



Blue Flag Feasibility Study: **Hamilton Beach Blvd.**

Swim Drink Fish Canada
2024



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Executive Summary

The Blue Flag program is an international eco-label awarded to beaches and



marinas. The program began in Europe in 1985 and is administered by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in Denmark. In Canada, Blue Flag is operated by Swim Drink Fish.

On April 25, 2024, Swim Drink Fish conducted a feasibility study of Beach Boulevard, located in Hamilton, Ontario. This report details the findings of those studies. The beaches were assessed against international Blue Flag Beach Criteria, which are organized into four categories:

1. Environmental Education and Information

2. Water Quality

3. Environmental Management

4. Safety and Services

Based on this review, Beach Boulevard is eligible to apply for Blue Flag certification in 2026 if the following commitments are made:

- Form a beach management committee.
- Install one Blue Flag information board at the beach upon receipt of the Blue Flag award in the spring of 2026.
- Demarcate the proposed Blue Flag beach and swimming areas with visible markers
- Install sufficient lifeguard stations in accordance with a risk management study, conducted in accordance with the Lifesaving Society of Canada
- Provide Blue Flag Canada with 20 enterococci/fecal strep sample results per beach before raising the flags in 2026. On an ongoing basis, commit to sampling for enterococci/fecal strep at least 5 times per season at each beach in addition to weekly E.coli tests.
- A sensitive habitat management and monitoring plan should be developed and established for the beach and the marine environment.
- Install additional garbage and recycling bins along the beaches in adequate numbers.
- Expand or install more restroom facilities
- Commit to publicizing water quality results throughout the swimming season in a manner easily understood by the public.
- Create a beach emergency plan to cope with pollution safety risks at both beaches.
- Commit to installing wheelchair-accessible features, including water access.
- Install signage indicating the rules for usage at the site (no camping, driving, or dumping, no dogs on the beach, etc.)

Upon accepting the recommendations in this report and committing to meet the remaining criteria, Beach Boulevard may be declared an official Blue Flag candidate, formally undergoing the Blue Flag certification process.



Introduction

The Blue Flag program is an internationally recognized eco-label that is awarded to clean, safe, and sustainably managed beaches and marinas. The program is operated by Swim Drink Fish Canada. In 2024, over 5,121 beaches and marinas in 51 countries were awarded the Blue Flag. A Blue Flag is awarded annually based on a marina meeting the Blue Flag criteria in the prior year.

In Canada, the National Operator of the Blue Flag program is Swim Drink Fish, a national registered charity. Swim Drink Fish is responsible for developing and administering the program, including conducting feasibility studies for potential Blue Flag beaches and marinas, administering the Canadian Jury, monitoring beaches and marinas that achieve Blue Flag status, developing strategic partnerships, and promoting the benefits of the Blue Flag program.

International Blue Flag Beach Criteria

A total of 33 criteria form the core of the International Blue Flag Program and are divided into four categories:

1. Environmental Education and Information
2. Water Quality
3. Environmental Management
4. Safety and Services

The criteria are further divided into “imperative” and “guideline” criteria. To be awarded a Blue Flag, a beach must fulfill all imperative criteria. Guideline criteria provide additional services and information to beach users; however, Blue Flags may be awarded to beaches that do not meet any guideline criteria.

While excellent water quality is essential for a Blue Flag beach, the criteria under Environmental Education and Information, Environmental Management, and Safety and Services lay out a broader framework for assessment. They examine the beach from a holistic perspective and set standards to ensure that the beach ecosystem will be protected and that the use of the beach by the public will be managed in the most environmentally sensitive way.



Assessment of Beach Boulevard, Hamilton, ON.

On April 25, 2024, Gregory Ford (Vice President) and Megan Coad (Great Lakes Program Manager), conducted a feasibility study of Beach Boulevard. The beach was evaluated against the international Blue Flag Beach criteria.

Observations

The following features were noted at Beach Boulevard during the site visits:

1. The beach appeared to be regularly cleaned and had very little bulky litter present, with a moderate amount of fine litter.
2. The surrounding areas of the site were well preserved, including a dune ecosystem in good health, with signage indicating this to the public.
3. The site offers sustainable transportation options, including bike and walking trails and a public transit route that stops there.

Recommendations

This report lists the criteria that still need to be met at Beach Boulevard and provides recommendations on how to implement them.

Criterion #1: Information about the Blue Flag Program must be displayed.

Once awarded the Blue Flag, Beach Boulevard must have its own individual Blue Flag information boards in place. An information board tells visitors about the Blue Flag program, outlines what the city is doing to meet the criteria, and describes the local ecosystem. It can also be used as a location for posting water quality results and advertising environmental education activities. Information boards must be approved by Swim Drink Fish before being finalized.

Note: You are not expected to have information boards created or installed prior to applying for Blue Flag designation; the understanding is that you are committed to having them placed by the beginning of the bathing season once awarded.

Criterion #2: Environmental education initiatives must be offered and promoted to beach users.

To be awarded a Blue Flag, the applicant must offer or promote at least five environmental education initiatives. These can include the following:

Passive participation: Exhibits, films, presentations, conferences, debates, etc.



Active participation: Guided nature walks, educational games, beach cleanups, photography or art contests, eco-scavenger hunts, etc.

Training activities: Training sessions for teachers, municipal staff, lifeguards, cleaners, summer students, etc.

Publishing and media: The production of brochures, stickers, t-shirts, interpretive signage, newsletters, books, posters, and radio broadcasts, etc.

Blue Flag Environmental Information Centre: This is where specific information about Blue Flag and environmental issues can be provided. A common meeting area can be used as an information centre, so long as it offers activities and/or exhibitions and provides environmental information for the general public. We recommend collaborating with local environmental organizations or community groups such as a local conservation authority; activities offered by these groups can be promoted by the city at the beach and through various communications channels. Environmental education can also be undertaken by setting up tables at community events. Scheduled activities must be posted at the beach.

Criterion #3: Information about bathing water quality must be displayed.

Upon being awarded the Blue Flag, the most recent geometric mean results for E.coli must be posted on location at Beach Boulevard and on www.blueflag.ca. Results can also be posted in a display case, on a sandwich board, or written with an erasable marker on a laminated chart posted on a bulletin board.

Criterion #5: A map of the beach indicating different facilities must be displayed.

A map displaying the boundaries of the Blue Flag beach and the location of key facilities and services must be posted on the Blue Flag information board. Swim Drink Fish will provide guidelines for creating the map and the required map elements with approved pictogrammes from Blue Flag International.

Criterion #6: A code of conduct that reflects appropriate laws and/or regulations governing the use of the beach and surrounding areas must be displayed.

The site's code of conduct must include rules about the presence of domestic animals, zoning, fishing, litter management, vehicle use, camping, and fires. It must also be displayed on the Blue Flag international board.

Laws and/or regulations governing beach usage and management should be available to the public at the office of the local authority/beach operator.

The period when the lifesaving equipment and/or lifeguards, and first aid, are available must be clearly marked on the Blue Flag information boards and at the lifeguard station. An explanation of the emergency flag system in use must also be provided.



Criterion #8: The beach must fully comply with the standards and requirements for water quality analysis.

An independent person, officially authorized and trained for the task, must collect the samples. An independent laboratory must carry out the analysis of the bathing water samples. The laboratory must be nationally or internationally accredited to carry out microbiological and physical-chemical analyses. The testing method and data resulting from it must also be accredited.

Samples for microbiological and physical-chemical parameters must be taken.

Criterion #9: Industrial, waste-water or sewage-related discharges must not affect the beach area.

A bathing water profile must be compiled for every Blue Flag beach. A bathing water profile includes identification of potential sources of pollution, a description of the physical, geographical and hydrological characteristics of the bathing water, as well as an assessment of the potential for cyanobacteria and algae formation.

It is recommended that there should not be any industrial, urban wastewater or sewage-related discharges into the Blue Flag area or immediate buffer zone/surrounding area. If there are discharge points in the area of the beach, these must be documented at the time of application.

During the site visit, staff noted an odor coming from the Burlington Lift Bridge north of Beach Boulevard. During the bathing water profile, or Environmental Health and Safety Survey, the study should assess the cause of the odor to ensure no industrial, wastewater, or sewage-related discharges will be impacting the beach area.

Criterion #10: The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for the microbiological parameters *Escherichia coli* (E.coli) and intestinal enterococci (streptococci).

A commitment must be made to providing Blue Flag Canada with 20 enterococci samples before the Blue Flag is raised. A minimum of 20 samples are required as an initial dataset, and 5 samples per season thereafter.

Criterion #12: The local authority/beach operator must establish a beach management committee.

The beach management committee should include representatives of the city, public health agencies, and relevant community groups or non-profits. The committee should meet at least twice a year to discuss the management of the beaches and ensure that all criteria are being met. In the case that multiple beaches within the city are awarded the Blue Flag, one committee may oversee the group of sites.

In many instances, Swim Drink Fish is able to assist with facilitating the local beach management committee.



Criterion #17: Waste disposal bins/containers must be available at the beach in adequate numbers, and they must be regularly maintained.

There should be an adequate number of bins on the beach, and they should all be regularly maintained, well-secured, and spaced appropriately. Individual bin capacity, the number of users on the beach, and how frequently the bins are emptied determine the number and minimum space between bins placed on the beach. During the peak tourist season, the spacing between bins and the frequency of emptying should be adjusted as necessary.

When we visited Beach Boulevard we did note that some bins were available, however, they were not adequate to service the beach. More will need to be installed.

Criterion #18: Recycling bins must be available at the beach.

Should the community have a local recycling facility, containers must be made available at the beach for these materials, e.g. glass, cans, plastic, paper, etc. The receptacles should be properly designed and managed for the type of waste received, should be emptied regularly, and be well placed for accessibility.

During the visit, no recycling bins were observed at the site. Bins will need to be installed at appropriate intervals to properly service the site. Separate containers must be provided to accommodate different types of waste that are recycled in the city.

Criterion #19: An adequate number of toilet or restroom facilities must be provided.

The number of toilets/restrooms available at the beach must reflect the average number of beach visitors during the peak season, the length of the beach, and the number and location of major access points. The toilet or restroom facilities must be easy to locate through signage and through information on the map on the Blue Flag information board.

When the site was visited we observed the restroom facilities and noted that they would not be adequate to service the beach. More facilities will need to be added/expanded to meet this criteria.

Criterion #23: Access to the beach by dogs and other domestic animals must be strictly controlled.

Dogs or pets, other than assistance dogs, are not allowed on a Blue Flag beach or in the Blue Flag area if it is part of a larger beach. If the presence of pets is permitted by the local and national legislation, animals are only allowed in the parking areas, walkways and promenades in the inland beach area and must be under control.



Criterion #25 (& 14): Marine and freshwater sensitive habitats in the vicinity of the beach must be monitored.

If there is a sensitive habitat located within 500 metres from any part of a Blue Flag beach, a monitoring program must be established to monitor the health of the habitat at least once a season. An expert organization or relevant authority must be consulted regarding the monitoring and management of this sensitive area.

A sensitive dune habitat was observed at the site. A management plan should be developed to manage and protect this habitat.

Criterion #27: Appropriate public safety control measures must be implemented.

The beach operator must ensure that safety measures comply with the national legislation regarding beach safety.

- a Blue Flag beach with a high number of visitors must be guarded/patrolled by an adequate number of lifeguards placed at appropriate intervals as recommended in the risk assessment and according to the beach characteristics and use. The number of lifeguards must increase according to peak usage, and a minimum of two every 200m is recommended for those beaches that have not undertaken a risk assessment.
- Bathing areas patrolled by lifeguards must be clearly marked out. The area must be defined on the map, on the information board, and/or physically on the beach with markers or flags.

Criterion #28: First aid equipment must be available on the beach.

The first aid may be available by means of: a) a lifeguard on-site, and/or b) an attended first aid station with trained personnel, and/or c) equipment located in a shop or other beach facility at the beach, and/or d) directly available to the public on the beach. It is strongly recommended that busy beaches and family beaches have first-aid stations with staff in attendance. First-aid personnel must have appropriate qualifications.

Criterion #29: Emergency plans to cope with pollution risks must be in place.

An emergency plan should provide beach staff, elected officials, personnel, and emergency response agencies with clear and systematic guidelines on how to respond during an emergency or natural disaster.

Criterion #33: At least one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have access and facilities provided for the physically disabled.

It is strongly recommended that all Blue Flag beaches have facilities that allow access by the physically disabled, granting them access to the beach, surrounding buildings, and restroom facilities. It is a Blue Flag requirement that at least one beach in every municipality must provide these facilities. It is a Blue Flag recommendation that at this beach, if possible, there is access to the water for the physically disabled.



Next Steps

1. Commit to adopting the recommendations of the feasibility study report.

We encourage the City of Hamilton to share the feasibility study report with city staff, council, and other local organizations. Pending approval to adopt the recommendations of this report, Beach Boulevard will officially be recognized as a Blue Flag “candidate,” meaning they are undergoing Blue Flag certification.

2. Submit a Blue Flag application

Once the Blue Flag criteria have been implemented (with the exception of criteria covered by the Blue Flag information board and the 20 enterococci bathing water quality samples), we will encourage the City of Hamilton to apply for the Blue Flag. We strongly encourage the City of Hamilton to communicate any issues or barriers with us, as we may be able to provide assistance or guidance. Applications are accepted every November, and we will provide instructions for submitting an application. The application will first be assessed by the Canadian Blue Flag Jury in February, and then by the International Blue Flag Jury in April. The fee for the Feasibility Study has been waived, but as of 2024 an application fee of \$1,560.00 will be due during submission of the Blue Flag application. Please note that this amount may change by 2026.

3. Celebrate the Blue Flag designation.

We only encourage applicants to apply if we are confident they will pass both juries. If an application has been submitted, we, therefore encourage the city to start planning for a flag-raising celebration to be held at the beginning of the beach season. This is an excellent opportunity to promote your international designation to the community and tourists alike. We help new Blue Flag recipients promote their status through earned media, social media, blogs, and magazine articles. We will also participate in flag-raising celebrations. Each Blue Flag beach and marina also has its own profile page on www.blueflag.ca.

Conclusion

As this report demonstrates, Beach Boulevard is capable of meeting the Blue Flag criteria. We encourage the City of Hamilton to take the final steps toward joining the Blue Flag community, and we look forward to working with you to promote Beach Boulevard as a safe, healthy and sustainable beach destinations to be enjoyed by both residents and tourists.

