

STAFF REPORT

THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG



Report to:	Mayor and Council Members	Priority:	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Low
Submitted by:	Teresa Behan, Deputy Director, Community Services tbehan@cobourg.ca	Meeting Type:	Open Session <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed Session <input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting Date:	July 19, 2021		
Report No.:	Community Services-052-21		
Submit comments to Council			

Subject/Title: The Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee's Review of Victoria Park Beach

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive the Review of Victoria Park Beach from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee for information purposes;

AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse the Committee's recommendations as outlined in the Staff Report;

AND FURTHER THAT an internal Working Group be established – including a cross-section of staff with expertise regarding parks, communications, events, parking, legislative services, by-law enforcement, emergency planning/response, and with Council representation – to enhance collaboration in the management of the waterfront, including Victoria Park Beach, the Cobourg Harbour and the West Beach;

AND FURTHER THAT this report be shared with the Working Group and all relevant departments to review, implement, and to provide any recommendations to the 2022 budget process.

1. STRATEGIC PLAN

People: Encourage healthy lifestyles and wellness.

Places: Enhance shoreline management; steward and safeguard the natural environment.

Partnerships: Facilitate meaningful collaboration with Cobourg citizens.

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Extensive public feedback was obtained through the Beach Use Survey and forum on the Engage Cobourg platform. The survey and forum were launched on February 2, 2021 and ran for a period of three weeks, closing on February 23, 2021. The Public Engagement report is attached as Appendix A, and a total of 3,687 people were informed through the process.

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) also received several correspondences from members of the community over the course of the review.

3. PURPOSE

This report provides a summary of PRAC's recommendations on how the municipality can manage the popularity of Victoria Park Beach. The 'beach review' was primarily conducted with a 'normal', non-pandemic year in mind, recognizing that the pandemic has provided an opportunity for the Town of Cobourg to review current practices, understand public concerns, and consider new approaches to 'build back better' ahead of the 2022 summer season.

4. ORIGIN AND LEGISLATION

On August 31, 2020, Municipal Council approved a motion requesting that PRAC conduct a review of Victoria Park Beach by gathering public input from local residents and by considering the approaches used by other beachfront communities:

Moved by Councillor Emily Chorley, Seconded by Deputy Mayor Suzanne Séguin:

WHEREAS at the Committee of the Whole Meeting on August 24, 2020 Council considered a memo from the Secretary of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, regarding a recommendation from the Committee on the Cobourg Beach;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council endorse the recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) and request staff to investigate and report on how comparable beachfront communities are managing and regulating their beaches and waterfronts for public access, with the report provided to PRAC by December 1, 2020; and

FURTHER THAT Council request PRAC to receive public input on how the Town of Cobourg can manage the popularity of Victoria Park Beach, and provide recommendations to Council by March 1, 2021.

5. BACKGROUND

In August 2020, Council asked PRAC to receive public input on how the Town of Cobourg can manage the popularity of Victoria Park Beach, and to provide their recommendations to Council. With this in mind, the Beach Use Survey was designed by PRAC to inform Cobourg residents of costs and options related to Victoria Park Beach, and to gather feedback and ideas for managing and mitigating the impact of the high volume of visitors to the beach during a typical summer.

The public feedback gathered through the Beach Use Survey was compiled by the Communications Department into a detailed report that was extensively reviewed by PRAC members. The survey engaged 1,408 Cobourg residents and business-owners in response to questions about beach amenities/services, prohibited activities, enforcement, changing facilities, lifeguarding, revenue generation, parking, and the economic return to local businesses.

In addition to receiving public input through the Beach Use Survey and citizen correspondences submitted directly to the Committee, PRAC also received input from municipal staff. In December 2020, the Deputy Director of Community Services provided the Committee with information on regulations and approaches used by other waterfront communities such as Kenora, Collingwood, Midland, Wasaga Beach, and Fort Erie.

Furthermore, in April 2021, the Manager of Legislative Services presented information to the Committee on by-laws, by-law enforcement processes and the Provincial Offences Act, and the

Administrator for Engineering and Public Transit provided information regarding waterfront parking lots, rates and passes.

PRAC members also reviewed the Town of Cobourg’s existing by-laws to determine whether there is sufficient municipal regulation of common issues such as littering, smoking/cannabis use, dogs on the beach and the use of drones in public parks (see Appendix B).

6. ANALYSIS

Based on the information provided to PRAC by members of the public and municipal staff, the Committee agreed upon the following recommendations for Council’s consideration:

Beach Recommendations

	<i>Action</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>Communications</i>	Increase/update signage at all beach entrances, outlining rules and regulations	For example, no barbeques, dogs on the beach, alcohol consumption, smoking restrictions, etc.
	Develop and expand a dedicated beach webpage on the official Town of Cobourg website	Provide information on amenities, water quality, beach rules and fines for offences, drop-off and parking locations, etc. – possibly offered in other languages
	Provide a leaflet to homeowners in impacted neighbourhoods with guidance on how to resolve issues such as blocked driveways, noise and litter complaints	For example, include a contact number for reporting illegally parked vehicles and other infractions
<i>Amenities</i>	Expand washroom capacity	Temporary or permanent facilities
	Install changing facilities	Temporary or permanent facilities
	Increase the number of garbage and recycling bins	Consider increasing the frequency of garbage collection
	Consider adding cigarette waste recycling receptacles in waterfront parking lots	
	Install water bottle filling stations in Victoria Park	
<i>Rules/By-Laws</i>	Consider enhancing regulations concerning smoking and cigarette butt disposal, the use of cannabis, glass bottles and the use of tents on the beach	Publicize all major beach rules and fines
	Increase all relevant fines in the Parks Use By-Law and the Parking By-Law, subject to approval	The fine for most infractions, such as disruptive noise, littering, dogs on the beach, smoking in parks and the use of barbecues, is currently \$105.00 – consider increasing fines to \$250.00

	Consider imposing noise restrictions in the Special Event Permit process	Consider the position/direction of speakers during major events
<i>Enforcement</i>	Increase the number of by-law enforcement officers on-duty during peak times	Subject to budget approval; aim to increase enforcement of common offences such as littering, tents and barbeques on the beach
<i>Events</i>	Conduct a review of existing waterfront events and the authorization process	Consider making Council approval necessary for major recurring events
<i>Safety</i>	Lifeguards are an integral part of Victoria Park Beach and the service should be retained if possible	The majority of survey respondents (68%) believe the Town should continue to provide lifeguards on the beach
	Consider establishing a capacity for the beach as part of the emergency management process	Once established, monitor accordingly
<i>Parking</i>	Significantly increase beach area parking rates and review parking rates along the waterfront	Care should be taken to avoid pushing beachgoers into the downtown for cheaper parking and creating parking shortages
	Consider establishing designated or discounted parking for Cobourg residents	Explore options such as a resident parking pass or 'permit only' parking spaces in waterfront lots
	Consider installing pay and display machines on residential streets near the beach	
	Improve the existing drop-off location with wayfinding signs and consider creating additional drop-off locations	
	Consider providing a shuttle service during major events and peak times	
	Explore ways to utilize parking at Donegan Park	Consider using wayfinding signage and other forms of communication to inform visitors of lesser-used parking areas
<i>Revenue Generation</i>	Consider allowing pop-up businesses to operate with a permit	Permits could be purchased for a fee
	Explore the possibility of increasing revenue through the rental of sun shelters and beach chairs	

	Beach access fees are inadvisable due to the cost of infrastructure/fencing, staff time for enforcement, and the imposition of barriers to walkers along the waterfront	Other revenue sources, such as increased parking fees, would be easier to administer
<i>Waterfront Connectivity</i>	Increase by-law enforcement patrols along the West Beach	
	Enhance signage at the West Beach, outlining rules and regulations	Aim to create a consistent 'look and feel' across all waterfront signage
	Consider placing washroom facilities in the West Beach area	Temporary facilities could be located near the boat storage compound
	Explore ways to expand the 'shoulder season' use of the beach and waterfront	Consider activities or events during the spring and autumn and winter
<i>Collaborative Management</i>	Establish an internal working group to enhance collaboration in the management of the waterfront, including Victoria Park Beach, the Cobourg Harbour and West Beach	Consider including a cross-section of staff with expertise regarding parks, communications, events, parking, legislative services, by-law enforcement, emergency planning/response, and with Council representation

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/BUDGET IMPACTS

The regulatory changes suggested by PRAC would be of little cost to implement, besides staff time, although the cost of signage and any additional by-law enforcement capacity would require approval through the annual budget process. The cost of lifeguarding Victoria Park Beach is approximately \$100,000 per year, and the capital projects suggested by the Committee, such as enhanced washroom and changing facilities, would also require additional analysis and approval through the annual budget process. An increase in parking fees and penalties/fines, however, would help to offset some of the costs associated with maintaining Victoria Park Beach and the surrounding area.

8. CONCLUSION

If endorsed by Council, PRAC's review of Victoria Park Beach will facilitate planning for the post-pandemic period and foster a collaborative approach to managing one of Ontario's most popular beach destinations.