



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: April 24, 2023

FROM: Parks and Open Space Department
Oakville Fire Department

DATE: April 11, 2023

SUBJECT: **Waterfront Park Safety Enhancements**

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

That Life Ring Stations and Unsupervised Beach signs be installed at Lakeside Park, Coronation Park, Bronte Beach Park and South Shell Park.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- In September 2022 there was an incident in Lake Ontario directly off Coronation Park which resulted in an individual drowning.
- Staff within Community Services have reviewed the incident, considered options, and are recommending that life ring stations and Unsupervised Beach signs be installed at several waterfront park sites. Signage and educational messaging may create greater public awareness of the safety issues. Life rings will enable assistance at our most frequented waterfront parks.
- An inspection and documentation program will be setup to ensure that the life rings and signs are checked on a regular basis.
- The life ring stations and signs will be installed prior to the 2023 Victoria Day weekend.

BACKGROUND:

Oakville's waterfront parkland has several sites where residents gather for swimming access to Lake Ontario. These include Coronation Park, Bronte Beach

Park, South Shell Park, and Lakeside Park. At present, life ring stations and unsupervised beach signs are not installed at these waterfront parks. There are seasonal signs indicating whether the near shore water is Safe/Unsafe for entry based on bacteria levels as determined weekly by the Region of Halton. Water testing by the Region occurs between Victoria Day and Labour Day weekends. The public is also informed on whether swimming is safe/unsafe through the Region of Halton website. Parks/Harbours staff are responsible for maintaining the water quality signs at waterfront park beaches.

Staff is recommending that life ring stations as well as unsupervised beach signs be added to waterfront parks with beach access to Lake Ontario.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

Life ring stations have been installed on the piers and within Oakville and Bronte harbour for many years. In addition, safety ladders are fastened to the piers, and at the end of many seasonal docks within both harbours. The piers are prone to wave overtopping, windy/slippery conditions and individuals could be swept off the piers into deep water. Docks within the harbours often rise up and down with wave action from wind or storm activity which could lead to an individual losing their balance and falling into deep water. The ladders and life ring stations, painted yellow, provide assistance in the event an individual falls into deep water. Warning signs at the piers also caution users that wave action frequently overtops the pier creating slippery/unsafe conditions. Harbours section staff inspect the life ring stations and ladders on the piers and seasonal docks within the harbours.

Staff is recommending that safety devices be introduced at waterfront parks with beach access where residents gather to swim in Lake Ontario. It is recommended to install life ring stations at 100 meter spacing and signs at the edge of the beach as well as beach entry points from either walkways or parking lots advising swimmers that the beach is unsupervised (please see Appendix A for Signs). Recommended locations include Coronation Park, Bronte Beach Park, and South Shell Park. From Victoria Day – Labour Day and often till the end of September these lakefront park sites attract a high number of residents and visitors to enjoy the beach and good/easy access to swim in Lake Ontario. While Lakeside Park is not a popular swimming site for residents and visitors due to the rocky cobble beach, there is a regular group of swimmers (Lake Ontario Swim Team - LOST) who meet at Lakeside Park every Saturday morning and swim in Lake Ontario. Hence Lakeside Park also merits installation of the life ring stations and signs.

Parks staff would be responsible for installing the life ring stations, signs, and implementing a weekly inspection program which is an expansion of the current program to inspect water quality signs from Victoria Day – Labour Day. Parks staff undertaking other parks maintenance activities in these parks throughout the week

would also be expected to inspect the life ring stations and signs. Based on conversation with other municipal partners, it is expected a number of life rings will go missing over the swimming season.

Staff contacted other waterfront municipalities and conservation areas to determine their implementation of safety devices at waterfront beaches. The results are summarized below.

Municipality	Life Ring Stations	Warning Beach/Waterside Signage
Hamilton	Yes	Yes
Conservation Halton	Yes	Yes
Burlington	Yes	Yes
Mississauga	Yes	Yes
Ajax	Yes	Yes
Pickering	Yes	Yes
Whitby	Yes	Yes

The cost to implement the life ring station program and unsupervised beach signs is estimated at \$18,500. This amount can be accommodated within the approved Parks and Open Space 2023 budget.

The Lake Ontario drowning incident off Coronation Park was a tragic and unfortunate occurrence. It is hoped that by providing life ring stations and signage at waterfront parks with beach access where swimming is known to occur, they may provide assistance in the future should an incident take place. There is no certainty that by adding these safety features, it may prevent a drowning from occurring. The signage and safety equipment assist in terms of cautioning park patrons of the risks and potential risks related to swimming in Lake Ontario.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

Several members of the community have contacted Community Services regarding the report coming to Council. Those individuals have been provided notification of the meeting.

(B) FINANCIAL

The cost associated with installation of the life ring stations and signs at the noted waterfront park locations is estimated at \$18,500. Funding for this program can be accommodated within the approved 2023 Parks and Open Space operating budget.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

N/A

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal of livability.

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

N/A

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Examples of Signage to be installed at listed waterfront parks.

Prepared by:

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Recommended and Submitted by:

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