harbour Pool is programmed to meet the various demands of the community by providing the public with water safety education in the form of swimming lessons, public swim, fitness classes, leadership programs, and specialty programs, such as the Piranhas Swim Club.

Resident Feedback:

Following aquatic program registration days, feedback is received from registrants regarding the challenges of getting children registered into prime-time swimming lesson programs. Since 2014, this feedback has been especially notable through social media, although it has been received in years prior as well. Staff continuously review the feedback and look for new ways to accommodate more registration capacity based on the needs and wants of citizens.

Typical feedback received:

1. e-Connect is always overloaded on the first day of registration;
2. more info needed on how to successfully register for programs (on-line, in person at a City facility, or phoning in); and
3. classes are full.

The 2015 Recreation Facility and Parks Master Plan Update clearly identified aquatics capacity as being a top concern within the community. A strong message was sent that more aquatics capacity needs to be added and a preference was given for aquatics services at the Dow Centennial Centre (DCC). On April 12, 2016, Council set the plebiscite for aquatics to coincide with the 2017 municipal election and on April 26, 2016, Council chose a “split aquatics” concept for the focus of that plebiscite.

Current Situation:

The Harbour Pool schedule is reviewed regularly for efficiencies and areas of improvement. The Pool itself has many unique design features that limit the amount of safe instructor stations that can be provided to the community. For example, high walls, varied depth in shallow areas, and the Pool's design limits the capacity of lessons which can be programmed at any given time.

This is taken within the context that the amount of aquatic space square footage has not increased since the facility was built in 1982 (with a significant renovation in 1989). The population of the City when the original facility was constructed was 12,455. The City's current population is 24,040, which means that while the population has doubled in size, the amount of physical aquatic space has remained constant. This highlights the importance of continually evaluating and investing in recreation amenities and the benefit of building additional capacity when making those investments. The specific challenge with aquatics space construction is that it is an extremely expensive space to build and operate, and aquatics spaces are not easily expanded or scalable due to mechanical requirements.

Due to the population trend mentioned above, limited amounts of spaces are available for the growing population in swimming lessons during the peak desirable times. While capacity still exists in less desirable times, feedback is often focused on the inability to register in prime-times that better suits their schedule. Due to the growth in the region, aquatic centres from nearby municipalities are reporting similar registration challenges.

Residents versus Non-Residents:

The desire to implement a resident requirement registration advantage is not a new concept and is often the result of frustration from citizens who are not successful in securing registration spaces in prime-time lesson programs. The advantage of implementing these policies is that taxpayers are given the opportunity to register in the prime-time slots, while non-residents would wait a pre-determined period before being allowed to register.

Comparable Research

A comparison was completed to determine what types of registration processes occur throughout Alberta. The chart below shows a comparison of registration processes throughout the region and of facilities in Alberta that are commonly used by the City of Fort Saskatchewan as comparators.

	Leduc Rec Centre	Strathcona County	Cochrane	Beaumont Aquafit Ctr	St. Albert Servus Centre	St. Albert Fountain Park	Whitecourt	Hinton	Lloydminster	City of Edmonton	City of Red Deer	Tri-Leisure	Camrose
Type of Lessons	Red Cross	Red Cross	Red Cross	Red Cross	None	Lifesaving Society	Red Cross	Lifesaving Society	Red Cross	Red Cross	Red Cross	Red Cross	Red Cross
Resident vs Non-Resident Policies													
Resident vs Non Resident Pricing	No	No	No	No	None	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Non-Resident Extra Program Fee	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Non resident pay 25% more	N/A	Youth save \$6 Adult/Teen & Infant/Pre save \$5
Resident Advanced Registration Period	N/A	N/A	Yes-1 week *on-line registration not	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	No
Member vs Non-Member Policies													
Member versus Non-Member Pricing	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Member Program Discount	None	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	15%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	15%	N/A
Member Advanced Registration Period	Yes-2 days	No	N/A	No	Yes-1 week	N/A	Yes-1 week	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes-2 days	N/A

From this comparison three types of registration processes were identified:

1. **Registration with no restrictions** – Anyone can register for programs once they are open to the public. Most municipalities have a registration process without restrictions, recognizing that it allows community residents the choice to access swimming lessons that work with their family's schedules and lifestyles.
2. **Registration of member versus non-members** – This registration process provides advantages to those people who hold current memberships to a specific facility. Facilities offered either an advanced registration period, membership pricing, or a combination of both. This type of registration process requires that memberships are current at the time of registration and for the duration of the program. These types of policies occur only where major multi-use recreation facilities have pool facilities.
3. **Registration of residents versus non-residents** – This registration process gives priority to residents, whether it is an advance registration date or additional fees for non-residents. There was one municipality surveyed (Cochrane) that did have an advanced registration date for residents, however, this was restricted to in person and phone in registrations only.

Implementation:

The implementation of this policy can be done relatively easy from a technical perspective. Our current software systems do allow resident/non-resident verification although implementation would not begin until early 2017 given that the programs have already been set up and entered for the fall of 2016. The system has a built-in setting that allows for the municipality to create a resident-only registration period which would ensure the online registration service can still function normally. As long as the address for the registrant in the software is correct, then the system will only allow residents to register during the prescribed period of time before non-residents can register.

The current recreation administrative software provider (Class Systems) has previously notified the City that they are discontinuing support for this software program. As such, it is not known which provider will be chosen to replace Class and what their capacity is for resident/non-resident requirements. If Council chooses to implement a policy in this regard, Administration will ensure this requirement is included in the request for proposal scheduled to go out this June. In an optimum circumstance, the policy would be implemented to coincide with the new software roll-out.

In order for implementation to proceed, the following processes would need to be put in place:

1. All accounts would need to be set up in person prior to registration day. The option to set up accounts online to register for City programs would not be provided since residency cannot be verified electronically.
2. A system would need to be put in place to periodically verify that the residency entered into the system is still correct and the resident has not moved elsewhere.
3. For all existing customer accounts, it would be assumed that addresses are correct unless the resident informs staff otherwise.
4. Upon the establishment of a new account, a residency verification process would be followed that would require registrants to show one of the following:
 - a) Valid drivers license
 - b) Most recent tax role notice
 - c) Utility bill from within the last 6 months
 - d) Any government issued I.D. that contains an address. (for renters)

It would be assumed that the child is a resident at the location provided by the parent.

The technical implementation of such a policy is not difficult and would not result in a significant additional cost to the City financially. Additional staff time may be required if there are any complaints related to policy enforcement.

Policy Considerations

While policies creating residential requirements can seem simple enough on the surface, there are many underlying challenges with the implementation that need to be considered.

Choice

To allow citizens the choice to access swimming lessons that work with their family's schedules and lifestyles, it is beneficial to have a relationship with our neighbouring municipalities. While there are those registering for City of Fort Saskatchewan lessons who reside outside the City, this is consistent with the number of Fort Saskatchewan residents signing up for aquatic programs in other municipalities. Fort Saskatchewan residents may sign up for lessons in other communities for reasons, such as work location, pool design preference, swim club association, and specialty training (leadership programs, diving, synchronized swimming, etc.), in addition to the ability to find programming that better meets their schedules.

We would anticipate that if we created barriers to outside residents registering in our programs, our residents would eventually become subject to the same barriers in other municipalities. This would then reduce the choices for those who need or want the aquatic options available in other locations. One example would be a resident who wished to participate in a diving club, which is a program not offered at the Harbour Pool.

Philosophy

It is important to distinguish the fact that resident requirement policies are different from those where customers can choose preferential services through "member programs" offered by businesses. Those programs are entered into by choice by paying additional fees in exchange for preferential services. Resident/non-resident policies are essentially non-voluntary policies that divide customers into two groups based on a predetermined criteria. In this case, the consequences of picking "winners and losers" must be done with great care and the consequences fully understood.

Intermunicipal Relationships

While policies do exist that create resident versus non-resident requirements for municipal services, such policies are not the norm across Alberta. There are a significant number of examples that can be noted daily, where the residents within any one municipality utilize the services within another jurisdiction. Roads, recreation facilities, social support programs, cultural programming, etc. As a general rule, municipalities accept the "give and take" that exists between themselves and their regional neighbors as being the most efficient and seamless way to provide services to the region as a whole. If all municipalities put up barriers for those outside of their jurisdiction, there would need to be far more services provided within individual municipalities, which affects economies of scale and increases the size of government.

Community versus Municipality

A “trade area” is the geographic area from which a community generates business and encompasses those who identify with the community as being their gathering place. It is important to remember that the City’s trade area is not limited by our municipal boundaries. The trade area extends well beyond municipal borders and is based more on travel distances to important services. Those residents who live outside our municipal boundaries, but inside our trade area are important members of our community from both a social, and economic development perspective. Enacting policies that treat certain members of our trade area differently than others can have a negative impact on local business as it creates negative attitudes towards the City as being a community that cares more for those within the urban area. Building a strong sense of community should not stop at our municipal borders but should be welcoming to all who contribute to our community.

In addition, many people own, operate, or work for local businesses and may not reside within the City, but choose to shop and participate in events and programs here. The potential exists that businesses owners and employees who are an integral part of the community will be negatively affected by resident/non-resident policies.

Effectiveness and Customer Service

Designing and implementing a system that proves residency is easier when looking at adult residency. Drivers licences along with a current tax role or utility bill would work for most homes (for a renter who does not pay the taxes or utility bill, perhaps a current credit card bill or other verification would need to be provided). Challenges will still exist for someone who perhaps doesn’t carry a driver licence, but then other photo ID could be accepted assuming it contains an address.

The bigger challenge is that children and youth do not carry identification. We now live in an age where blended families or single parent families are not uncommon. Many children do not carry the same last names of their parents. Proving the residency of an adult does not guarantee you will know the residency of a child. It would not be difficult for a local adult to register a child on behalf of a non-resident family member. Great care would have to be taken if the municipality chooses to challenge the residency of a potential registrant so as to not offend. If a “laid-back” approach is taken then our policy will be abused. If a strong approach is taken to enforcement then we risk situations where we offend those from blended families, adoptions, foster homes etc.

Regardless of the approach used, the fact that children do not carry identification. would limit the effectiveness of the program. Some of the more recent birth certificates do contain parent information but this would again become problematic in situations where children are with foster parents, grandparents, or other living arrangements.

In addition, variations in custody arrangements would require a clear definition of “resident”. Children may stay with a parent half the time, on the weekends, every second weekend, etc.

Frequent violations of the policy (lying) will create database issues in that data on addresses, emergency contact information, and other important information will not be accurate. For example, if a child is involved in a serious incident during an aquatics program, and they were registered by a resident on behalf of a non-resident, contacting the parent of the child may become a challenge.

Summary:

The implementation of a residency/non-residency policy is not difficult to implement and will not require significant resources. The challenge is with the effectiveness of the residency verification process. Administration does not recommend the adoption of resident versus non/resident registration policies due to the factors previously noted which detail the many implementation challenges and “spill-over” effects from such a policy. Doing so does not increase the amount of spaces available for lessons, but will simply rearrange who gets priority. There will still be local citizens who are not able to register in their program of choice. While some of the challenges noted regarding residency verification may seem cumbersome, swimming is considered a “life skill”. It involves imparting safety skills that may save a child’s life and allows them to safely participate in indoor and outdoor aquatic environments.

It is recommended that the municipality maintain a strong focus on the planning and approval process for new aquatics spaces as the municipality continues to grow, as per the recently approved Recreation Facilities and Parks Master Plan.

Financial Implications:

Advanced registrations periods require additional staffing resources to support Customer Service Representatives. This would require approximately 56 hours per year allotted customer staff costs. This amount would be on-going to accommodate the additional registration days that would be added per year but would not be a significant amount of money.

Internal Impacts:

Due to timing for the Leisure Guide publications, no changes to the registration process are able to occur until 2017. The Fall 2016 Programming and Leisure Guide input process have already been completed.

Alternatives:

1. That Council maintain the current registration process, which does not restrict access based on residency. (No motion required)
2. That Council direct Administration to implement an advanced registration system that includes a two day “resident only” registration period beginning with the winter 2017 program session and bring forward a budget request in the 2017 budget process including all additional operating costs related to implementation.

Recommendation:

That Council maintain the current registration process, which does not restrict access based on residency. (No motion required)

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Submitted to:	City Council	Date: May 24, 2016