



Subject: 2023 Nickel Beach Parking and Related Operations

To: Council

From: Corporate Services Department

Report Number: 2023-32

Meeting Date: February 28, 2023

Recommendation:

That Corporate Services Department Report 2023-32 be received; and

That Council approve the changes in beach rates proposed in Appendix B and for Staff to proceed with the construction of new off-beach parking options at Nickel Beach as laid out in Appendix B; and

That Council approve a budget of \$1,300,000 to be funded from the infrastructure reserve to complete the Nickel Beach Parking Lot project and

That the updated Schedule G of the User Fees and Charges By-law be included in a future amendment to By-law 7047/84/22.

Purpose:

This report seeks Council approval to change beach rates to accommodate proposed off-beach parking options at Nickel Beach.

Background:

Residents of Port Colborne and visitors have been parking on and enjoying Nickel Beach since the advent of the automobile.

The Ministry of the Environment, Cemetery and Parks (MECP) has cited the Fowler's Toad as an endangered species in Ontario necessitating immediate changes to parking at Nickel Beach.

Staff are working with external legal counsel and an environmental subject matter expert. This report and the related recommendation are the result of that consultation.

Discussion:

In response of the MECP necessitating immediate changes to parking at Nickel Beach this report recommends new off-beach parking lots to be built, expanded, and/or developed near Nickel Beach.

Parking Lot Construction (Appendix A)

The need for the new off-beach parking lots is due to the fact there are no other alternative parking options at Nickel Beach.

The Public Works (PW) team has identified the timeline for construction is extremely tight and requires Council to approve moving forward with the project at the February 28th council meeting in order to meet the construction window.

The proposed lot locations are attached as Appendix A. Currently, it is estimated that the proposed parking lots will have approximately 260 spaces. This number is a fair comparison to the 200-car limit imposed last year through Council. The additional spaces are required to offset lower priced off-beach parking options proposed in Appendix A while maintaining Nickel Beach as a self-sustaining entity. Additional financial discussion can be found in the Financial Implications section below.

Salient risks to the project and potential mitigation measures include:

- The timeline: This project will have to move extremely fast (see comments under internal consultation below).
- Timely completion of engineering drawings (these have been sourced to an external engineering firm) to satisfy external agencies' requirements.
- Agreement with Vale to access and use plan Lot D on refinery grounds (Staff appreciates the engagement of Vale to date on this subject).
- Agreement with respective agencies and the Joint Accessibility Committee that all accessible parking spots can be located in Lot C instead of some in each.
- The brush located at the parking locations is removed prior to March 15. Public works is prepared to begin removing brush immediately should this report be approved.
- There is a property with a house beside Lot A (Appendix A). The City is currently reaching out to the homeowner. The picture attached in Appendix A does identify potential encroachment issues onto City property. Staff highlight a potential purchase of the property would be recommended should an opportunity arise.

General comments on construction:

- Lots A and C will be gravel parking lots. Lot A will require considerable gravel to be trucked in. PW is working on defining that amount at the time of writing this report.

- Lot B will be parallel along the road.
- Lot D is an already paved lot on Vale's property. Main considerations include an alternative entrance with secure fencing in order to avoid disruption of Vale operations. As identified above, discussions with Vale are on-going.
- Lot A requires the most work as a result of the removal brush, the neighbouring property, and a requirement for a culvert to allow for already present.

Once the parking lot construction is complete, fees and changes to payment methods to access the beach will need to be updated accordingly.

Beach Rates (Appendix B)

First and foremost, Staff recommend the PORTicipate Pass program giving residents free access to the beach will remain in Lots A, B, and C. Staff recommend that there will continue to be no pre-registration required for City residents. However, parking spaces in these lots will be on a first come/first served basis.

In terms of pricing for Nickel Beach visitors, Staff are recommending a parking charge and no gate fee. Staff recognize Bay Beach in Fort Erie does have a two-step model, however their access point is less isolated and their visitors will not be undergoing the significant changes that Nickel Beach visitors will be.

Recommended pricing for the lots are attached in Appendix B. Comments, considerations, and recommendations with respect to the pricing model are as follows:

- Maintain peak and off-peak parking rates but expand the definition of peak to include Fridays.
- For simplicity, price lots based on location and the ability to book in advance to guarantee a parking spot. The proposed pricing model is similar to the discount pricing offered to Niagara Region residents last year.
- For consistency, maintain Lots A, B, and C with the same fees. Lot D will have different fees based on proximity, and the ability to book in advance. Staff identify Lot B may have the potential for a further differentiated pricing model in the future.

Beach Payment Options

In addition to setting rates, the method to which payments are received also needs to be reconsidered. In the past two years visitors have had to pre-register and/or book through the City's website using AudienceView software. This method has greatly streamlined beach operations and removed much of the congestion along Welland St and Lake Rd when the beach opens each morning. It also removed all cash handling from the operation.

In the new pricing model (attached as Appendix B), only Nickel Beach Lot D, Lot C – accessible lot (as required), and the lot at Centennial-Cedar Bay are recommended to

be booked in advance using AudienceView. Nickel Beach Lots, A, B, and C will be operated through Honk Mobile like the public boat launch by Sugarloaf Marina.

Staff identify Nickel Beach Lots A, B, and C lend themselves to Honk Mobile, recognizing:

- Honk Mobile is growing in usage across the Niagara Region and has been used in the City of Port Colborne for several years.
- In the last two years visitors were required to electronically book beach access.
- Pay machines have proven to be extremely temperamental, costly, and break down as experienced multiple times at Sugarloaf Marina in the past.
- The same 'book in advance option' of the last two years will be available in Lot D and Lot C when accessibility is required as a substitute method to book parking.
- Staffing Nickel Beach Lots A, B, and C to control access will be time consuming and costly. Historically there was only one entrance and exit. This plan introduces multiple options. As a result, Staff are reviewing options to reduce the number of beach staff, and allocate budget funds to the by-law division for another seasonal by-law enforcement officer.

Nickel Beach Area

It is anticipated that moving parking up Lake Road may find some visitors looking to "beat the system" and park on Lake Rd, Welland St, Fares, Rodney, etc. In the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, parking backed up to these streets and caused notable concern among residents.

Staff recommend introducing resident only parking in this area that would require the use of a PORTicipate pass during beach season to distinguish between residents and visitors. A parking model similar to this is used in many beach communities. Funding for signage is included in the parking lot construction budget. Specifics on signage will accompany an updated parking by-law to include the parking lots and related to changes in parking proposed in this report with fines for infractions.

Internal Consultations:

This project is a cross departmental project. Departments being consulted and supporting this project include Recreation, Public Works, Community Safety (By-law) Legislative Services (Planning), and Corporate Services. The City's Joint Accessibility Committee is also being consulted.

Staff thank the Niagara Region and Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) for meeting with City staff to move this project forward.

Financial Implications:

Financial implications resulting from topics in this report include changes to beach rates and parking lot construction costs.

Beach Rates (Appendix B)

The proposed beach parking rates identified in Appendix B are revised from those presented during the 2023 budget as a result of the new off-beach parking requirements.

In establishing these rates, the following was taken into consideration:

- The PORTicipate Pass (residents only) program will remain FREE in parking Lots A, B, and C at Nickel Beach and the lot at Centennial-Cedar Bay.
- Beach operational costs (no net change from the 2023 approved budget).
- Comparator fees at Bay Beach in Fort Erie.
- Goal to achieve operational simplicity.
- Options for customers around proximity to the beach and the ability to obtain a guaranteed parking spot (Nickel Beach and Centennial-Cedar Bay by maintaining the ability to book ahead as provided during the last two beach seasons).
- Uncertainty of supply/demand implications.

The fees proposed are forecasted to achieve the 2023 revenue budget of \$428,000, subject to the following assumptions:

- July 1 to September 4 – 50% occupancy from Monday to Thursday (excluding holidays) and 90% occupancy Friday to Sunday (including holidays).
- May 19 to June 30 and September weekends after September 4 – 20% occupancy from Monday to Thursday (excluding holidays) and 40% occupancy Friday to Sunday (including holidays).
- Weather is assumed to lead to closures or decreased demand and deter occupancy 20% of the days above.
- HST and booking system administrative fees will be in addition to the fees in Appendix A.
- Outside of the dates noted above, parking is free in Lots A and C and parking is closed in Lots D and Lot B before the Vale entrance off Lake Road.
- A budget of zero is maintained for production permits, beach fines, and parking fines.

An update to the parking lot by-law to accommodate parking and surrounding street parking fines will occur at a later date.

Parking Lot Construction Costs

The proposed budget for the new off-beach parking options is \$1,300,000. This includes new 'no parking' and 'local parking only' signage for the area surrounding the Nickel Beach area.

Staff identify that the beach operations have successfully transitioned to a self-sustaining entity in recent years. The change to off-beach parking will be significant for users. It is not clear what impact off-beach parking will have on visitor attendance to Nickel Beach. For this reason, and at the present time, this project cost is not forecasted to be paid through beach parking or access fees. Should visitor attendance be stronger than forecasted and a surplus in the beach operations is realized, that surplus will be available to offset project costs.

It is recommended the proposed budget of \$1,300,000 be funded from the infrastructure reserve. The estimated infrastructure reserve will be approximately \$2,200,000 after accommodating this funding requirement and the previously approved repairs to the Vale Health and Wellness Centre roof (approved January 24, 2023).

The proposed budget above does not include the potential acquisition of any property at this time.

Specifics on signage denoted above will accompany the parking by-law update to accommodate parking and surrounding street parking fines.

Public Engagement:

The new off-beach parking at Nickel Beach is new and continues to evolve. Should this report be approved, Staff will be utilizing social media and other communications mediums to inform the public.

Strategic Plan Alignment:

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

- Service and Simplicity - Quality and Innovative Delivery of Customer Services
 - Attracting Business Investment and Tourists to Port Colborne
 - City-Wide Investments in Infrastructure and Recreational/Cultural Spaces
 - Value: Financial Management to Achieve Financial Sustainability
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Conclusion:

That Council approve the changes in beach rates proposed in Appendix B and for Staff to proceed with the construction of new off-beach parking options at Nickel Beach.

Staff highlight the timeline for developing the proposed off-beach parking options is extremely tight and the planning continues to evolve. Staff identify there may be a need to come back to Council for additional approvals regarding construction and/or beach operations. The short timeline to beach opening may even necessitate the use of special meetings of Council to keep the project moving.

Appendices: (If none delete section)

- a. Proposed Layout of Parking Lots A to D
- b. Beach Rates

Respectfully submitted,

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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.