



Subject: *Aquatics Program Registration*
To: Parks, Recreation, & Culture Committee
Date Prepared: June 2, 2023
Related Motions: N/A
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Summary

Following registration of seasonal programs, some East Hants residents have indicated issues with enrolling into aquatic programs at the East Hants Aquatic Centre (EHAC). Some residents feel that there should be a priority registration for East Hants residents, as well as others that feel a facility membership holder should have priority registration. Staff have completed an analysis on the percentage of East Hants residents in aquatics programs versus residents outside of the Municipality, as well as a jurisdictional scan on priority registration models in Nova Scotia and across Canada.

Financial Impact Statement

There are no financial implications to the recommendations in this report.

Recommendation

That the Parks, Recreation, & Culture Committee recommends that Council maintains the current registration model for aquatics and recreation programs that does not prioritize registration for members of the East Hants Aquatic Centre or residents of East Hants.

Recommended Motion

Move that Parks, Recreation, & Culture Committee recommends that Council maintains the current registration model for aquatics and recreation programs that does not prioritize registration for East Hants residents or membership holders at the East Hants Aquatic Centre.

Background

Impact of Shutdowns and Cancelled Leadership Courses

The East Hants Aquatic Centre (EHAC) opened in July 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The first aquatic program registration at EHAC had a total of 500 participants, which was limited due to staffing size and pandemic restrictions on capacity. COVID-19 provincial shutdowns and restrictions disrupted key leadership course offerings (Bronze Star, Medallion, Cross, etc.) that train people to become a lifeguard and swim instructor. This largely affected the number of participants coming through the leadership pathway to become staff members, which reduced capacity to meet the demand of swimming lesson registration.

Registration Numbers

Despite challenges with staffing swim instructors, East Hants continued to grow the registration numbers over the past three years by increasing the number of scheduled lessons that instructors teach per day and fast-tracking lifesaving training for as many new staff as possible. Since 2021, registration numbers have grown by approximately 300 participants per year. Spring 2023 was the largest registration to date at the aquatic centre with 1,200 participants. This number does not include an additional 300 people on the waiting list.

East Hants Aquatic Centre Registration Since Spring 2021

Season/Year	Total Registrations
Spring 2021	640
Spring 2022	909
Spring 2023	1,200

Resident vs. Non-Residents

Staff reviewed client accounts from historical data of aquatics registration at the EHAC. Clients were manually identified as being a resident based on the address that was listed in the client account. Most registration seasons showed that the percentage of residents and non-residents was almost equally split (50|50). Staff defined the residency status to the best of their ability by analyzing client data with addresses as they are inputted into the recreation software.

East Hants Residents vs. Non-Residents

Resident	Unique Client Count	% Based on Location
East Hants	493	46%
Other	585	54%

Jurisdictional Scan

Staff conducted a jurisdictional scan of aquatic facilities in Nova Scotia to better understand how other facilities compare to the EHAC in terms of total registration and whether each facility offers a priority registration. Staff also looked at the size of the aquatic staff team that each facility has to understand the capacity that East Hants has to grow in terms of registration size. The Spring 2023 waitlist had similar percentages of 50% resident and 50% non-resident.

Results of Aquatic Facilities of Similar Size in Nova Scotia Scan

Facility	Location	Spring 2023 Registration	# Of Aquatic Staff	Priority Registration (Y/N)
East Hants Aquatic Centre	East Hants	1201	68	No
Rath Eastlink Centre	Truro, NS	280	40	Yes, members priority
Zatzman Sportsplex	Dartmouth, NS	1300	75	Yes, members priority
YMCA - Halifax	Halifax, NS	862	50	Yes, members only
Lunenburg County Lifestyle Centre	Lunenburg, NS	483	28	Yes, members priority
Canada Games Centre	Halifax, NS	1250	140	Yes, membership priority
Sackville Sports Stadium	Halifax, NS	N/A	100	No

Sackville Sports Stadium was unable to provide statistics on registration due to technical difficulties.

The data shows that East Hants offers approximately the same amount of registered aquatic programming as some of the larger facilities in Halifax (i.e. Canada Games Centre). Most facilities identified were operated by non-profit organizations versus municipalities. These facilities offer a discount, as well as priority registration for members. The EHAC doesn't have priority registration for people who purchase memberships at the facility due to the inequity it would create if East Hants were to privilege those who can afford to pay membership with early registration. Sackville Sports Stadium was the only other facility found that is operated by a municipality, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). HRM does not have priority registration for paying members at the Sackville Sports Stadium.

Staff conducted a scan across Canada for municipalities that have priority registration in place for residents. There were five (5) municipalities identified that offer priority registration shown in the table below.

Municipalities in Canada that Prioritize Registration for Residents

Municipality/Town	Population	Neighbouring Municipalities
Vaughan, ON	323,281	Toronto, Richmond Hill, Markham & Brampton (Ontario)
Town of Langley, BC	143,224	Abbotsford & Surrey (British Columbia)
Arnprior, ON	8,795	Ottawa (Ontario)
City of Delta, BC	110,848	Vancouver & Surrey & Richmond (British Columbia)
Mount Pearl, NL	22,477	St John's (Newfoundland)

The areas identified in this table offered priority registration for swimming lessons and/or other recreation programs. Some of the municipalities identified also had a 10% fee increase for non-residents. Although the municipalities/towns identified varied in terms of geographical size and population size, they all shared a commonality of having neighbouring municipalities with populations much greater than their own. Mount Pearl, NL was the only area that staff found in Atlantic Canada who offer a priority registration for residents.

Discussion

The data captured by staff demonstrates that the EHAC is operating with high enrollment due to the catchment area attracting both residents and non-residents of East Hants. The enrollment that EHAC is having exceeds expectations that were originally set for the facility before construction.

East Hants Aquatic Centre - A Regional Facility

In 2015, a feasibility study and business case were developed for constructing the East Hants Aquatic Centre. In this document, it was noted that the catchment area for an aquatic centre located in the corridor area of East Hants would serve a population outside of the East Hants municipal boundaries. This was a critical element for the Municipality to received federal funding of \$5.8 million.

Current Programming Reaching Capacity

The original expected annual registration target for aquatic programming at EHAC was estimated to be approximately 2,000 per year, which was based on the size of the facility and expected demand. The current numbers of registration are now almost double to the original projection benchmark at approximately 3,500 per year.

EHAC is a smaller aquatic centre and has less staff (68) than all the comparators of the jurisdictional scan that had similar registration sizes. One example is the Canada Games Centre (CGC) with 1,250 registrations this past spring. The CGC has 140 aquatic staff, an eight (8) lane 25m competition pool and 25m leisure pool. These facilities are also located in areas of high population density and in closer proximity to post-secondary institutions, which means they can employ more staff to teach swimming. EHAC has a smaller staffing complement and is 90% high school students, which means constant turnover for most staff once they graduate. Spring enrollment of 1,200 participants is reaching the max of what the EHAC can offer on realistic staffing size and capacity.

Priority Registration and/or Rates for East Hants Residents

The jurisdictional scan across Canada showed that priority registration for residents is not common. Staff have identified the different risks for Council to consider regarding an East Hants resident priority registration.

1. Perfect Mind Resident Capabilities

The recreation software that East Hants uses possesses the capability to take a client account and recognize if the address is in the East Hants boundary based on GIS. The software can then set different registration dates and fees for clients who are identified as residents.

Advantages:

- A. For a one-time fee, Perfect Mind would populate all the client accounts with resident status who have an address in East Hants boundary.
- B. As new clients sign up online, their address will automatically be validated as resident or non-resident.

Disadvantages:

- A. Fake addresses could be used in the system.
- B. System does not prevent multiple addresses for different client accounts (address sharing).
- C. The recreation software won't recognize an address in the resident boundary if it is spelled incorrectly. It does not have an address validation feature with Canada Post.
- D. There is no way to track if people move out of East Hants unless they update their address in Perfect Mind.

Staff have identified that approximately 2-3 hours of customer service staff time per week would need to be added to the budget to validate addresses. Instead of using the GIS feature of Perfect Mind, staff could also validate resident status in person by proof of address.

2. Impact on Residents with Other Municipalities

If East Hants were to move towards a priority registration for residents, it could push other municipalities to follow suit. Many East Hants residents rely and use some services in HRM, West Hants and Colchester. Council must consider the risk that if other municipalities follow suit, East Hants residents could be impacted by not getting equal access to recreational services.

3. Impact on Non-Residents

Moving to a resident priority registration model could have several negative effects on the non-residents who use the EHAC and other services of East Hants. There are many people who live approximately 5-10km from the aquatic centre who are non-residents and shop and support East Hants. A priority registration model for residents could create negative feelings from boarder residents towards the Municipality and impact how they support East Hants. There is also the risk that they may choose not to enroll at the East Hants Aquatic Centre, which could negatively impact enrollment.

Priority Registration and/or Discounts for Members

The jurisdiction scan in Nova Scotia demonstrated that most facilities have a priority registration and discounts in place for members of their facility. This is a common approach by membership facilities to help drive membership sales up by adding additional benefit to the membership. However, all the facilities that had membership privileges in place were not operated by a municipality. The only other aquatic facility that was operated by a municipality is Sackville Sports Stadium. This facility has a membership option, but does not give members early registration or discounts. This is common approach for municipally-operated facilities to ensure they are being fair to residents who are unable to afford a membership.

Overall Risk Assessment

There are advantages and disadvantages to priority registration. From a membership perspective, priority registration can help drive more membership sales and increase revenue. From a resident priority perspective, it can help ensure residents are getting into programs before non-residents. However, both of these models contain several risks that could be detrimental to the municipality.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Having a regional aquatic facility like the EHAC supports the strategic plan by providing services, programs and facilities, through direct service delivery and collaboration with others, that allow people and businesses to thrive.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are no financial considerations to the recommendation in this report.

Alternatives

1. That the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee recommend to Council that Council direct staff to come back with options outlining a priority registration model.
 2. That the Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee direct Council to provide alternate direction to staff.
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Attachments

N/A