

PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE COMMISSION

TO: *MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS*

SUBJECT: BURNABY RECREATION FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND INCLUSION PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the proposed City of Burnaby Parks, Recreation and Culture Financial Assistance and Inclusion for Residents (FAIR Play) Policy (Attachment 1) in the report dated December 5, 2023 be approved; and

THAT the current program funding with Burnaby Community Services be extended until May 31, 2025, to assist with the administration of the Fair Play Program.

REPORT

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Commission, at its meeting held on December 5, 2023, received and adopted the *attached* report seeking Council approval of the "Financial Assistance and Inclusion for Residents Policy and Program".

On behalf of the Parks,
Recreation and Culture
Commission,

Councillor S. Dhaliwal
Chair

Commissioner R. Kent
Vice Chair

TO: PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE COMMISSION (PRCC)
FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE
SUBJECT: **BURNABY PRC FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND INCLUSION FOR RESIDENTS – THE FAIR PLAY PROGRAM**
PURPOSE: To seek adoption of the “Financial Assistance and Inclusion for Residents Policy and Program”.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the proposed City of Burnaby Parks, Recreation and Culture Financial Assistance and Inclusion for Residents (FAIR Play) Policy (**Attachment 1**) in the report dated December 5, 2023 be approved; and

THAT the current program funding with Burnaby Community Services be extended until May 31, 2025, to assist with the administration of the Fair Play Program.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

The Financial Assistance and Inclusion for Residents (“FAIR Play”) Policy and Program outlined in the report aligns with the goals and values in the Corporate Strategic Plan (2017), Social Sustainability Strategy (2011), Burnaby Economic Strategy (2017), Healthy Community Policy (1991), the Benefits Based Approach (2023), Burnaby Parks, Recreation and Culture Fees Bylaw No.14556, and City of Burnaby’s purpose to create a city that we all want to live in and be in.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Providing access to Parks, Recreation and Culture (PRC) activities and services regardless of the ability to pay is a basic tenet of public PRC services. Living in poverty is the greatest predictor of poor health and social isolation/exclusion. Research shows that providing subsidized recreation and culture services to low-income people and families has many positive outcomes for health, creating and maintaining social supports, and for reliance on other social services. For example, in a recent Canadian study, people receiving subsidized recreation stop requiring social assistance on average two years ahead of those who do not receive subsidized recreation.

Since 1994 Burnaby has provided a nominal “Recreation Credit” to residents who can prove an income level at or below the Stats Canada Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) amount.

There has been no evaluation of the Recreation Credit Program to determine if it is an effective tool in assisting vulnerable residents of Burnaby access to PRC activities and services. The amount chosen as the Recreation Credit is arbitrary and the use of LICO to determine eligibility is not recommended. Stats Canada clearly communicates that LICO should not be used to determine eligibility for services, however, many municipalities, Burnaby included, use it specifically for that purpose.

PRC will be undertaking a full review of the department’s Fees and Charges Framework in 2023-2025. Part of this review will include a modernization of all PRC’s “Safety Net Strategies” to ensure that all residents of Burnaby have access and a respectful process to participate in PRC activities and services.

As part of this review, staff are proposing the FAIR Play policy (Attachment 1) and program be implemented effective March 1, 2024. The program is based on leading practices, and feedback we have collected from residents about the short falls of the current Recreation Credit Program. The City’s subsidization of the FAIR Play Program aims to ensure that barriers to access for Burnaby residents are being reduced to encourage active participation in PRC programs. An amendment will be required to Burnaby Parks, Recreation and Culture Fees Bylaw No. 14556 before this policy is implemented.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

It is estimated that 13.5% of people living in Burnaby are low income (2021 Canada Census). In 2023, to date, there are 3,061 people (less than 10% of those identified as low income) using the current Recreation Credit Program, a \$250 “credit” is applied to a person’s account annually and can be used toward registered programs and pass purchases. To receive the credit, a person must apply and share their most recent tax and other financial information to determine their eligibility. Problems with this approach include:

- The credit amount of \$250 is arbitrary and is not enough to cover the cost of an annual pass;
- Proving income and personal tax information can be a demeaning process and a barrier to applying to the Recreation Credit Program. In addition, some people living in poverty are also managing health or social issues that prevent them from completing their taxes;
- LICO is currently used to determine eligibility. Based on LICO, a person would need to make less than \$29,380 annually to qualify. This is well below the Living Wage for Burnaby and would be representative of someone living in extreme poverty. For example, the Living Wage in Burnaby is approximately \$43,825 annually. A person who works full time but in a minimum wage job makes approximately \$30,485 annually.

FAIR Play Program Highlights:

- The FAIR Play Program will not use LICO for determining eligibility. Recognizing the unique high costs of living in the Lower Mainland, staff are proposing a model used by the City of Vancouver. Qualified applicants would need to make less than 50% of the median income of Burnaby residents, based on the most recent Census data. According to 2020 Census Data Burnaby’s median income was \$83,000. Median income is the income cut-off of where half the households earn more, and half earn less. Using this formula, a qualified applicant would need to have less than \$41,000 in annual income;
- A qualifying individual or family will receive an annual Be Active pass and *FAIR Play* credit on their account to apply to registered activities such as swim lessons, advanced aquatics/lifeguard training courses, summer camps, preschool or arts;
- Based on the principles of the Benefits Based Approach, developing physical literacy, creating life-long habits of being active, and the health benefits associated from starting participation at a younger age: children will receive a \$500 credit;
- Adults, Youth and Seniors will receive a \$250 credit;
- The application process will be streamlined with fewer barriers. Trusted Partners - community agencies/professionals who can verify need will be able to refer directly to FAIR Play. Individuals will be able to self-refer using a simple application form;
- Barriers created by the approval processing time will be mitigated with ‘try-it’ passes. These passes will provide drop-in access to applicants while they wait for their application to be processed.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff plan to transition to Fair Play March 1, 2024. Some initial steps required to engage in this process are:

- Training for Trusted Partner agencies;
- Staff training;
- Development of marketing and other tools; and
- Creation of an Evaluation framework

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Determining the financial implications of the new FAIR Play program is not straight-forward. The subsidy amount for the Be Active annual pass cannot be counted as lost revenue because PRC facilities have capacity for additional drop-ins with no impact on the overhead fixed costs of being open. People living in poverty are unable to afford a pass in the first place so there is no “loss” of revenue.

There will be nominal loss of revenue from a person using FAIR Play for an activity registration. Nearly all PRC programs are currently subsidized to some degree. All participants in PRC activities do not pay the full cost for the activity, as the true cost of these activities are offset by taxes. A person using FAIR Play credit can participate fully subsidized where a participant who pays the fee as per the Fees Bylaw is partially subsidized. The impact, through the positive community benefit, of providing additional subsidy to lower income residents is immeasurable and will help to reduce inequities.

On May 31, 2021, Council approved three years of funding in the annual amount of \$30,000 for Burnaby Community Services to administer applications for the Recreation Credit program. Staff recommend the continuation of this funding for an additional year while the FAIR Play program is implemented and evaluated. Staff anticipate this funding will be required until May 2025 and will be reassessed then.

The current annual PRC budget for providing the Recreation Credit program is \$1.17M. Year-to-date, only \$374K of this budget has been used. Staff anticipate a 15%-20% increase in the number of people utilizing the FAIR Play program due to the reduction in application barriers (an increase of 459-600 people). The current budget is anticipated to be enough to cover any increases in program demand.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Morrison-Clark, General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Financial Assistance and Inclusion for Residents (FAIR Play) Policy

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Rebecca Thandi, Director of PRC Strategic Initiatives and Robin Juergensen, Manager Recreation Services.