





Hamilton

# INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Public Health Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	November 13, 2023
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Blue Flag Beach Program (PW23068/BOH22004(b)) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Andrea McDonald (905) 546-2424 Ext. 2738 Richard MacDonald (905) 546-2424 Ext. 5818
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Cynthia Graham Director, Environmental Services Public Works Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Kevin McDonald Director, Healthy Environments Division Public Health Services
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## COUNCIL DIRECTION

At the June 13, 2022 Board of Health meeting (item 7.2), staff received the following direction:

- (a) That the BOH22004(a), respecting Blue Flag Eligibility for a City of Hamilton Beach, be received, and
- (b) That staff be directed to identify the requirements and costs associated with having City of Hamilton beaches meet the requirements of the Blue Flag Program, with a report back to the Board of Health.

## INFORMATION

The international Blue Flag Program was established in 1987 to recognize public beaches, marinas and boating tourism who are sustainable and safely managed. This report will focus requirements of Blue Flag Program for public beaches. Many

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

communities have sought blue flag status to promote community pride and tourism. The blue flag lets people know that the beach is sustainably managed and accessible, with high quality services, safety procedures and water monitoring. Additionally, the required educational component of the program helps to connect people with the water and promotes stewardship. It is important to note that Hamilton's beaches are regularly inspected already during bathing season, to ensure safety of users – the Blue Flag program provides another opportunity to give the public information about the water at specific locations.

In Ontario in 2022, there were 22 beaches with the blue flag designation. Many of these beaches are found within in the Town of Wasaga (Wasaga Beach), City of Toronto (Hanlan's Point Beach, Cherry Beach, Kew Balmy Beach, Centre Island Beach, Woodbine Beach Bluffer's Park Beach, Gibraltar Point Beach), Municipality of Lambton Shores (Grand Bend Beach) and City of Sarnia (Canatara Beach). Ontario holds 78% of the Canadian total.

The Blue Flag Program recognizes communities that work hard to promote swimmable, drinkable, fishable water. The program has a rigorous compliance program to meet the Blue Flag status.

For Public beaches there are 33 Blue Flag compliance criteria across four categories. These categories include:

- a) Environmental Education and Information
- b) Water Quality
- c) Environmental Management
- d) Safety and Services

Operators of public beaches must ensure that requirements are met prior to accreditation, and maintained annually, to earn the blue flag status. See Appendix "A" to Report PW23068/BOH22004(b) for the criteria breakdown by category, and the estimated cost to the City of Hamilton to implement the program at one beach location on Lake Ontario.

This program is administered in Canada by a not-for-profit organization "Swim Drink Fish" (SDF). In order to apply for a Blue Flag accreditation status, a beach must undergo a feasibility study by the organization. Successful blue flag organizations and operators fly a dedicated blue flag to demonstrate their compliance to the program.

To have a Blue Flag accredited beach, there are seven steps that are required to be complete, see below:

1. Contact "Swim Drink Fish" to express interest;

2. Feasibility Study- arrange a Feasibility Study with “Swim Drink Fish” staff to assess beach for Blue Flag Canada eligibility;
3. Candidate Phase-implement recommendations from feasibility study;
4. Blue Flag Application Canada- criteria is met, submit application to “Swim Drink Fish”;
5. National Blue Flag Jury- the national jury reviews all Blue Flag Canada applications Successful application are submitted to the international jury;
6. International Blue Flag Jury-the international jury reviews all application. “Swim Drink Fish” awards Blue Flags that receive international jury approval; and
7. Blue Flag season begins- Once swimming season starts Blue Flags can be raised. “Swim Drink Fish” staff work with the operators, to ensure the Blue Flag Canada criteria continue to be met throughout the season. The operator for City owned beaches would be city staff.

The approved application is valid for the current award year. Each year the operator is required to re-apply for Blue Flag certification.

The accreditation process can take 1-2 years depending on the timing of the application and implementation of the recommendations by “Swim Drink Fish” based on the Feasibility assessment. “Swim Drink Fish” recommend that the first step in the journey to become an accredited Blue Flag beach is the collaborative site visit and Feasibility Study. A Feasibility Study has not been completed by “Swim Drink Fish” and the City of Hamilton to date.

Notwithstanding that a Feasibility Study has not been completed, attached (Appendix “A” to Report PW23068/BOH22004(b)) is a compilation of estimated costs associated with the compliance criteria required for Blue Flag criteria. This table has been estimated based on one potential Blue Flag beach site located on Lake Ontario (Van Wagner’s Beach).

To collect and estimate the implementation costs, staff groups consulted as stakeholders include Recreation Division, Waste Management Division, Public Health Services Division, and Environmental Services Division.

Estimated capital set up costs total \$213,000 and there would be a yearly operational impact of \$300,000 to run the program at one beach location, details can be found in Appendix “A” to Report PW23068/BOH22004(b).

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix "A" to Report PW23068/BOH22004(b) – Blue Flag Criteria