



## City of Hamilton Report for Consideration

**To:** Chair and Members  
Public Works Committee

**Date:** May 20, 2025

**Report No:** PW25030

**Subject/Title:** Blue Flag Feasibility Audit and Costing  
**(Outstanding Business List)**

**Ward(s) Affected:** City Wide

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### Recommendations

- 1) That staff **BE DIRECTED** to submit a Capital Budget Project Detail Sheet for Option A – Lifesaving Equipment only to the 2026 capital budget for consideration.

### Key Facts

- At its meeting of November 22, 2203, Hamilton City Council passed the following Motion: That staff be directed to engage Swim Drink Fish Canada, to begin the process for accreditation for Van Wagner’s Beach site, with the first step being a feasibility audit for compliance with the Blue Flag Program designation criteria and that staff report back with costs to become compliant.
- In the audit, attached as Appendix “A” to Report PW25030, Swim Drink Fish Canada identifies the site (the beach at 1151 Beach Boulevard) as having a potential for designation pending capital investment and implementation of operating requirements necessary to address gaps among 17 of the 33 designation requirements.
- Estimated costs (capital /annual operating) associated with implementation of Blue Flag Beach Designation Criteria and the Feasibility Study recommendations are \$2,360,081.00/\$138,561.00 for Option A – Lifesaving Equipment Only or \$2,638,993.00/\$408,122.00 for Option B – Seasonally Lifeguarded Beach, as detailed in Appendix “B” to Report PW25030.

- At this time, this report fulfils the direction received by Council to date. If Council wishes to proceed with establishing the 1151 Beach Boulevard beach location as a Blue Flag designated beach, staff require direction to submit the funding requirements to the 2026 budget process for consideration.

## Financial Considerations

This Report directs staff to submit a detail sheet to the 2026 capital budget for consideration, so there are no financial or FTE impacts related to the recommendation at this time. Financial impacts will be identified in a future capital budget detail sheet submission including capital and operating costs for Option A – Lifesaving Equipment Only, at a cost of \$2,360,081.00 for capital upgrades and \$138,561.00 in annual operating costs.

## Background

At the November 13, 2023 Public Health Committee meeting (Item 4), staff received the following direction:

That Item 4 of Public Health Committee Report 23-011, respecting the Blue Flag Beach Program (PW23068/BOH22004(b)) (City Wide), be **amended** as follows:

- That Report PW23068/BOH22004(b), respecting Blue Flag Beach Program, be received;
- That staff be directed to engage Swim Drink Fish Canada, to begin the process for accreditation for Van Wagner's Beach site, with the first step being a feasibility audit for compliance with the Blue Flag Program designation criteria; and,
- That staff report back to the Public Health Committee with the costs to become compliant with the Program.

Report PW25030 was redirected to Public Works Committee, rather than Public Health Committee to reflect the nature of the content and direction of the report.

Staff worked with stakeholders across the organization to scope a beach location for further analysis by Swim Drink Fish. The final location assessed was the beach front at 1151 Beach Boulevard. This location was chosen primarily because of access, water quality, and shoreline condition. Additional advantages include existing amenities such as washroom facilities, drinking water fountain, and parking lot.

Swim Drink Fish conducted a Feasibility Study of this beach location in 2024, highlighting and refining the 33 designation criteria into recommendations for capital upgrades, equipment, and programming that would support future designation which is attached as Appendix "A" to Report PW25030. The designation criteria, highlighting recommendations and all estimated costs associated, are detailed in Appendix "B" to Report PW25030 and include facility (washroom, storage, staging) upgrades, water quality monitoring beyond the City's current program, information and signage, environmental protections, and, stewardship and public safety and accessibility

measures, including lifesaving and first aid equipment, and/or an option for a seasonally lifeguarded beach.

## Analysis

As per direction received from Report PW23068/BOH22004(b) respecting Blue Flag Beach Program, staff consulted with stakeholders outlined below to estimate high-level start-up and annual operating costs based on the designation criteria and recommendations from the Feasibility Study. The following items were identified as gaps requiring an upfront financial investment and long-term financial commitment to achieve and maintain annual Blue Flag designation:

1. **Public Safety and Accessibility:** Public safety equipment (Option A – Lifesaving Equipment Only) is required at this location. In addition, upgrades to beach accessibility equipment would be beneficial. As a progression of the Blue Flag Program, a new Open Water Swim Program (Option B – Seasonally Lifeguarded Beach) may be required through Recreation (see audits and fees below) based on level of beach use. Water testing beyond the standard for Hamilton is also required.
2. **Facility Upgrades:** Upgrades are required for equipment storage, sufficient washrooms for beach users, and where lifeguarded beach program is implemented, to support staff staging and first aid. The long-term projection for a facility upgrade would involve a 5-year time commitment from approval to finalization. A capital investment of \$2,250,000.00 has been estimated within the budget for this work. A detailed design with costing is required to solidify this budget number.
3. **Information, Education, and Environmental Stewardship:** Requirements include installation of information boards, hosting of public activities, dune and beach management planning, and implementation and establishment of a beach management committee.
4. **Audits, Fees, Environmental Monitoring:** An audit of the beach by the Life Saving Society once in trial operation is required to determine the need for an Open Water Swim Program. Sensitive dune habitats must be monitored annually. The beach must be accredited annually with an annual fee associated.

It was determined that designation criteria items such as By-laws and regulations, spill response, equipment needs for parks operations and majority of water testing, access to beach location via sustainable modes of transport, and fresh drinking water supply have been achieved. Therefore, no financial pressures are anticipated with respect to those criteria.

The following internal and external stakeholders were consulted in determining the exact beach location and budget items associated with designation:

The Public Health Department, Environmental Services Division, Corporate Facilities & Energy Management Division, Recreation Division, and Waste Management Division were consulted and collaborated on costs associated with the Feasibility Study

recommendations and beach designation criteria outlined in Appendix “B” to Report PW25030.

The Hamilton Water Division was consulted on locations of local storm water outfalls to confirm that they do not impact or intersect with the proposed beach location.

Within the Planning and Economic Development Department, the Tourism & Culture Division was consulted on proposed beach location and possible aligned priorities.

Hamilton Police Service Marine Unit was consulted on proposed beach location and health and safety considerations of a Blue Flag designated beach location on the City of Hamilton managed Lake Ontario shoreline, to confirm the water rescue process and water condition around the proposed beach location.

Landscape and Architectural Services Section and Hamilton Conservation Authority were consulted on the Shoreline Management Plan.

The Corporate Security Section was consulted on location, and health and safety considerations made for future beach operation.

The Corporate Services Department was consulted respecting risk associated with Blue Flag Beach designation. It was determined that risk would need to be further consulted should next steps be taken to implement criteria associated with designation.

Life Saving Society Canada was consulted on preliminary beach location and costs associated with the Life Saving Society - Beach Audit as recommended through the Blue Flag Beach Feasibility Study included as Appendix “A” to Report PW25030.

## **Alternatives**

An alternative to the Recommendation of Report PW25030 would be to direct staff to submit a detail sheet to the 2026 capital budget for Option B – Seasonally Lifeguarded Beach, at a cost of \$2,638,993.00 for capital upgrades and \$408,122.00 for annual operating costs. Staff do not recommend this alternative because Option A provides the investment required to pursue the Blue Flag designation. If deemed necessary or desired, a further investment in the future to build out the open water lifeguard program (Option B) will remain an option.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

1. Sustainable Economic & Ecological Development
  - 1.4. Protect green space and waterways
2. Safe & Thriving Neighbourhoods
  - 2.3. Provide vibrant parks, recreation and public space

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## Previous Reports Submitted

[Blue Flag Beach Program \(PW23068/BOH22004\(b\)\)](#), Public Health Committee, November 13, 2023

[Beach Water Quality and Blue Flag Eligibility \(BOH22004\(a\)\)](#), Board of Health Committee, June 13, 2022

[Public Beach Signage \(BOH22004\)](#), Board of Health Committee, March 21, 2022

## Consultation

Staff from the following City Departments were consulted in the development of this Report and costs associated with implementation of Blue Flag designation criteria and Feasibility Study recommendations:

- Parks Section, Environmental Services Division, Public Works Department
- Waste Collections Section, Waste Management Division, Public Works Department
- District Recreation Operations Section, Recreation Division, Healthy and Safe Communities Department
- Water Safety and Environmental Health Sections, Medical Officer of Health Division, Healthy and Safe Communities Department
- Risk Management Section, Legal and Risk Management Services Division, Corporate Services Department
- Business Development Tourism Section, Tourism and Culture Division, Planning and Economic Development Department
- Wastewater Collection Section, Hamilton Water Division, Public Works Department
- Corporate Safety & Security and Strategic Planning, Capital & Compliance Sections, Corporate Facilities and Energy Management Division, Public Works Department
- Hamilton Police Services

## Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix A: Blue Flag Feasibility Study: Hamilton Beach Blvd., Swim Drink Fish Canada, 2024

Appendix B: Blue Flag Beach Compliance - Implementation and Operation Budget Estimate, Hamilton Beach Boulevard

**Prepared by:** Kasey Livingston, Senior Project Manager  
Public Works Department, Environmental Services, Parks

**Submitted and recommended by:** Cynthia Graham, Director  
Public Works Department, Environmental Services