

REDUCED POOL HOURS AT FIRSTENBURG AND MARSHALL COMMUNITY CENTERS

Frequently Asked Questions

Why were hours reduced at community center pools?

Vancouver Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services is experiencing significant challenges recruiting lifeguard staff, especially those who can work daytime hours during the school year. The safety of our community is always our top priority and pools cannot be open at times when we cannot maintain required staffing levels.

Pool hours were reduced due to a lifeguard staff shortage, it is not connected to any recent maintenance projects.

How did you decide which hours, classes, programs to eliminate?

Firstenburg and Marshall pools are valuable resources for many people and decisions about reducing pool hours are taken seriously. Low impact fitness opportunities, water safety training for all ages and abilities, and leisure swimming activities that build connections with friends and family are important services for our community.

Pool hours have been cut by more than half since January 2023. All pool users and programs are feeling the pressure of these changes, especially those who use the pools as their regular source of recreation and exercise, and those who want to enroll in swim lessons.

When considering potential service changes, staff reviewed the full list of aquatics programs to make decisions that maintain the diversity of pool activities with reduced hours. Another important factor was keeping pools open during the hours with the highest public use, including mornings, evenings and Saturdays.

Even with these careful considerations, service reductions unfortunately create negative impacts. People who typically use the pools midday will experience the impacts of reduced hours more directly. We recognize this inconvenience and ask for continued patience as we work to find solutions in the future.

Why don't the community center pools have enough lifeguards?

Maintaining full pool schedules is always challenging because it requires a lot of well-trained staff. A full day's pool schedule is 12+ hours and each of the pools must have 2-6 lifeguards on duty at any one time, based on type of activities being offered and the pool capacity.

Like many employers nationwide, the City of Vancouver has been impacted by significant changes in the labor market and ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. There are fewer applicants for part time staff positions, which includes jobs in aquatics programs. At the same time, the City of Vancouver has been looking at our classification and compensation structure.

The combination of all these factors has resulted in the Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services department operating with less than half the staff it had five years ago.

How soon will afternoon pool hours return?

There is not a set date for when pool hours will be expanded. Additional lifeguard staff must be recruited and complete the required training, certification and job shadowing. Lifeguards play a crucial role in maintaining community safety, so the hiring process cannot be rushed.

An update on staffing and programming strategies will be shared with center members in January. Pool users should expect reduced pool hours to be in place at least through December.

What are you doing to address this problem?

We are actively recruiting and training lifeguards right now. It takes 1-2 months for candidates who enter the training program and complete the certification and onboarding process to be approved for individual lifeguard duty.

In the long term, the City of Vancouver is looking at how to grow our recreation team with competitive pay, sustainable training and opportunities for professional growth and advancement.

Is there anything the public can do to help?

If you or someone you know is interested in working as a part time lifeguard, please visit www.cityofvancouver.us/RecJobs. Anyone age 16+ is encouraged to apply, especially those who are available to work shifts during the middle of the day.

No prior experience or swimming expertise is needed. Training is required before candidates can begin work; training is paid for by the City of Vancouver. Candidates who successfully complete training receive a \$300 incentive when they are hired.

How can I make sure that my experiences with the reduction in pool hours are being heard and considered during future decision-making?

Please share information about how the reduction in pool hours has impacted you through [our online form](#) available at www.cityofvancouver.us/aquatics. You can also use the form to pass on ideas and suggestions for future consideration.

Staff will use the feedback collected on the form to guide future strategies for pool use. If you cannot complete the form online, please visit the Firstenburg or Marshall front desk and a customer service representative will provide you with a written comment card.

Limited access to the pool really impacts my community center use. How do I cancel my membership?

We are sorry that the community centers are not able to meet your expectations during this staff shortage. We hope that you will consider reactivating your membership in the future.

You can cancel your community center membership through an [online cancellation form](#) or by calling a customer service representative during regular business hours. Cancellation requests must be received by the 24th of the month prior to be removed from the billing cycle.

SWIM LESSONS

Why can't I register for swim lessons?

The lifeguard shortage has reduced the number of swim lesson sessions that the City of Vancouver can offer. Both lifeguards and Water Safety Instructors (WSIs) must be present to safely offer swim lessons. Many lifeguards choose to participate in the cross training and added certification process required to become WSIs. For that reason, the current staff shortage impacts availability for both the lifeguard role and the WSI role.

Are you offering any swim lessons right now?

Marshall Pool will not offer swim lessons through the end of 2023. Very limited swim lesson sessions will be available at Firstenburg Pool in November and December. Consolidating lessons to one location for a limited time supports ongoing swim lesson operations. Firstenburg is best suited to serve a wide variety of learning levels due to the zero-depth entry and shallow water design of the pool.

Registration opens for Firstenburg swim lessons at 7 a.m. on Oct. 25, spots will fill very quickly. Learn more about swim lessons and find the registration link at www.cityofvancouver.us/aquatics.

When will more swim lessons be added?

Swim lessons are a vital tool to keep our community safe and healthy. We are actively recruiting and training new lifeguards and WSIs to restore our swim lesson program in 2024. Becoming a WSI requires additional training and certification after becoming a lifeguard and involves co-teaching up to three swim lesson sessions to build the confidence and skills needed to be a successful instructor.

At this time there is not a specific date when more swim lesson sessions will return. Updates will be provided as the situation develops.

Where else can I register for swim lessons?

All City of Vancouver WSIs follow American Red Cross curriculum. Level requirements completed at Firstenburg or Marshall pools would be transferable to [other facilities with Red Cross instructors](#).