

**DATE:** August 18, 2021**FILE:** 8020-02**TO:** Chair and Members  
Comox Valley Recreation Commission**FROM:** Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative OfficerSupported by Russell Dyson  
Chief Administrative Officer***R. Dyson*****RE:** Changes to the Financial Assistance for Recreation  
Services Program**Purpose**

To obtain support from the Comox Valley Recreation Commission (Commission) to amend the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program.

**Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer:**

THAT the Comox Valley Recreation Commission supports the proposed change to the Comox Valley Regional District Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program, as outlined in the staff report dated August 18, 2021, for a one-year trial term starting January 1, 2022.

**Executive Summary**

The CVRD currently provides the PLAY Program to CVRD residents that are in need of financial assistance for recreation services. Low income residents can also currently access the City of Courtenay's RAC Program, Town of Comox's TRIP Program and the Village of Cumberland's FAIR Program if they live in those membered municipalities. Registration processes for these programs have been streamlined recently through interagency collaboration.

Recreation staff from all of the municipalities have been working together to develop a more inclusive program that would allow more residents to access services from each of the recreation departments.

The key changes to the proposed program include:

- One unified form for all the recreation departments with a new program called Leisure for Everyone Accessibility Program (LEAP).
- Using the Statistics Canada Low Income Measure (LIM) to determine program eligibility versus the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) rates to allow more individuals/families to access the program.
- Increasing the number of facility drop-ins permitted for youth aged 18 and under to 52 free admissions to drop-in programs at each organization regardless of which municipality they reside in.
- This program would be a one-year trial to ensure it remains economically feasible for each community and it offers the ability to increase or decrease services in future years.

Prepared by:

Concurrence:

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**Background/Current Situation**

The July 7, 2021, staff report to the Commission outlined how the CVRD has recently partnered with our three membered municipalities to offer streamlined recreation services for low income individuals and families.

Currently, when you apply for the CVRD's Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program (PLAY Program) you will automatically be registered for the City of Courtenay's RAC Program, Town of Comox's TRIP Program or the 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.

Although the Comox Valley's Financial Assistance For Recreation Services Programs has improved for low income residents there are still some challenges and areas identified by staff for further development. There are currently four separate application forms depending on where you live and this can be confusing for applicants and the staff processing them. Residents living in one community do not receive any services from another community even if that recreation facility might be more conveniently located to where they live, work or play or offer services more suited to them or their families. Additionally, the LICO rates we have been using to allow access to the programs are very limited and restrict residents from accessing the programs they truly need.

The new proposed inter-municipality program will address all of these challenges. The new program, LEAP, would be set up as a one-year trial program starting with programs/services for January 1, 2022. This program would focus on improved accessibility for all (higher eligibility cut off rates) and increased access to services for youth aged 18 and under

Residents would apply once (all on the same form) and youth (aged 18 and under) would receive a LEAP pass for each municipality. Youth would also be eligible for any additional benefits (i.e. registered programs) from PLAY, TRIP or FAIR programs depending on where they reside. Eligible applicants aged 19 and over would be enrolled in the existing PLAY, TRIP and/or FAIR programs.

Keeping youth physically active and engaged in the community was the priority for the staff team working on this project. If the one-year trial program proves successful and economically sustainable for all the municipalities it can be expanded to include adults/seniors in future years.

**Program Eligibility – Low Income Threshold**

We currently use LICO rates to determine eligibility for the program. 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.

Staff are recommending that LIM rates are used instead to determine program eligibility as it would allow more residents to access the program. LIM rates are a set of thresholds estimated by Statistics Canada that identify Canadians whose incomes are below half of the median of the adjusted income

distribution. The adjustment is made such that economies of scale in consumption within a household are accounted for (i.e. takes more money to run a household of six than two).

See table below for a breakdown of the two eligibility rate options:

Table 1: Program Eligibility –Low Income Cut-Off Rates versus Low Income Measure Rates

# in Household	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 & over
Income Under LICO (current)	\$21,687	\$26,997	\$33,190	\$40,298	\$45,705	\$51,548	\$57,392
Income Under LIM (proposed)	\$25,153	\$35,572	\$43,566	\$50,306	\$56,244	\$61,612	\$66,549

Although most of Vancouver Island uses the LICO rates as their measure some recreation departments add a percentage to these rates to allow more people to access their programs (i.e. Oak Bay, West Shore etc.). The City of Vancouver uses LIM rates as do some other departments on the mainland. Switching to using the LIM rates would definitely increase program accessibility for residents and help better meet the needs of residents post-COVID-19.

### Benefits of Recreation

It is important that recreation is accessible to all CVRD residents regardless of income or where they live. Having solid financial access to recreation service programs for low income individuals and families is good for the whole community.

Excerpts from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association Benefits Catalog:

1. Recreation and active living are **ESSENTIAL TO PERSONAL HEALTH!**
  - a) It helps prevent or combat a number of conditions;
  - b) It helps people live longer – adding up to two years to life expectancy;
  - c) It prolongs independent living for seniors.
2. Recreation is key to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** and essential to **QUALITY OF LIFE!**
  - a) Develops motor and social skills – life skills;
  - b) It builds self-esteem, a positive self-image and increases life satisfaction levels.
3. Recreation reduces self-destructive and **ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR!**
  - a) It is an antidote to smoking, substance abuse, suicide and depression;
  - b) It also reduces isolation and loneliness;
  - c) For many of our rehabilitation clients – it is the only time they leave their house that week.
4. Recreation builds **STRONG FAMILIES** and **HEALTHY COMMUNITIES!**
  - a) Families that play together – stay together;
  - b) Positive opportunities for latch-key kids;
  - c) Builds community pride.
5. Recreation is **GOOD** for the **ECONOMY!**
  - a) Recreation reduces healthcare, social service and police/justice costs;
  - b) It reduces crime and social dysfunction – for every \$1 spent on recreation it saves \$4 in police and social service costs;

- c) It leads to improved work performance – increased productivity, decreased absenteeism, reduced on the job accidents and decreased staff turnover;
- d) Attracts businesses to the community;
- e) It attracts tourism – hockey tournaments, swim meets, conferences, courses and workshops etc.

### Policy Analysis

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

- Adapting to changing community priorities – modifying the Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program perimeters based on community needs.
- Maintaining core services at an affordable cost – ensuring Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program eligibility rates are updated annually and reassessed for community suitability (LIM versus LICO).

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

1. To support the proposed change to the CVRD Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program for a one-year trial term starting January 1, 2022.
2. To not support the proposed change to the CVRD Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program for a one-year trial term starting January 1, 2022.

Staff are recommending option 1.

### Financial Factors

The CVRD currently absorbs the cost of the Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program in our existing Recreation Services Department operating budget. The approximate 6,200 additional drop-ins a year from the existing PLAY Program or the future LEAP 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 LEAP participants drastically increases usage it could reach a point that paying customers are displaced. This is unlikely, however, as our drop-in programs were rarely at maximum capacity (even pre-COVID-19) and there is no increase in the maximum number of permitted drop-ins per participant from the PLAY program. The only increase would be the number of additional participants eligible for the program based on the new LIM rates.

### 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, Baynes Sound – Denman/Hornby Islands (Electoral Area A), Lazo North (Electoral Area B) and Puntledge – Black Creek (Electoral Area C). Similar reports will be presented at the other municipality's commissions/councils if the CVRD supports the proposed changes to Financial Assistance for Recreation Services Program.

**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.

**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.

In addition to developing this trial program in collaboration with our membered municipalities the interagency team also checked in with our contacts at local agencies that work with low income individuals and families to make sure we are on the "right page". Along with others, the Comox Valley Family Services felt these changes are on track and would be beneficial to their clients.