



February 20, 2025

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : General Manager, Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **Vancouver Aquatic Centre (VAC) - Confidential Board Briefing Memo**

Dear Commissioners,

The purpose of this memo is to:

- Respond to a commissioner enquiry to provide an estimated cost (or range) to modify the plan to accommodate a 50m pool size, with costs to include the additional zoning and archeology work required, and sufficient additional resources to accelerate the planning required, to still get shovels in the ground by Q4 2026; and
- Provide additional information in response to the February 10, 2025, VAC Aquatics User Group letter.

Request to provide an estimated cost (or range) to modify the plan to accommodate a 50m pool

At project inception, functional programming was focussed on the concept of a 50m pool and dive facility. It has been determined that a 50m pool will not fit at the current site due to many constraints that require the proposed pool to be built within the current VAC footprint, and the fact that a new 50m pool triggers a larger design to be compliant with accessibility and current design considerations (i.e. World Aquatic Standards, longer tank to accommodate bulkhead, clearances around the pool tank for accessibility, etc.).

To deliver a 50m pool, the project would need to completely restart due to the expanded building footprint required. Expanding beyond the existing footprint triggers new processes with considerable uncertainty to budget and project timeline. Rough estimates indicate project costs for the current proposed facility would increase by between \$10 to \$20 million per year of construction delay. Determining a specific cost associated with expanding the facility scope and scale is difficult given the inability to predict with reasonable precision the ground conditions. It would not be unreasonable to assume that a revised project scope inclusive of a 50m pool, and other proposed features could exceed \$100 million (inclusive of the aforementioned inflation impacts). More work would be required to provide a substantiated cost estimate.

Sponsored Crown Grant Process

Modifying the recommended program to deliver a 50m lap pool would impact the ongoing sponsored crown grant process with the Province, which staff previously shared In-Camera and remains confidential.

As previously communicated, VAC is located on permanent park land and land currently leased from the Province for parks and recreation enjoyment of the public. The sponsored crown grant

allows the Park Board to renew VAC by enabling consolidation of the land for development and moving forward with the permitting process.

The Province has confirmed receipt of the sponsored crown grant application with the recommended program. As per provincial requirements, City staff initiated discussions in Q3 2024 with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations who are interested in, among other items, site diligence reports and sustainability and climate standards. The current recommended program is designed to fit the existing building footprint to not create any new impacts on land currently not developed. This satisfies both Provincial requirements for park use and the Nations' interest in site conditions and environmental impacts. The Nations are generally supportive of the proposed program that remains within the existing building footprint, and City staff will continue to engage in conversations as the project progresses. The next step to advance the application is project approval confirmation from the Park Board and City.

The below table outlines the current project timeline and estimated timeline, and additional steps required with a 50m pool pivot. A 50m pivot introduces new regulatory requirements which add significant project uncertainty. The project team would have to rescind the current application and create new designs to support a new grant application. The additional time required introduces more uncertainty around the aggressive timeline and the project would not meet the plebiscite requirement to break ground by Q4 2024. The current \$170 million project budget considers 2025 and 2026 cost escalation. Additional project delays estimate an approximate \$10 to 20 million increase each year that construction is delayed. Without the plebiscite funding, the project team would need to secure new funding in the 2027-2030 Capital Plan for this end-of-life facility in a financially constrained environment. Other major capital projects identified for the 2027-2030 Capital Plan include Kitsilano Pool, Ray-Cam Community Centre, and Hastings Community Centre in addition to other city priorities (i.e. firehalls, libraries, bridges).

Understanding the aggressive timeline and budget constraints, any additional cost escalation would make the project not financially viable and risk losing an aquatic facility within the citywide network.

Action	Timeline	Estimated Timeline
New designs	Completed	3 months
Rezoning	N/A – not required	6-12 months for processing and approvals
Sponsored Crown Grant application	Submission completed	5 months
Consultation with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh	Initial discussions completed (ongoing)	Currently unknown
Secure Additional Funding	Q1 2025	Q1 2025
Detailed Design	Q3 2025	Q2 2026 (approx.)
Secure New Funding (2027-2030 Capital Plan)	N/A – not required	Q3 2026
Develop Construction RFP	Q2 2026	Q1 2027
Construction Procurement	Q2-Q3 2026	Q2 2027 (approx.)
Construction Breaking Ground	Q4 2026	Q4 2027 (approx.)

BOLD: new process impacting timeline

FEBRUARY 10, 2025 VAC AQUATIC USER GROUPS LETTER TO COMMISSIONS

1. Community/Social Impacts of Event Hosting

VAC Recommended Program Increases Event Hosting Opportunities

VAC currently supports three 25m swim competitions annually, and the recommended program provides opportunities to expand the number of competitions at the proposed future facility. The recommended program also improves delivery for 25m competition swimming by providing warmup and cool down facilities through the improved dive tank and new leisure tank. Park Board staff consistently evaluate and work to balance competitive swimming while minimizing service disruptions and public access to aquatic services.

The current VAC also hosts dive competitions but due to the nature of the competitions, there are minimal service disruptions to the public and staff can minimize impacts to public aquatic access during dive competitions. There would also be opportunities to increase the number of dive competitions in the proposed future facility.

Mitigating 50m Service Disruptions

The recommended program shifts service delivery due to the loss of a 50m pool and staff have considered initial options to reduce service disruptions through an aquatic system-wide reallocation of space and services – such as increasing 50m configuration at Hillcrest. The Park Board is committed to reviewing the viability to deliver a 50m pool for consideration in all future aquatic redevelopments, where feasible.

Staff expect that the renewed VAC as proposed will, generally speaking, continue to offer similar levels of service to existing swim clubs and rental groups, with the only exception being this access will be provided in a 25m pool as opposed to 50m pool.

Facility	Total weekly lane hours (All user groups & Public Swim)	
	Current Hours	Proposed Hours
Vancouver Aquatic Centre	500 hrs (50m): Club & public access 47% total operating hours	
Hillcrest Community Centre	84 hrs (50m): Club & public access 10% total operating hours	512 hrs (50m) 59% total operating hours

There are currently ten 50m pools supporting training and two supporting 50m competition hosting within the Lower Mainland. UBC and Surrey are the preferred locations for 50m swim competitions as the facilities meet World Aquatic Standards. Additionally, Burnaby recently approved building a 10 lane, 50m swim competition hosting facility that is expected to be opened in 2028. The below table outlines the various aquatic facilities in the Lower Mainland.

Location	50m training	50m competition	25m competition
VAC (Current End of Life Facility)	X		X (P)
VAC (Proposed)			X (P)
Hillcrest Community Centre	X		
UBC Aquatic Centre	X	X (P)	
Watermania (Richmond)	X		
Grandview Heights Aquatic Centre (Surrey)	X	X (P)	
Surrey Sport & Leisure Complex	X		
Guildford Recreation Centre (Surrey)	X		
təməsewtx ^w Aquatic and Community Centre (New Westminster)	X		
City Centre Aquatic Complex (Coquitlam)	X		
Walnut Grove Community Centre (Langley)	X		
Maple Ridge Leisure Centre	X		
Burnaby Lake Recreation Centre (Proposed Completion Q1 2028)	X		

(P) = Provincial Based on Swim BC 2025 Schedule

In addition to Provincial competitions, various of the facilities above host regional competitions throughout the year

2. Economic Benefit Analysis

Cost Recovery

VAC currently generates revenue through three streams: swim lane rentals, programming (i.e. swim lessons), and drop-ins (i.e.. Aquafit, public swim). Aquatic club lane rentals generate the lowest gross revenue per hour. The table below provides a revenue breakdown per hour by utilization based on the current fees and charges framework and current average participation rates in programs and drop-in services.

Utilization of 50m 8 lanes	Gross Revenue generated per hour
Programming - swim lesson (50%) and Length Swim (50%)	\$1,000
Programming - Aquafit/Public (50%) and Length swim (50%)	\$550
Aquatic Club Lane Rental	\$200

Future Economic Benefit

The reduction of the lap pool from 50m to 25m, combined with the increase in the warmer leisure pool is expected to increase the facility's usability and participation. As a result, this is expected to translate into increased future revenue projections for VAC, resulting in the need for reduced tax-payer funding to support annual operating costs on per swim basis. The shift in services delivery will result in VAC generating similar revenue to Hillcrest's aquatic programming (\$1.62 in 2018) compared to \$4.37 at VAC in 2018.

Although VAC would see a decrease in overall rental revenues from competitive swim groups, the expected increase in drop-in leisure usage would make up for the rental revenue decrease. VAC could expect an increase of approximately 45% in aquatic related revenues if it sees the same 2024 volumes as Hillcrest. However, this comes with additional costs to operate the new facility. The net investment increase reflects the programming change and increase in public usability of the facility.

3. Compliance with Public Mandate and Capital Plan

The project team sought legal advice to ensure clarity and compliance with the [Vancouver Charter](#). The following outlines the key legal considerations and guidance provided with respect to the Park Board and City's obligations to the Capital Plan and [plebiscite questions](#) from October 2022:

- The plebiscite questions for voter approval for borrowing of funds are intended to identify the purposes or need for the borrowing, in this case, certain capital projects and infrastructure.
- The description of the VAC capital project in the 2022 borrowing questions was quite high-level and the descriptions of the VAC project in the [informational PDF](#) and in the voter approval question are broad enough to cover either rehabilitation or outright replacement of the building, as the VAC was still at an early planning and design stage.
- Changes to components of the amenity (such as the length of pool) would not attract the requirement to go back to the voters.
- On the other hand, and as an example, removal of the pool altogether from VAC project would be a big enough change to have to back to the voters, as would using the funds for an entirely different purpose, per sections 242 and 244 of the Vancouver Charter.

While impossible to offer certainty, City Legal has advised that the shift from a 50m pool to a 25m pool for the VAC is highly likely to be resistant to a voter's potential legal challenge to the borrowing bylaw or its surrounding process. Please treat this as confidential legal advice and information.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Jackson".

Steve Jackson

General Manager, Board of Parks and Recreation – Vancouver Parks and Recreation

Copy to: Park Board Leadership Team
Park Board Communications
VAC Project Team