



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

INFORMATION REPORT

To: Mayor Linda Buchanan and Members of Council

From: Dave Hutch, Director, Parks and Public Spaces

Subject: HARBOUR SWIM DECK PROJECT UPDATE

Date: July 14, 2026 File No: 12-6240-20-0082/1

ATTACHMENTS

1. Swim Drink Fish (SDF) *Waterfront Park Water Quality Memorandum* (CityDocs [2831752](#))

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Harbour Swim Deck project, including:

- a review of the project genesis and description, feasibility study, benefits, project delivery and budget information;
- early indications from on-going public engagement;
- an overview of water quality regulations and testing completed for the project; and
- next steps.

Early indications from city-wide **public engagement** activities show the following results:

- Two-thirds of participants said they'd use the swimming deck
- Key concerns include: water quality, municipal spending, increased noise at park, and parking access
- Participants are most excited about: access to water, lane swimming, and sunbathing

Water quality results, including bacterial and non-bacterial contaminant levels, indicate a consistently suitable environment for swimming, meeting or exceeding health standards.

BACKGROUND

SDF is a national not-for-profit organization focused on water protection, restoration and public accessibility to waterfront areas. They have worked for over 20 years to restore the health of local waterways across Canada to make them swimmable, drinkable, and fishable.

Late in 2023, SDF approached the City with a proposal to explore a Harbour Swimming Deck in front of Waterfront Park. Through 2024 and the first half of 2025 CNV in partnership with SDF undertook a study (funded by SDF) to understand the feasibility of a swimming deck off Waterfront Park.

Feasibility Study

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

The scope of this work included exploring;

- Preliminary engineering constructability
- Water quality monitoring
- Permitting requirements
- Risk and liability

This scope also included preliminary interest-holder engagement and outreach and referral to Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̓lilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Because the swim deck is being located in a leased water lot from the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA), the VFPA is the approving authority and issues the development permit for the project. A list of expected informational and process requirements was provided by VFPA as a result of a preliminary project review.

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

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

Funding Agreement

The capital cost of the Harbour Swimming Deck is primarily funded through philanthropy of the Weston family via their family foundations (\$16M), via their ongoing relationship with SDF.

The CNV portion of the capital costs (\$5M) are funded thorough Developer Cost Charges (DCC).

DISCUSSION

The Big Idea

What is a Harbour Swimming Deck?

The Harbour Deck creates net new amenity space within the compact City of North Vancouver. The deck (~1,000sqm) and its protected swimming areas would add approximately 7,000 square metres of actively accessible space, expanding the City's footprint onto the water rather than competing for scarce park land.

The Harbour Deck offers a unique outdoor swimming opportunity for Lower Lonsdale. Approximately 20,000 residents live within a 10-minute walk of the site, most in attached housing with limited access to private outdoor space.

Value for Money

An open water swimming experience costs considerably less to build and operate than a traditional on-land outdoor pool. It uses natural ocean water and requires no mechanical system.

	Recent 25m outdoor pools (Metro Van)	Proposed Harbour Deck
Construction	\$20M to \$32M	~\$21M
Operating season	4 months	Year-round potential
Operating cost (excludes annual asset management)	\$77k to \$225k / month	~\$41k / month

Global Precedents

Harbour swimming decks have grown in popularity over the past 20 years as globally leading cities re-imagine their urban waterfronts and provide access to nature and outdoor swimming. Cities in Denmark, Norway, France, Germany and Australia have led the way, transforming formerly inaccessible industrial waterfronts into great places for people.

A recent Canadian example, L'Oasis in Quebec City, opened in 2022 and is noted as the first floating harbour swimming deck of scale in North America. As urban water quality has improved, open water swimming has become possible, further adding to the attraction and vibrancy of these waterfronts.

Connecting the Waterfront

The City's waterfront experience currently sits almost entirely at the vibrant Shipyards area. The Harbour Deck would expand it dramatically by activating Waterfront Park, with the Spirit Trail connecting through to Kings Mill Park and the Harbourside development. Together these would form a linear waterfront experience with multiple destinations and a diverse range of leisure opportunities, activities and attractions.

Safe, accessible and free access to Burrard Inlet

The proposed location is subject to wave action, debris, and proximity to the navigable channel for vessels. A robust buoy line surrounding the deck would prevent debris entering, keep swimmers within the water lot area, and reduce wave impact. The large, deep deck and its mooring system will attenuate wave action, creating a safe swimming environment.

Inclusivity is designed in from the outset. An accessible gangway with a maximum slope of 5% at all tide levels would provide all-abilities access from the Waterfront Park seawall, and a roll-in entry pool sits at the centre of the deck. Guard rails, a variety of methods to enter and exit the water, and lifeguarding during busy summer periods suit swimmers of all confidence levels.

All amenities, including refurbished washrooms, change cubicles, outdoor showers and drinking fountains, would sit on land at Waterfront Park. This removes the need for power and water supply to the deck.

Who is it for?

- **Youth:** The City currently has a deficit of youth-focused amenities. The deck gives youth a place to gather socially and be casually active. Teenagers seeking adventure, fun and challenge would appreciate the jumping platforms and cold plunge, and cold water immersion has been found to boost dopamine levels by as much as 250%. Proximity to the SeaBus and Lonsdale Exchange makes the site independently accessible for young people.
- **Families:** The deck would appeal to families seeking safe, free, low-barrier activities. The protected swim areas can host swimming lessons, helping to meet demand while NVRC waiting lists remain long. Research by Griffith University in Australia found that children who learn to swim young reach developmental milestones up to 10 months earlier than those who do not.
- **Swimmers:** Lane swimming is in very high demand across Metro Vancouver, and NVRC reporting has identified the need for additional 50-metre lane swimming facilities to meet it. The deck offers at least three 50-metre lanes.
- **Seniors:** For older adults, the deck delivers social, low-impact activity in a fully accessible setting. Studies show that older adults who swim consistently retain better cognitive ability than non-swimmers.

How will it be used?

The concept design maximizes deck space for lounging and social use, with integrated seating and views across Burrard Inlet to Vancouver. Visitors would sun themselves, socialize, dip and swim. Features include:

- Up to 700 square metres of protected swimming areas
- At least three 50-metre swim lanes
- A shallow pool with an accessible sloped entry
- Jumping platforms and a cold plunge

Activation elements such as umbrellas, bistro tables, planters and food carts would enhance the experience. In the future, saunas, a pop-up bar or a concession could generate revenue and extend the swimming season, mirroring how the City manages The Shipyards. Integrated revenue generation recovers some operating costs, keeping City contributions relatively low.

Benefits

Community and wellbeing

The Harbour Deck fosters social connectivity and cohesion, supports physical and mental health, and brings positive activity and vibrancy to Waterfront Park. Outdoor swimming culture is a vibrant and growing phenomenon internationally. The Wild Swim Project in the UK found that swimmers maintaining regular group sessions for six months or more reported life satisfaction improved by 25%, happiness by 20%, and anxiety reduced by 18%.

Economic

While visiting the Harbour Deck would be free, visitors are likely to patronize nearby businesses in Lower Lonsdale, supporting local jobs. Emerging consumer spending data suggests visitors could spend approximately \$10M per year in Lower Lonsdale. Wellness and lifestyle tourism is also a rapidly growing sector; the Global Wellness Institute valued Canada's wellness economy at \$198.65 billion in 2023. The project reinforces the City's identity as a vibrant destination and demonstrates leadership in revitalizing underutilized waterfront space.

Environmental

The feasibility study anticipates minimal environmental impact. The proposed mooring system would minimize impact to the seabed, and because swimmers use harbour ocean water directly, no heating or filtration is required, meaning no operational greenhouse gas emissions.

The floating deck creates new, previously inaccessible recreation space that is resilient to climate change and adaptive to sea level rise, providing a valuable place to cool off during extreme heat events.

Swimming in the Inlet turns water quality from an abstract idea into something residents experience directly, which builds a durable public interest in protecting it. The water quality testing program run in partnership with SDF is already producing a clear baseline of when and where conditions vary, and why. That evidence supports targeted infrastructure investment and helps the City improve water quality over time.

Operations Plan

The feasibility study developed an Operations Plan to estimate operating costs and design requirements. It models high-quality service delivery on The Shipyards, global precedents and local lifeguarded beaches.

The plan assumes free entry and opening hours from dawn until dusk, as much as possible year-round. It covers overnight security alongside operations and maintenance staffing. Staff have begun conversations with Lifesaving BC and other authorities to determine optimal operations within funding capacity, and operations can flex to suit the operating budget.

Managing the risks of cold-water swimming

The Operations Plan and facility design address the inherent risks of cold-water swimming through a safety framework developed with water safety experts. Key elements include:

- Controlled entry points, designated swim zones, and a dedicated shallow pool for children and beginners
- Gradual-entry acclimatization structures, including integrated ramps, stairs and ladders
- Clear risk signage, real-time daily temperature postings, and seasonal winter wetsuit recommendations

When comparing Waterfront Park water temperatures to other North Shore natural swimming areas, the Waterfront Park location is similar in temperatures at Deep Cove (17°C to 20°C) and exceed the water temperatures at Ambleside Beach (14°C to 16°C).

Maintenance

The deck and its infrastructure will require ongoing maintenance, including:

- Day-to-day cleaning, debris clearing and visual hazard inspection of the deck, washrooms and public areas
- Regular inspections, repairs and annual maintenance
- Preparation for weather events, and inspection after severe weather
- Renewal of components over the life of the deck, such as replacing wood cladding

Staff will return to Council with a draft Operations Plan, anticipated in 2027.

Project Delivery

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

The two project delivery phases are:

- Phase 1 – Pre-Construction
Including:
 - Design development
 - 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).

Public Engagement

Ongoing engagement has invited the public, interest holder groups, businesses and intergovernmental partners to help shape the Harbour Swimming Deck project in Waterfront Park.

An engagement survey ran from June 1 to June 30 and drew over 2,600 responses. Pop-up engagement added over 400 in-person interactions. Targeted engagement continues, with youth-focused activity running through the fall.

Objectives

- Share specific information on the proposed project, including the process to date, the partnership with SDF, the preliminary schematic concept, potential Waterfront Park improvements, the operating approach and water quality results
- Gather input from identified public and community interest holders
- Create an inclusive and accessible engagement opportunity for all participants
- Meet all requirements of the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority Key Project and Environmental Review Process

Activities

- Online survey on the City's digital engagement platform, Let's Talk
- On-site pop-up events at Waterfront Park and The Shipyards, where the public could learn about the project and share their input
- Youth engagement through SD#44 (targeted email linking to the survey) and the North Vancouver Library Teen Space (pop-up event at the Library)

Engagement asks which deck features matter most to users, what new features in Waterfront Park would enhance their enjoyment, what excites people, what concerns them, and their overall support for the project. The input will also inform Operational Planning, including the times and seasons people would most likely use the deck.

Early indications

- Two-thirds of participants said they would use the swimming deck
- Participants are most excited about access to the water, lane swimming and sunbathing
- Key concerns are water quality, municipal spending, increased noise at the park, and parking access

Promotion

- A postcard mailed to every business and home in the City, with a notification letter to homes in the surrounding community
- Posters at approximately 20 residential buildings within a two-block radius of the site
- Traditional and social media outreach, print advertising and media relations
- Email invitations to identified interest holders and community groups
- On-site signage with a QR code linking to the digital survey
- The City's project website and Let's Talk platform, with detailed information and ways to participate

Staff are compiling and analyzing feedback, and continuing targeted engagement with groups such as youth and businesses. Comments and survey results will form a What We Heard Report, shared with Council in an upcoming Information Report and posted online.

Water Quality

The Harbour Swimming Deck project is supported by two years of water quality testing by Swim Drink Fish. Swim Drink Fish is a nationally recognized expert in water quality

Attachment 1 "*Waterfront Park Water Quality Memorandum*" provides a synthesis of the multi-year water quality monitoring program undertaken by Swim Drink Fish to assess Waterfront Park's suitability for recreational swimming. It provides an overview of regulation and preventive risk management approaches which seek to protect public health and safety.

The results show the Waterfront Park site has been **consistently suitable for swimming**, meeting or exceeding health standards.

- E. coli bacteria levels in the water are consistently below levels set by local authorities.
- Low concentration or undetectable levels of contaminants in the water column do not pose any acute risk to human health for the purposes of recreational swimming.

- A response plan is in development by CNV to detect and manage incident-based health risks.
- Ongoing E. coli monitoring will be conducted by Metro Vancouver in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The feasibility analysis estimated the following rough order of magnitude costs (Class D equivalent):

- Capital costs (hard and soft) — \$21M
- Operating costs — \$700k to \$800k per annum, from 2027 (includes estimated annual operating costs and annual asset management)

A \$16M philanthropic donation from the Weston family funds the majority of the project. City developer funds (source: Developer Cost Charges) cover the remaining \$5M.

Once the facility opens, estimated in 2027, the City becomes responsible for operating costs.

The operating estimate covers staffing to deliver the operational model described above and assumes three modes of operation: summer, shoulder and winter. It also includes annual inspections and the renewal of elements needed to keep the structure in good working order across its full operating life.

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

Staff also continue to work with external regulatory bodies, including the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and Vancouver Coastal Health, and to consult with the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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 (Tsleil-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.

NEXT STEPS

Phase 1, Pre-Construction, is currently underway with active work including community and interest-holder engagement, ongoing water quality monitoring, and a public procurement process(s) for required contractors and specialists to commence design development, and the preparation of technical and specialist reports to meet Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) permit application requirements.

Staff will continue to provide project updates to Council as the project progresses including the full results of community engagement expected in Fall 2026. Staff will also return with the draft Operational Plan anticipated in 2027.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:



Dave Hutch
Director, Parks and Public Spaces