



The Corporation of **THE CITY OF NORTH VANCOUVER**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORTATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT**

**REPORT**

---

To: Mayor Linda Buchanan and Members of Council

From: Dave Hutch, Director, Parks and Public Spaces

Subject: HARBOUR SWIM DECK PROJECT AND PARTNERSHIP

Date: January 14, 2026 File No: 13-6740-20-0021/1

---

**RECOMMENDATION**

PURSUANT to the report of the Director, Parks and Public Spaces, dated January 14, 2026, entitled “Harbour Swim Deck Project and Partnership”:

THAT the report and the information in regards to “Swimmable Cities”, an international alliance supporting a global, grassroots movement for swimmable urban waterways, and the “Swimmable Cities Charter”, a set of principles which further a vision for transforming urban waterways and creating better, more liveable futures for communities, be received for information.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Swimmable Cities Charter (CityDocs [2758281](#))

**SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Harbour Swim Deck project, the partnership with Swim Drink Fish Canada, and the projected timeline and process. And to introduce the Swimmable Cities alliance, and the Swimmable Cities Charter, an international movement for urban swimming.

Council has approved entering into an agreement with Swim Drink Fish Canada (“SDF”) and the Weston family’s philanthropic foundations (“Westons”) for the funding and delivery of the Waterfront Park Amenity Project which includes a Harbour Swimming Deck and improvements to the washrooms at Waterfront Park.

## BACKGROUND

Late in 2023, SDF approached the City with a proposal to explore a Harbour Swimming Deck in front of Waterfront Park. The Harbour Swimming Deck would provide an innovative new public space and place to swim throughout the year on North Vancouver's waterfront.

A comprehensive feasibility study and preliminary concept design have been developed to understand the practicality and estimated cost.

The capital cost of the Harbour Swimming Deck is primarily funded through philanthropy of the Weston family via their family foundations, facilitated by environmental not-for-profit SDF. The comparative costs of a land-based pool would be \$40M to \$80M, with considerably higher operating costs.

Throughout development of the feasibility study City staff have been a part of the international community of practice, convened by Swimmable Cities, a global, grassroots movement for swimmable urban waterways, to share knowledge and experiences.

The Swimmable Cities alliance has developed the Swimmable Cities Charter which outlines a set of guiding principles, and represents a commitment to contribute to the international network; sharing ideas, resources and expertise. Many leading cities have signed on to the charter in support of the international swimming movement.

## DISCUSSION

The following provides an overview of the feasibility study that was developed to explore the practicalities of building a swimming deck and supporting on-land infrastructure at Waterfront Park and provide Council with the key information necessary to make a decision on proceeding or not, with the project,

The scope of this work included:

- Preliminary design, and engineering constructability
- Preliminary capital cost estimate
- Preliminary operating model
- Water quality monitoring
- Potential philanthropic financial commitment
- Preliminary internal interest-holder engagement
- Permitting requirements
- Risk and liability
- Other potential supporting infrastructure

This work considered existing site conditions and constraints to help us answer the question: could we do it, should we do it.

Development of the design concepts sought to optimize:

- *Visitor experience*; to provide a comfortable, joyful experience to connect with the water and community
- *Safety*; to create a safe, protected environment for swimming
- *Inclusivity*; to provide a range of experiences to cater to a diverse population of potential users of all ages and abilities
- *Operational requirements*; to minimize costs, while providing a high-quality experience.

The deck and protected swimming areas add approximately 7000sqm of actively accessible space, for residents to enjoy. Anticipated benefits of the project include:

- Social connectivity by creating a space for gathering, sunning, socializing, and swimming;
- Community physical and mental health;
- Appreciation of the importance of water quality and marine habitat restoration and protection;
- Sense of connection with the water which fosters environmental stewardship and responsibility;
- Creation of additional waterfront recreation space which is resilient to sea level rise;
- Climate adaption by providing a space for cooling off in extreme hot weather;
- Provision of outdoor swimming opportunities that meets the community's aquatic recreation needs;
- Attraction of new visitors to the City's waterfront and The Shipyards with associated economic benefits; and
- Increased vibrancy and activation at Waterfront Park.

Once deemed feasible a preliminary concept design was created to inform costing and potential project delivery processes, further detailed below.

The process described above was undertaken in confidence to protect the interests of the parties involved should the project deemed not feasible to proceed.

## **Project Delivery**

Delivery of the project will be led by the City including a public procurement process(s).

The two project delivery phases are:

- Phase 1 – Pre-Construction  
Including:
  - Detailed design
  - Public consultation to inform final design
  - First Nations and stakeholder engagement
  - Application to the VFPA for development permit
  - Refined construction costing (class A)

- Phase 2 – Construction  
Including:
  - Construction drawings and documentation
  - A fixed price contract for construction
  - Finalization of operations plan

Commencement of Phase 2 (Construction) is dependent on receiving all necessary approvals such as permit from the Vancouver Port Authority, approval from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).

## **Swimmable Cities Alliance**

Launched in the lead up to the Paris Olympics in July 2024, the Swimmable Cities alliance is supporting a global, grassroots movement for swimmable urban waterways.

Throughout development of the feasibility study with Swim Drink Fish, City staff were connected to the Swimmable Cities Alliance. This provided staff with access to an international community of practice, convened by Swimmable Cities to share knowledge and experiences.

## **Swimmable Cities Charter**

In support of the Swimmable Cities movement, Council may consider signing the Swimmable Cities Charter, to signal our commitment to adhere to a set of high-level, non-binding principles matching other major cities commitments to collectively further a vision for transforming urban waterways and creating better, more liveable futures for communities.

The charter, provided in *Attachment 1*, sets out 10 principles which empower experts in design, policy development, public health and much more, to share ideas, resources and expertise. This approach reflects the multi-national momentum of the Swimmable Cities movement and the value of a flexible, goal-focused framework to guide future work by decision-makers, advocates and experts in their work with local natural waterways.

Becoming a signatory would acknowledge of the City's role in the global movement towards swimmable urban waterways, would recognize the valuable contributions of the international community of practice has made in shaping the City's Harbour Deck project so far, and will continue to offer into the future as design and operational planning commence. The alliance is a valuable forum to share knowledge, solve problems and learn from organizations who have undertaken similar projects.

Signatories represent more than 212 diverse organizations across 109 cities, and 36 countries. This includes 15 municipalities including City of Paris, Greater London Authority, City of Rotterdam, City of Melbourne, City of Portland, and City of Annapolis.

Signing the Swimmable Cities charter is voluntary and requires no financial obligations and is self/peer regulated. The key requirements are that each signatory agrees to work

and make decisions in alignment with the Charter's 10 principles and to become a positive role model for other cities and organisations in the movement.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Harbour Swimming Deck feasibility analysis estimated the following rough order of magnitude costs (class D equivalent):

- Capital Costs (including hard and soft costs) – \$21M
- Operating Costs – \$700k to 800k per annum, from 2027

The project is predominantly funded by a \$16M philanthropic donation from Westons with City funds being utilized to fund the remaining \$5M portion.

Starting in 2027 the City will be responsible for operating costs associated with the Harbour Swimming Deck. This could be delivered in partnership (such as with NVRC), and/or offset by revenue generating programming or services.

The operating cost estimate is inclusive of staffing to deliver the operational model described above and assumes three modes of operation (summer, shoulder and winter). The estimate also includes annual inspections and renewal of elements to maintain the structure in good working order over its entire operating life. This total cost is an estimated \$700k-800k per year.

## **INTER-DEPARTMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Throughout development of the project staff have worked closely Public Safety, Risk, Legal Services, Finance, Planning and Development, Parks and Natural Area Operations, The Shipyards Operations, Communications, and Strategic Corporate Initiatives.

Future stages of the project would require ongoing collaboration with City staff and consulting with external regulators such as the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and Vancouver Coastal Health.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN, OCP OR POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The project supports Council's Strategic Plan priorities:

- "A City for People" that is welcoming, inclusive, safe and accessible and supports the health and well-being of all
- "A Resilient City" that leads the way in climate action and acts as a steward of the environment for future generations
- "A Vibrant City" where dynamic public spaces and places provide opportunities for connection and enable residents to engage with their community, and celebrate their culture and history.

An Action of Council's Strategic Plan is to "Create a Waterfront Park Masterplan that celebrates the history and culture of Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səilwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations, emphasizes the park's regional importance and enhances and improves the connection to Burrard Inlet".

This project enhances the opportunity of the future Waterfront Park Masterplan to deliver on this action.

The Swimmable Cities charter aligns with the City's Integrated Stormwater Management Plan (2016), the City's framework for comprehensive, coordinated stormwater management.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:



---

Dave Hutch  
Director, Parks and Public Spaces