

DATE: July 7, 2021

TO: Chair and Directors
Comox Valley Recreation Commission

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

RE: Financial Assistance for Recreation Services

FILE: 8020-02

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. Dyson

Purpose

To provide background information to the Comox Valley Recreation Commission (Commission) on the current process for determining Low Income Cut-off (LICO) rates for the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) PLAY Program.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:

THAT the Comox Valley Recreation Commission receive this report dated July 7, 2021, regarding financial assistance for Recreation Services.

Executive Summary

The CVRD PLAY Program offers financial assistance for recreation services for low income residents. It is run in collaboration with the City of Courtenay's RAC Program, Town of Comox's TRIP Program and the Village of Cumberland's FAIR Program.

We currently use the federally produced LICO rates to determine eligibility for the program as do most Vancouver Island municipalities that offer low income recreation programs.

Staff from each of the four recreation departments are currently working together to further streamline the Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Application process. They are also investigating the possibility of setting up a program on a one-year trial that would allow participants to access the services from all of the municipalities. This along with how best to determine LICO rates will be further investigated.

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Background/Current Situation

The CVRD has partnered with our three membered municipalities to offer streamlined recreation services for low income individuals and families. Previous to January 2020 the CVRD offered their PLAY Program to any eligible resident (based on income) of the CVRD. That program included 52 free admissions per year, per family member, to the CVRD Sports and Aquatic Centres plus one free registered program and four programs at 50 per cent off per calendar year per family member.





The City of Courtenay offered their RAC Program and the Town of Comox offered the TRIP Program to eligible residents living in just their boundary areas. Their programs offered different services but the application process and eligibility requirements were generally the same. Customers would have to apply for the PLAY Program at the CVRD in addition to applying for the program at the City of Courtenay or the Town of Comox if they lived in one of those boundary areas to access the services of both low income programs. Previous to January 2020 the Village of Cumberland did not have a financial assistance program for recreation services.

Starting in 2019 the recreation staff from all four recreation departments worked together to make the application process more user friendly. Starting in January 2021 when you apply for the PLAY Program you will automatically be registered for the City of Courtenay’s RAC Program, Town of Comox’s TRIP Program or the new Village of Cumberland’s FAIR Program if you live in their designated boundary area. The reverse applies as well – apply with one of the other municipalities and automatically receive a PLAY pass at the CVRD. There are four separate application forms depending on where you live: Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland or Baynes Sound – Denman/Hornby Islands (Electoral Area A), Lazo North (Electoral Area B) or Puntledge – Black Creek (Electoral Area C).

See the individual financial assistance for Recreation Services Program descriptions below:

COMOX VALLEY Financial Assistance for Recreation Services

Your four local recreation departments are working together to ensure all Comox Valley residents have access to low cost recreation options. Application forms have now been combined so you will only need to fill out one form, if you qualify, to receive the benefits of your home community and CVRD facilities. Application forms can be found on the website or by phoning your home municipality. Resident families and individuals who are working low income, on BC benefits and/or the family income for 2020 before taxes does not exceed the Canada Low-Income Cut-off Rates are eligible for the following financial assistance recreation programs:

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">CVRD SPORTS & AQUATIC CENTRES'S PLAY PROGRAM</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 5px 0;">All residents of Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland and Areas A, B, C of the Comox Valley Regional District are eligible for the CVRD PLAY program - 52 free admissions per year, per family member at the CVRD Sports and Aquatic Centres. Plus 1 free registered program and 4 programs at 50% off per calendar year per family member.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>comoxvalleyrd.ca/rec</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">COMOX RECREATION'S Inclusion Program (TRIP)</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 5px 0;">TRIP financial assistance is awarded to eligible Town of Comox residents and can be used for a 50% discount towards registered, non-contract programs and Fitness Studio memberships. Financial Assistance amount is awarded per person, per calendar year and can be used online, in person or over the phone for registrations and membership sales.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>comox.ca/recreation</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">COURTENAY RECREATION'S Recreation Access Program</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 5px 0;">City of Courtenay Residents are eligible for the Recreation Access Program (RAC) - scan cards and program discounts can be used at the Lewis Centre, Florence Filberg Centre, Courtenay Outdoor Pool and LINC Youth Centre. RAC program includes annual scholarship amount to be used towards discounted programs and services, and 52 free drop-ins.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>courtenay.ca/rec</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">CUMBERLAND RECREATION'S FAIR PROGRAM</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 5px 0;">Village of Cumberland Residents are eligible for the Financial Assistance in Recreation (FAIR) - 50 free admissions per year or 50% off an annual membership, per family member to the Cumberland Recreation Centre.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  <p>cumberland.ca/rec</p> </div>
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The CVRD typically provides about 750 free PLAY memberships a year (pre-COVID-19) and those members swipe their membership card approximately 6,200 times a year. This means there is only an average of 8 visits per PLAY member. However, it is important to note that some members use all 52 of their visits for each family member while many only use one or two drop-ins and primarily access the PLAY Program for the free/discounted registered programs.

PLAY Memberships by Year:

2019 – 745
2020 – 511
2021 – 170 year to date

PLAY Memberships by Age for 2019:

Adults – 403
Child – 224
Teen – 51
Senior – 67
Total - 745

Registered PLAY Program participants typically receive approximately \$20,000 in total discount registrations in an average year (pre-COVID-19) and about 50 per cent of that is for swimming lessons.

Registered PLAY Program Discounts by Year:

2019 - \$18,403.39
2020 - \$12,147.12
2021 - \$2,609.87

We currently use the LICO rates to determine eligibility for the program. The LICO rates focus on the amount of money spent by a family on ‘necessities’ (i.e. housing, food and clothing) as determined by the federal government. If a family is spending a substantially higher percentage of their income on such necessities (i.e. 20 percentage points higher than the average Canadian family) then the family in question falls below the LICO rate. Currently, on Vancouver Island, the LICO rates are used for most municipal low income pass programs.

Table 1: National Council of Welfare Estimates of Stats Canada Low Income Cut-off Rates

National Council of Welfare Estimates of Stats Canada Low Income Cut-off Rates							
# in Household	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 & over
Income Under	\$21,687	\$26,997	\$33,190	\$40,298	\$45,705	\$51,548	\$57,392

The LICO rates are updated every year and the cut-off rates were planned to be updated on the application forms for January 2022 in partnership with our three membered municipalities.

Staff from each of the four recreation departments are currently working together to further streamline the application process and are trying to develop one application form that would service all the communities within the CVRD. We are also investigating the possibility of setting up a program on a one-year trial that would allow participants to access the services from all of the municipalities. This along with how best to determine LICO rates will be investigated.

The most recent LICO rates (before tax) by the municipality are listed below for your information. These are taken from the 2016 Census:

2016 Low Income Cut-offs - Before Tax:

Muni	Low Income
Electoral Area A	790
Electoral Area B	555
Electoral Area C	575
Courtenay	3915
Comox	1165
Cumberland	445
Total	7445

Policy Analysis

The following COVID-19 response and renewal framework for the CVRD services are supported:

- Adapting to changing community priorities – modifying the PLAY application process and program perimeters based on community needs.
- Maintaining core services at an affordable cost – ensuring PLAY Program LICO rates are updated annually and reassessed for community suitability.

Community partnership and fiscal responsibility are two of the CVRD strategic key drivers:

- Community partnerships with the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland.
- Fiscal responsibility through the careful management/modification of existing services to better meet the needs of area residents.

Accessibility and partnerships are two of the Commission’s strategic priorities:

- Strategic Goal 4 – Accessibility - improving recreation access to lower income residents.
- Strategic Goal 2 – Partnership between Jurisdictions – collaborating with the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland.

Options

This report is for information only.

Financial Factors

The CVRD currently absorbs the cost of the PLAY Program in our existing Recreation Services Department operating budget. The approximate 6,200 additional drop-ins a year from the PLAY Program have no direct costs as they are dropping into existing programs and are not displacing paying users (i.e. wellness centre visits, drop-in swimming or skating etc.). If the number of PLAY participants drastically increases it could reach a point that paying customers are displaced, however, pre-COVID-19, our drop-in programs were rarely at maximum capacity so this is not a huge concern. The approximate \$20,000 a year in discounts for registered programs are easily absorbed in the annual operating budget as PLAY members are spread out through multiple programs and many of the programs were not full so minimal additional costs are incurred. If registered program participation in PLAY was doubled it would create a more noticeable dent in the budget and would be harder to absorb as it would regularly displace paying customers.

Legal Factors

There are no legal concerns generated by this report.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

- Public Health and Safety: Support a high quality of life through the protection and enhancement of community health, safety and well-being.

- Objective 7A-5: Support the promotion of healthy lifestyles and invigorating community spirit through physical activity.

Intergovernmental Factors

Participants in the service include the City of Courtenay, Town of Comox, Village of Cumberland and Electoral Area A, Electoral Area B and Electoral Area C.

Interdepartmental Involvement

The Recreation Services Department has taken the lead but will work with the Communications Department on the promotion of an updated Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program once it is developed.

Citizen/Public Relations

It is important that the residents in the Comox Valley have access to recreational opportunities that are affordable and promote and maintain a healthy active lifestyle. The update of the Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program will help ensure leisure opportunities for low income residents continue.