

## COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

*For consideration at the Standing Committee meeting on City Finance and Services meeting on  
May 20, 2026*

### **1. Carrying on Joe Fortes' Legacy: Universal Access to Basic Swimming Lessons and Expansion of Aquatic Infrastructure as Core Public Safety Policy**

Submitted by: Mayor Sim

#### WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver is one of Canada's coastal and port cities, with a long-standing economic, cultural, and recreational relationship to the Pacific Ocean and its working waterfront, resulting in widespread and ongoing public exposure to aquatic environments;
2. Drowning remains a leading cause of preventable death among children and youth, and basic swimming ability is a foundational life skill essential to survival, safety, and confidence in aquatic environments;
3. The Lifesaving Society and other public safety authorities emphasize that early-stage swimming instruction, such as floating, treading water, and basic propulsion, provides the greatest reduction in drowning risk;
4. Swimming is not only a safety skill but also an important family and community activity, supporting physical health, social connection, and lifelong recreation across all ages;
5. The legacy of Joe Fortes, widely regarded as Vancouver's first official lifeguard and swimming instructor, reflects a long-standing civic commitment to ensuring residents can safely access and enjoy the city's waters;
6. Access to swimming lessons in Vancouver is constrained by both user fees and limited pool capacity, with affordability pressures disproportionately affecting families with children and newcomers;
7. The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation currently delivers approximately 1,133 swimming lesson programs annually across introductory levels one through three, serving approximately 6,498 participants, with associated fee revenues of approximately \$420,590 per year;
8. Past and existing efforts to expand access to swimming instruction have demonstrated that partnerships between the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and the Vancouver School Board can provide an effective and equitable model for broad-based delivery of introductory swimming education;
9. Municipal governments routinely invest in universal public safety infrastructure, including fire protection, transportation safety, and parks, without direct user fees, recognizing the shared societal benefit of prevention;

10. The City has historically adopted per-capita service benchmarks, such as parkland targets, to guide long-term infrastructure planning, and a similar approach to aquatic facilities would support equitable access across neighbourhoods;
11. The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation has directed staff to initiate an update to the VanSplash Aquatics Strategy, with work anticipated to conclude in early 2027, creating an opportunity to incorporate consideration of aquatic facility expansion, service level targets, and access objectives arising from this motion into that planning process prior to subsequent consideration by Council;
12. Other Canadian cities, including Toronto, Calgary, and Edmonton, have expanded free or low-cost access to recreation programming, recognizing its role in public health, safety, and affordability; and
13. Addressing both financial barriers and infrastructure capacity constraints is necessary to ensure universal access to swimming instruction.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council affirm that basic swimming ability is an essential life skill and that access to introductory swimming instruction should be treated as core public safety goal.
- B. THAT Council direct staff, in consultation with the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, to design and implement a program providing free access to the first three levels of swimming lessons (or equivalent beginner stages) for all residents of Vancouver, with priority access for children aged 3 to 12.
- C. THAT Council direct staff to report back with a proposed per-capita aquatic infrastructure target (e.g., pools per 10,000 residents or equivalent service metric) to be achieved by 2035, analogous to the City's parkland provision metrics, including:
  - Current service levels and geographic distribution;
  - Projected population growth and demand; and
  - Recommended targets to ensure equitable access across neighbourhoods.
- D. THAT Council direct that all new or replacement aquatic facilities required to meet the per-capita target be planned and delivered through the City's Capital Plan and capital budgeting processes, ensuring long-term, sustainable investment in aquatic infrastructure;

FURTHER THAT the program and infrastructure strategy be designed to:

- Expand access while managing demand through fair registration practices;
- Increase instructor recruitment, certification, and retention;
- Explore partnerships with the Vancouver School Board, community organizations, and senior governments.

- E. THAT Staff report back in early 2027 to align with Park Board's VanSplash timeline, with:
- A phased implementation plan, including pilot locations;
  - Capacity expansion options, including extended pool hours and new facility delivery;
  - Financial analysis, including foregone revenue and incremental operating costs; and
  - Opportunities for external funding, including provincial and federal contributions aligned with public health and safety objectives.
- F. THAT Council consider funding for both the program and associated capacity expansion through the City's annual Operating Budget and Capital Plan processes, recognizing the initiative as an investment in public safety, affordability, public health, and community well-being.
- G. THAT Council request that the Park Board restore the pre-COVID-19 operational procedures for Kitsilano Pool, including but not limited to the reintroduction of full-capacity operations without time-limited swim sessions, the reinstatement of drop-in public access alongside lane swimming and leisure use, and the resumption of in-person queuing and admissions practices that enabled flexible, spontaneous access for residents and visitors throughout the day;

FURTHER THAT Council request that the Park Board report back on the timeline and operational requirements necessary to reinstate this pre-pandemic service model in advance of the upcoming summer season.

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