



**PORT COLBORNE**

**Subject: Nickel Beach Report**

**To: Council**

**From: Corporate Services Department**

Report Number: 2025-06

Meeting Date: February 25, 2025

---

**Recommendation:**

That Corporate Services Department Report 2025-06 be received;

That Recreation staff be directed to move forward with the environmental projects involving removal of invasive phragmites, installation of dune fencing; and

That Recreation staff be directed to conduct a trial of vendors at Nickel Beach during the 2025 season.

---

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the 2024 beach season, highlighting key trends, challenges, and successes observed throughout the year. This report will also provide an outlook for the 2025 season, including planned improvements and strategies to enhance the overall beach experience for residents and visitors.

---

**Background:**

The 2025 beach season in Port Colborne will mark the third year without beach front parking. Throughout this period, staff have consistently made operational adjustments aimed at enhancing the experience for both residents and visitors. Feedback has been gathered from staff, councillors, residents, and beachgoers to inform these improvements.

In accordance with Section 27.0.2 of Ontario Regulation 832/21, Nickel Beach is designated as protected habitat for the Fowler's Toad, a species listed as endangered under the provincial *Endangered Species Act* (ESA). This designation provides automatic protection for the toad's habitat. As such, the City of Port Colborne has

developed an official Operations Manual for Nickel Beach, which has been guided and approved by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks (MECP). The manual outlines specific timelines and procedures for any work conducted in the area to ensure the protection of the Fowler's Toad and its habitat and must be strictly adhered to.

In accordance with the Operations Manual, the accumulation of algae or seaweed in the water or wet/damp algae or seaweed along shoreline is not to be disturbed. However, dried algae or seaweed on the shoreline may be removed and relocated to an alternative site on the property. During the removal process, staff are required to inspect the area for the presence of Fowler's Toads and toadlets. If any toads are found, work must cease immediately. The piled dried seaweed/algae should only be removed from the site once per week, after ensuring that no toads are present.

---

## **Discussion:**

### **2024 Highlights and 2025 Enhancements**

In 2024, Recreation staff presented a request to Council to modify the Zone 1 parking area in response to safety concerns raised by numerous beachgoers in 2023, which had led to a significant number of refund requests. As a result of this modification, the 26 parking spaces along Lake Road were redesignated as a "No Parking Zone." Council approved the expenditure to repurpose this area, creating a walkway from the Zone 2 parking lot to Nickel Beach. The walkway was marked with line painting and the installation of flexible bollards. As a result of this project, Recreation staff received zero complaints from beachgoers expressing concern for their safety while walking from the Zone 2 parking lot to Nickel Beach. Notably, there was \$7,080 less in refunds processed in 2024 compared to 2023.

Nickel Beach has many amenities and programming for beachgoers to enjoy, including:

- Splashtown Niagara.
- Becoming a leashed dog friendly beach.
- Dog days of summer event.
- Pop-up vendor appearances.
- Washroom facilities.
- First-aid trailer.
- Beach lounge rental program.
- Take a toy leave a toy bin.
- Mobi-Chair (beach wheelchair).
- Mobi-Mat (beach accessibility mat).
- Installation of Security Cameras.
- Beach Mural, painted by Lakeshore Catholic High School class.

- Beach season extended to Thanksgiving weekend.

Feedback received from the public during the 2024 beach season identified positive feedback regarding the service from beach staff, the cleanliness and maintenance of washroom facilities, and the overall quality of the beach environment.

Respondents have noted the price of parking and the accumulation of seaweed and algae along the shoreline as areas for review.

In response to the feedback received, staff are collaborating with the Communications Department to develop a “Seaweed Report,” which will be posted on the City’s website and on-site at Nickel Beach. This report will provide up-to-date information on seaweed and algae accumulation at the beach, offering beachgoers greater awareness of current conditions prior to arriving at Nickel Beach. Additionally, the “Seaweed Report” will include information educating the public on the challenges and limitations associated with seaweed removal from both the water and shoreline, as previously noted in this report.

To address concerns regarding parking pricing, staff have proposed, and City Council approved during the 2025 User Fees and Charges Report 2024-183, a hybrid pricing model that incorporates hourly parking rates. This adjustment is intended to enhance accessibility for individuals who visit the beach for activities such as walking, running, site seeing, walking their dog or visiting after work. The detailed pricing matrix that was approved by Council can be found in Appendix "A" for reference purposes.

Based on data collected from beach staff during weekdays, the number of beachgoers utilizing a PORTicipate pass varied between 5 and 40 individuals per day. On weekends, this range increased, with daily usage of the pass varying between 15 and 50 beachgoers. The Zone 2 parking lot exceeded parking capacity, with beachgoers spilling into Zone 3 residential parking areas on every weekend from July 7<sup>th</sup> to August 11<sup>th</sup>.

Recreation staff have outlined several operational changes and initiatives for the 2025 beach season. These will include new programming designed to enhance the overall beach experience at Nickel Beach, as well as projects focused on protecting and preserving the natural environment of the beach.

At the conclusion of the 2024 beach season, Splashtown Niagara expressed interest in extending the term of their current agreement, which is set to conclude in November 2025. In response, staff are drafting a new licensing agreement with Splashtown Niagara, which will extend the term of the agreement through to 2029. Splashtown Niagara has positively contributed to providing an enjoyable recreation experience for beachgoers.

Recreation staff are planning to introduce food vendors at Nickel Beach on weekends during the peak of the 2025 season as a trial initiative. The trial will offer vending opportunities to the vendors awarded space at H.H. Knoll Lakeview Parkette. Should

this pilot be successful, staff will develop a formal process to offer food vending opportunities at Nickel Beach on weekends during peak times starting in 2026.

Survey responses will be collected throughout the entire 2025 season to receive feedback from beachgoers and create a net promoter score that can be reported back to council in 2026. Beach staff will also collect daily statistics throughout the season on weather conditions, seaweed conditions, parking lot and beach attendance tracking at different intervals of the day and number of PORTicipate passes in lots.

Recreation staff have engaged with several key environmental agencies, including the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), LCA Environmental, and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, to discuss potential initiatives aimed at enhancing the natural environment of Nickel Beach.

### **Invasive Species Control – Phragmites Removal**

Phragmites, an invasive species, are damaging Ontario's biodiversity, wetlands, and beaches. A section of the beachfront at Nickel Beach has been identified where invasive phragmites are spreading, leading to the loss of beachfront area on the western end of the public beach. In response, the City has submitted a request to the MECP for approval to remove these plants, aiming to mitigate their impact on the environment.

### **Dune Fencing Project**

The dune fencing project will be implemented in tandem with the phragmites removal. Once the invasive plants are removed, dune fencing will be installed to help rebuild the sand dunes in the affected area. This process will facilitate the accumulation of more sand, creating an environment that is less conducive to the growth of plants on the beachfront and further supporting the restoration of the dunes.

---

### **Internal Consultations:**

Communications staff will launch a robust communications and marketing strategy to profile the unique features of Nickel Beach and encourage area residents to visit the beach this coming summer. At a high level, the strategy will include a digital component with geo-targeted digital ads to residents in Port Colborne and neighbouring municipalities, radio advertising, updated website, and social media content. Staff will also work with local media to support sharing Nickel Beach messaging through traditional media channels as well.

---

### **Financial Implications:**

The City is addressing the issue of invasive phragmites, a highly aggressive plant species, which requires removal to protect local ecosystems and maintain public

spaces. Staff have received quotes ranging for \$2,500-\$3,500 to remove. Additionally, staff have identified a grant through the Invasive Phragmites Control Fund, this grant could result in financial assistance for this project.

Nickel Beach's operational funding model has shifted from being entirely self-sustaining to a hybrid approach. The revised model now covers two-thirds of its operational costs through user-generated revenues, while the remaining one-third will be funded through the municipal levy.

---

### **Public Engagement:**

Recreation staff will have a survey for Nickel Beach available online and on-site for beachgoers to provide feedback about their experience.

---

### **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

The initiative contained within this report supports the following pillar(s) of the strategic plan:

- Environment and Climate Change
  - Welcoming, Livable, Healthy Community
  - Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure
- 

### **Conclusion:**

This report on the 2024 beach season highlighted new programs, operational changes, and feedback from beachgoers. It also outlined plans for the 2025 season, with the goal of enhancing the beach experience for residents and visitors through various programming changes and initiatives.

### **Appendices:**

- a. Parking Rates

Respectfully submitted,

Luke Rowe  
Recreation Supervisor  
905-228-8037  
[Luke.Rowe@portcolborne.ca](mailto:Luke.Rowe@portcolborne.ca)

Greg Zwiep  
Manager, Recreation and Tourism  
905-228-8044  
[Greg.Zwiep@portcolborne.ca](mailto:Greg.Zwiep@portcolborne.ca)

Blair Holinaty  
Marina Supervisor  
905-228-8036  
[Blair.Holinaty@portcolborne.ca](mailto:Blair.Holinaty@portcolborne.ca)

**Report Approval:**

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final review and approval by the Chief Administrative Officer.