

Aquatic Service and Facility Review – Phase One Report

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Report Summary

This report and presentation provides an overview of the Aquatic Service and Facility Review first phase of work which includes a review of current state and a summary of public and stakeholder engagement conducted to date.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan in the areas of Asset Management and Service Excellence, Climate Change and Creating a Healthier and More Vibrant Community. The Aquatic Service and Facility Review incorporates asset management considerations and will guide decisions on investments in infrastructure to support community recreation with a focus on quality of life.

The report supports Council's Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP) as considerations for modernized, efficient facilities will form future phases of the comprehensive aquatics review.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background

At the City Council meeting of February 21, 2023, Council approved an approach to a comprehensive aquatics review to develop a 25-year vision for aquatic services in Greater Sudbury. Funding in the amount of \$150,000 to complete the review was approved from the Tax Rate Stabilization Fund.

Contract CDD23-113, Request for Proposal for an Aquatic Service and Facility Review was awarded to Monteith Brown Planning Consultants. The scope of work includes:

- Gather input on community needs and trends affecting aquatic participation.
- A review of the condition, effectiveness, and performance of public indoor pools.
- Study of non-municipal facilities and provides recommendations on how they should contribute to an overall aquatic service delivery system for the community.
- Considerations for related initiatives, such as Lionel E. Lalonde Therapeutic Pool, Kalmo Beach 10-Year Plan, and Lively Recreation Advisory Panel Work.

- Provide recommendations for longer-term strategies for indoor pool renewal and development.
- Develop strategies to enhance the public experience at splash pads and supervised beaches.
- Considerations for aquatic services with a future vision for a 25-year time frame, accounting for population growth, growth centres in Greater Sudbury and industry/aquatic trends.

The Aquatic Service and Facility Review is delivered over two phases. The first phase of work includes the following:

- **Current State Report** – Includes a review of aquatic trends and utilization as well as a preliminary assessment of facility condition and capital requirements. The Current State Report is included as Appendix A.
- **What We Heard Report** – A summary of the engagement process conducted through pop-up consultations, community surveying, stakeholder consultation and Council and staff input. The What We Heard Report is included as Appendix B.

Current State Report Key Findings

Key findings from the Current State Report are summarized below. Themes will be assessed further in the next phase of the project along with additional public input to inform the final Aquatic Service and Facility Review:

- **The City has a long history of aquatic service and facility provision.** The City of Greater Sudbury owns and operates 5 indoor pools that offer a range of programming from instructional swimming, recreational swimming, aquafitness, training/ competition, and more. These pools are generally located in the city's most populated areas, with the smaller Onaping Pool (built by a mining company in 1967) serving the outlying communities of Levack, Onaping, and Dowling.
- **Indoor pools offer critical benefits to the community.** Aquatic services deliver on several aspects of the City's Strategic Plan, including creating a healthier community and strengthening community vibrancy. Indoor pools offer many direct and indirect benefits to the community in a year-round setting, the most important of which is building the skills residents need to prevent drowning deaths. Residents also benefit from lifelong participation in fitness swimming, inclusive recreational and play opportunities, water sport and training opportunities, and improved physical and social health.
- **Past studies have found that the City has a sufficient supply of pools to meet current and anticipated needs.** Recent forecasts suggest that Greater Sudbury will grow by 11% (18,280 persons) by 2051. Nearly one-half of this growth is forecasted within the Sudbury community (including the South End and New Sudbury), with the outlying communities (led by Valley East, Azilda and Chelmsford) accounting for the balance of future growth. Rationalizing the provision of pools has been identified as a strategic direction for the City for some time.
- **The City's pools are aging, and most have exceeded typical lifespans.** The average age of the City-operated indoor pools is 49 years (average build year 1974), which exceeds the average expected useful life of a new publicly-owned pool (being 46 years according to provincial data). Additionally, the maintenance/asset renewal history of the City's pools has not been consistently sufficient to maximize their service life.
- **Most of the City's pools are experiencing rising capital renewal costs and are at greater risk of unplanned closures.** Building components that have surpassed their expected lifespan are increasingly at risk of failure, which can lead to service interruptions, cancelled programs, unplanned closures, and increased costs.
- **Municipal pools are not fully barrier-free and have not kept pace with modern pool designs.** Except for the smaller Onaping Pool, the City's pools are traditional 25-metre rectangular tanks. The City's pools were built in a different era that limits their ability to address the needs of all age groups and interests. Many lack compliant entry ramps or chair lifts, modern or universal change rooms,

natural lighting, and space for dryland training and programming. Further, two pools are attached to schools and three of the City's five pools are stand-alone facilities that are not part of multi-use recreation centres, limiting their operational benefits and relevance to residents.

- **While demand for lessons remains strong, the appeal of the City's pools for recreational swimming appears to be declining.** This is likely due to demographic factors, but may have also been affected by the current state of infrastructure. Notably, City pools are unable to offer fully accessible warm-water opportunities, a growing area of need in the community. Aquatic programming is continually evolving to capture different segments of the population and the City's inventory of pools has not kept pace with the growing recreational needs of Greater Sudbury residents and organizations.
- **The City's demographic profile has a significant impact on the demand for aquatic services.** For example, indoor pools largely rely on demand from children (for instructional swimming) and seniors (for warm water aquatics). With an aging population, demand is rising for services such as daytime pool times, aquafit classes, therapeutic programs, and other warm-water activities.
- **Community providers are a vital component to delivering the full range of aquatic services.** Prior to closure, the Jenő Tihanyi pool at Laurentian University was heavily used by the community until it closed in March 2020. The facility offered the region's only 50-metre pool (the next nearest one is in Markham) and supported local and regional sport training as well as provincial-level competitions. The Sudbury YMCA also operates a multi-tank aquatic facility as part of its downtown fitness and wellness centre which is accessed through memberships and day passes. The YMCA has recently indicated that its operations (which include an indoor aquatics facility built in 2000) are financially unsustainable.

With respect to supervised beaches, the Current State report identifies the following:

- Supervised beaches provide safe locations for residents and visitors young and old to experience the water during warmer months and to practice water safety.
- The number of visits to public beaches has declined since 2019.
- Support buildings at many beach locations are aging and/or inadequate for long-term needs.
- Barrier-free accessibility is a notable challenge for many public beaches in Greater Sudbury.

The report also provides the following key findings related to splash pads:

- The number of splash pads in Greater Sudbury has grown substantially in recent years.
- Most of the City's larger splash pads have been made possible through community donations.

What We Heard Report Preliminary Findings

Phase one of the project included an engagement process which included pop-up consultations, a community survey, public submissions through Over to You, stakeholder consultation and Council and staff interviews. More than 1,000 people (representing more than 3,000 residents) and 12 organizations (representing more than 520 swimmers) provided feedback through this process. Preliminary findings from the What We Heard report are listed below:

- **Learning how to swim is an essential skill for all residents of Greater Sudbury.** There are 330 lakes in Greater Sudbury, which provide both a unique opportunity and risk for residents and visitors who enjoy them. With a growing population of newcomers, their swimming skills and knowledge of local lakes may not be comparable to long-time residents. Learning how to swim is crucial for all to enjoy the lakes and pools in a safe manner.
- **Updates to indoor pools are recognized as a high priority due to aging infrastructure.** With all municipal pool facilities being at or near the end of their lifespan, residents and user groups are highly aware of what is not working and what barriers are present. Satisfaction levels are lowest for

the City's oldest pools. 92% of survey respondents agreed that upgrades to indoor pools should be a high priority for City Council and community providers, with 82% specifically indicating that upgraded change rooms (e.g., lockers, benches, showers) are a key area for improvement. The ability to offer warm-water activities and barrier-free spaces were also identified as priorities.

- **Travel time and distance to aquatic facilities is reasonable for the majority of residents.** While Greater Sudbury covers a large geographical area, but 83% of residents agreed that travel time to facilities was reasonable. Many families who participate in sports understand and are aware of the need to travel across the city to participate in activities.
- **Residents want more program availability, especially swimming lessons.** Additional swimming lessons was the top open-ended response when asked about offerings at indoor pools. Residents explained their concerns about not getting their kids into swimming lessons as registration becomes full soon after it opens. Other requests include more sessions for lane swims, family swims, and aquacise classes.
- **There is interest in warm water tanks for recreational and therapeutic uses for people of all ages and abilities.** With an aging population and increasing interest in aquatic fitness, the demand for warm water activities and facilities has followed. Younger children, families, and persons with disabilities also find warm water tanks useful for recreational play over the colder traditional tanks generally suited for sports and training. 71% of survey respondents said that warm water and therapeutic activities were important to them. The City's proposed therapeutic pool has an opportunity to provide these warm water needs for the community, but many believe that the vision should be bigger and broader than what is currently planned.
- **Having barrier-free spaces and quality support amenities are essential to the experience at splash pads and supervised beaches.** Shade structures, benches, change rooms, water bottle filling stations, and washrooms are all amenities that complement outdoor uses such as splash pads and supervised beaches. Through the survey, residents mentioned that not having these supporting amenities were barriers to accessing these aquatic facilities as often as they would like. Without them, residents are unable to enjoy these spaces for long periods of time, especially for seniors and young children who often require access to washrooms more frequently.
- **Community providers want to collaborate with the City to provide indoor aquatic services.** Laurentian University has historically provided aquatic services through its Olympic sized pool to both residents and visitors of Greater Sudbury, but the facility closed in 2020 due to the pandemic and crucial repairs are needed for it to re-open. The community and user groups have indicated that re-opening this pool is a top priority, not only to provide more capacity, but also to accommodate athletic training opportunities and host regional and provincial-level competitions.

Additionally, the Sudbury YMCA provides aquatic services within the urban core of Greater Sudbury. This is the newest pool in the City, although it is not regulation length for competitive swimming purposes. The YMCA operators out of the Centre for Life, which is based shared with the City and the YMCA has indicated that their operation is financially unsustainable under the current model.

Next Steps

Phase two of the Aquatic Service and Facility Review will consist of a detailed facility needs assessment that considers geographical distribution and future service delivery, an implementation strategy, and additional consultation with residents and stakeholders. The Aquatic Service and Facility Review final report will be presented to City Council in September 2024.

Resources Cited

Approach to a Comprehensive Aquatics Review, City Council (February 21, 2023)
<https://pub-greatersudbury.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=48717>

Aquatic Service and Facility Review Over To You Page
<https://overtoyou.greatersudbury.ca/aquatic-service-and-facility-review>