

# City of Victoria Accessibility Framework 2019

Draft for Engagement

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## Acknowledgements

Victoria is built on the homelands of the Songhees and Esquimalt people. The Songhees and Esquimalt nations are part of the Coast Salish family and are descendants of the Lekwungen family groups. Victoria continues to build and nurture strong relationships with the Lekwungen peoples. The City is committed to an inclusive and accessible environment for all people, in alliance with our indigenous partners.

### Accessibility Working Group

The City gratefully acknowledges the contributions, dedication and hard work of the Accessibility Working Group members, who have given selflessly over the past four years in the development of a more inclusive Victoria. Early in their mandate, this voluntary group of persons with disabilities identified the need for an Accessibility Framework and made the original recommendation to Council. They have also provided valuable input to help develop this framework and provided feedback on existing gaps, challenges and actions that the City can take to become more accessible.

The Accessibility Working Group (AWG) has provided recommendations, expertise and knowledge to City Council and staff on accessibility issues, with the aim of making City of Victoria infrastructure, programs and services more accessible to residents and visitors.

Their contributions have provided deep insights into the experiences of Victorians with disabilities. They have guided the City with expertise; helped influence the development of this document and the City's first accessibility policy; and provided staff with experiences, insights, and input to advance the goal of inclusion and becoming a more accessible community for all people.

### Community

This framework has also been made possible through the support, insights and expertise of other accessibility experts, service providers, advocates, and dedicated volunteers with lived experience related to accessibility challenges and barriers. The City is grateful for their contributions.

## Executive Summary

TO BE INSERTED prior to final draft completion

## Introduction

The City of Victoria is taking deliberate steps to make itself a more inclusive community. As a part of these efforts, new policies, strategies and programs are being developed to help nurture a connective and cohesive community, which will promote health, well-being, belonging, resiliency and vibrancy.

We recognize the City is on a path to evolve our understanding and capability related to accessibility. People with disabilities, among other equity-seeking groups, have traditionally not had a full say in the planning and municipal service delivery processes. It is recognized that the City can achieve better solutions by involving those with diverse perspectives and abilities, taking positive steps to remove systematic barriers, promoting inclusion and creating a more positive and respectful community through its actions.

Many City programs, services and infrastructure have been introduced over time, without due consideration for how these may affect people with disabilities. Even now, we continue to introduce services and infrastructure that may prevent full participation from many in our community. This framework has been created to help guide the City in accessibility planning which is then put into action by each department, as part of normal business and service delivery.

A new City-wide Accessibility program will set into motion a series of actions that aim to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities. A city-wide Accessibility Program can be defined as the combination of resources, policy, guidelines, standards, directions, actions, tools and information to deliver year-on-year accessibility improvements. This framework includes a set of commitments, information and direction that provides structure to support City departments planning to create high standard of accessibility across municipal services and programs, infrastructure and projects.

This Framework applies to all aspects of City planning and operations, from our capital investments and municipal programs, to front-line services for residents and businesses. The associated City of Victoria Accessibility Policy and multi-year action plan reinforces our commitment to accessibility and is part of an emerging, broader set of priorities and programs to support an inclusive, welcoming community.

**{PLACE HOLDER FOR GRAPHIC}**

Accessibility is a part of our broader equity and inclusion efforts that contribute to improved social health and well-being. An intersectional research and policy lens recognizes that people have multiple and diverse identity factors shaping their perspectives, ideologies and experiences. An intersectional approach addresses inequality and barriers to inclusion without isolating one factor of an individual's identity from another. It also recognizes that inclusion affects people differently, in part, to how their identity factors intersect and ultimately influence their experience.

Shifting our preconceptions, attitudes and decision-making regarding disability requires careful self-examination, education, awareness, commitment and planning. This framework focuses on a systematic approach to reduce barriers in our community. We use data, lived experiences, best practices and human rights decisions and guidance to understand community accessibility challenges and opportunities to support investment decisions that maximize positive outcomes for as many people as possible. The Accessibility Program allows the City to adapt to changing priorities, context and constraints.

Over the next several years, the City will focus on accessibility programming and barrier reduction and prevention. Removing barriers from public places requires a structured approach to improve accessibility across public infrastructure, programs, services and information. The City has an important role to improve accessibility and help foster a more inclusive dialogue that recognizes we are a stronger and healthier community when no one is left out.

## What is Meant by Accessibility?

“Accessibility” is a general term used to describe the degree of ease that something (e.g. device, service, place) can be used and enjoyed by persons with disability. Accessibility requires conscious planning, design and/or effort to ensure barriers are not only removed but are also, highly useable and practical for the general population.

The concept of accessible design ensures both "direct access" (i.e. unassisted) and "indirect access" (meaning compatibility with a person's assistive technology (for example, computer screen readers)).

Accessibility can be accomplished by mainstream or universal design, which allows a person with a disability to use the same facility or service as everyone else (this is

preferred) or in a segregated manner with a separate solution for people with a disability.

## Accessibility vs Accommodation

“Accommodation” refers to the changes or modifications made to a system (e.g. a policy or practice) to meet the needs of a specific individual or group. Accommodations can be options to overcome any type of barriers within an existing system”<sup>1</sup>.

Accommodation is not the same as accessibility, and accessibility is always preferable to accommodation. Accessible systems are designed at the outset to be usable by as many people as possible, regardless of ability. Accommodations may be proactive or reactive and may not effectively address everyone’s needs. An accessible system would make sure the required functions / treatments were in place before being introduced. Removing barriers can be challenging and more expensive. In removing barriers, care should always be taken to avoid or minimize any unintended negative consequences for others.

Sometimes people with disabilities will require personal accommodations in situations where accessible systems or programs are not yet in place. Accommodations may be a reasonable approach for important, temporary improvements, and may also be considered an appropriate response to rare or infrequent accessibility issues. These instances should be carefully monitored and managed to ensure longer term accessibility solutions are identified and developed wherever possible<sup>2</sup>.

## Engaging People with Lived Experience

A series of public engagement events were held to pursue a deeper understanding of the issues, challenges and priorities we face in creating an accessible city. Face-to-face engagements over the last two years have included workshops, meetings and focus groups to learn, discuss and explore key issues, ideas and insights. Community members were invited to provide feedback on accessibility challenges

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability-strategies.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://uiowa.instructure.com/courses/40/pages/accessibility-vs-accommodation>

and priorities, both in written form and verbally. Opportunities were promoted within the community via social media, the City’s website, through disability advocacy and support agencies, and directly to community members who had corresponded with the City on access and inclusion matters. The engagement sessions involved local organizations, service providers and people with lived experiences including those with caring responsibilities.

## Key Insights and Themes

The engagement process identified key insights and themes from the community that have been integrated within this framework. The first theme is a need for additional awareness, education and understanding. Participants emphasized that the City, service providers, developers, and businesses need to learn how people with disabilities travel through the community, interact in public and private places, and participate in events and activities. In many cases, the very real barriers people with disabilities face mean that they cannot fully participate in our community.

Another theme that emerged was the importance of accessibility in the built environment within and beyond the geographic boundaries of Victoria. There are many people with disabilities who come from other communities to work, visit, or play in the City of Victoria. Participants identified the importance of retrofitting the built environment and applying new, consistent regional standards to support accessible transportation, parks, plazas and public buildings.

The final theme from the engagement process identified how Victoria can use its role as a capital city to demonstrate leadership, set the example, and encourage a higher community standard to improve acceptance and the quality of life for people with disabilities.

## Understanding More About Disability

The United Nations defines accessibility as “a precondition for an inclusive society for all and may be defined as the provision of flexibility to accommodate each user’s needs and preferences.”<sup>3</sup> The Accessible Canada Act defines disability as “a

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<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 24 January 2007

physical, mental, intellectual, learning, communication or sensory impairment – or a function limitation – whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society”.<sup>4</sup>

Different disability groupings are used to help provide a broad understanding of experiences that may be shared or related to a disability, in terms of underlying health conditions, impairment, activity limitations, participation restrictions and environmental factors. Disabilities can be encountered at any age and can be temporary or long term.

While there is no universally adopted set of disability groupings, it is important to recognize several common types and causes of disability. Some disabilities are visible while others are non-visible and not immediately apparent to others, such as asthma, allergies or environmental sensitivities, extreme fatigue or chronic pain. The following definitions have been adapted from the Accessible Canada Act to help build awareness, but should not be interpreted as a complete list.

- **Pain:** Pain-related disabilities often refer to long term or complex pain, that may be caused by injury, and may commonly occur with other disabilities.
- **Flexibility, Mobility and Dexterity:** Disabilities related to mobility and flexibility and dexterity include limb disabilities, manual dexterity, coordination, and spinal-cord function.
- **Mental Health:** Mental health-related disabilities refer to conditions that affect the mind or brain and the way a person thinks, feels and acts.
- **Learning and Memory:** Learning and memory disabilities include impairment related to skills such as reading, writing and problem solving, and can also interfere with more complicated and abstract skills such as organization, reasoning, long and short-term memory, and attention span.
- **Visual Disabilities:** Visual disabilities can range from partial vision loss to complete blindness.
- **Hearing:** Hearing disabilities can range from partial to complete deafness.

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<sup>4</sup>Government of Canada. (2019). Bill C-81: An Act to Ensure a Barrier-free Canada (Accessible Canada Act). (2019) Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-people-disabilities.html> on 2019-08-12

- **Developmental:** Developmental disabilities are a diverse group of conditions resulting from physical or mental impairments that arise before adulthood. These conditions may create difficulties with language, mobility, learning and independent living.
- **Other:** There are many other types of disabilities that may affect how a person lives their day-to-day life.

## Types of Barriers

There are five general types of barriers.

1. **Attitudinal Barriers:** Behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions that discriminate against people with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, judge or misunderstand those with disabilities. An example of how an attitude can contribute to the discrimination is speaking to the assistant, rather than the person with a disability, assuming that a person who cannot communicate in traditional ways cannot understand. Training such as inter-personal skills for customer service is a way to address this type of barrier.
2. **Informational or Communication Barriers:** When a person with a disability cannot easily receive and/or understand information that is available to others. One example of a communication barrier is when information is only available in audio or verbal format and is inaccessible to people with hearing loss. Ways of addressing this barrier include having sign language interpreters, closed captioning services, or written materials to accompany presentations.
3. **Technological Barriers:** When technology does not meet the needs of people with disabilities. An example of this could be service computers at City Hall that are not accessible to people with vision loss. Ways of addressing include providing computers that have screen reader software and large print key labels.
4. **Physical or Architectural Barriers:** Elements of buildings or outdoor spaces that create barriers. An example of this is utility poles placed in the sidewalk without adequate width for people using mobility scooters or wheelchairs to navigate. Ways of addressing include retrofitting the built environment and planning new sidewalks without obstructions.

5. **Organizational or Systemic Barriers:** Policies, procedures or practices that may unintentionally result in people with disabilities being treated differently or excluded from participating. An example of this is when people with disabilities are not accommodated at public consultation events because of the location or format of the event. Ways of addressing this include offering multiple events at different locations and offering additional ways to provide input outside of attending in person.

The City of Victoria is committed to removing existing and preventing the creation of barriers through the application of this framework and its actions.

## Our Community Disability Profile

The City of Victoria is the capital of British Columbia, located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. The city is an attractive destination for families, workers, retirees and visitors. It is home to 92,000 inhabitants and supports an additional 300,000 from across the region, as the main business, tourism and economic hub. The city's population grows at a rate above the national average, with projections to reach 109,000 residents by 2038. It is estimated that 19,000 individuals in the City of Victoria have a disability.

### Information Source

The data on disability in Victoria relies on Statistics Canada's census data for the Province and the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD). The data in this section is taken from the CSD, which provides an important overall snapshot but is limited in its local details. The survey was completed by individuals aged 15 and over who in the 2016 Census "reported having a long-term condition or difficulty." This is the most recent official statistical information on disability in Canada and is available on a provincial and national basis.

The CSD is based on a "social model of disabilities," which in screening for disabilities requires a "limitation in daily activities." The CSD included questions on disability type and severity. There were 10 types of disabilities covered: seeing, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain-related, learning, developmental, mental health-related, and memory. The severity of the disabilities was based on

the degree of difficulty (ranging from “no difficulty” to “cannot do at all”) and frequency of daily activity limitation (from “rarely” to “always”).

The CSD is currently available only at the provincial and national level. However, by using rates from the CSD (on presence of disabilities, types, and severity), we can develop an estimate of the number of individuals with disabilities in Victoria based on our census data. These estimates provide a general understanding regarding the number of people with a disability in our community and the existing spectrum of disabilities.

Disability, of course, is contextual and related to multiple barriers. Therefore, it is important to avoid preconceptions about what a disability is. The data does not provide a detailed analysis of Victoria but provides the first insights on the accessibility needs within our City, how prevalent they are and what the City can do to progressively remove barriers. There are more than 926,000 British Columbians over the age of 15 challenged by some form of disability. This represents 25% of the population. As the population ages, the number of people with disabilities (and their severity) is likely to increase.

## By the Numbers

**In Victoria, it is estimated that approximately 21% of the population (more than 19,000 people) have one or more disabilities. This means approximately 1 in 5 Victorians are experiencing at least one disability, and an estimated 1 in 10 Victorians over the age of 15 have severe or very severe disabilities.**

Severe disabilities are conditions that profoundly affect a person’s ability to access basic community spaces, services, and programs, and require a higher level of support for essential, everyday needs.

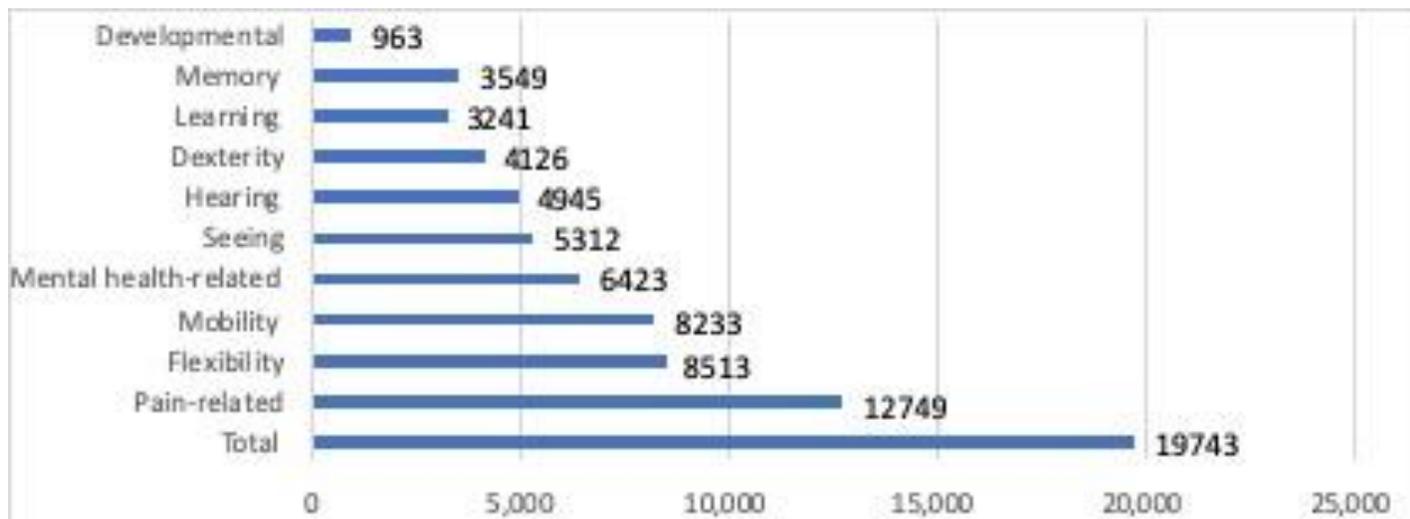


Figure 1. **Estimated Disability Types in Victoria.** Numbers estimated using Statistics Canada Survey on Disability (2017) and profile of persons with disabilities for British Columbia information, applied to the population numbers for Victoria. “Total” disability rates include estimated population experiencing one or more of the included types. This survey was completed for persons 15 years or older.

## Aging and Disability

The 2016 Census showed Victoria’s population is aging with more than 18,000 Victorians over the age of 65 years (representing 22% of the population) up from 14,600 in 2006 (18.5% of the population). Victoria’s aging population (65 years and over) is forecasted to grow by 50% over the next 20 years, to 27,000 people. This is significant because the prevalence of disability increases with age and affirms the need to start systematically reducing accessibility barriers now.

With 20% of Canadians (25-64 years) reporting having a disability, compared with 38% of Canadian seniors aged 65 and older, it is clear that older populations will have higher rates of disability. While the overall level of disability increases with age, specific types of disability also become more common. Within the 2017 statistics, the disabilities reported by Canadians varied significantly by age with disabilities such as pain, flexibility and mobility more than doubling for those 65 years and older.

As a part of the research and data collection on disability in Canada, there are a number of important findings related to employment, poverty and opportunities for people with disabilities.

- The rate of people with a disability living in poverty is consistently higher in every age category compared to Canadians with no disabilities.

- 645,000 persons with disabilities had potential for paid employment in an inclusive labour market but were not employed.
- Over 83,000 youth with disabilities were neither in school nor employed but were considered to have potential to work.

The 2019 Rick Hansen Foundation / Angus Reid Institute public opinion survey on disabilities found more than two-thirds of Canadians expressed the concern that someone they know will face a disability over the next decade. Three in ten Canadians say accessibility is a consideration for them when they think about the places they will go and which they will avoid in their community.

In addition to the above points, the 2017 Statistics Canada Survey on Disability also found that:

- 1 in 5 Canadians (22%) of the Canadian population aged 15 years and over had one or more disabilities.
- Pain, flexibility and mobility-related disabilities along with mental health were the most commonly reported disabilities.
- The prevalence of disability increases with age
- 13% of those 15 to 24
- 47% of those 75 and older.
- Many Canadians who reported disabilities are part of the work force, 76% of those with mild disabilities and 31% of those with severe disabilities.

## Developing Insights

Understanding the differences and commonality of disability types and groupings is critical when considering how and where the City designs, prioritizes and funds improvements. Understanding our community profile can help to refine areas of City responsibility, where more attention is needed or where processes need to be in place to accommodate people with disabilities.

In the future, more accurate and detailed local accessibility information will help the City better understand our specific accessibility challenges, needs and priorities. This data gap is identified within the City's multi-year action plan.

## Investing in Accessibility

This framework aims to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility throughout the City of Victoria. Thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, training and direct action will help deliver accessibility improvements in our community and across the region for decades to come.

All individuals have an inherent right to participate in a society where everyone is treated with dignity, given equal opportunity, and provided access to their community so that they can fully contribute to society in their own unique way. Depending on how they are planned and built, urban environments, infrastructures, facilities and services can impede or enable access, participation and inclusion for citizens.

An inclusive society provides opportunities for meaningful participation in society. An inclusive society fosters diversity, reduces social and economic isolation and promotes mental and physical health and well-being. Without inclusive opportunities, diversity may be scarce, and control over choice can be limited, reducing the ability for people with disabilities to make positive changes to their own lives.

As a community, we are richer with a diverse range of viewpoints and individual perspectives. Exclusion can lead to disadvantage and discrimination, which have far-reaching negative impacts across all aspects of life, including health, welfare, education and employment. These impacts are felt beyond the individual, with families and the broader community all being negatively affected by a non-inclusive society. There is a strong economic imperative for increasing the inclusiveness of our society, to foster job opportunities that enhance the ability of people with disabilities to be independent and free from economic struggle<sup>5</sup>.

Virtually every Canadian will or has already experienced a disability, or cares about someone with accessibility challenges. Most of us will require supports due to disabilities at times throughout our lives. By valuing the importance of accessibility, we can directly improve the health, well-being and personal outcomes for the people in our community. If policies of inclusivity and accessibility are implemented thoughtfully and effectively, we can increase employment and

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<sup>5</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2011) The Economic Benefits of Increasing Employment for People with Disability.

education rates, alleviate poverty and grow a sense of belonging - not just for individuals living with a disability, but for their families and loved ones, too.

People with disabilities deserve the opportunity to be actively involved in local government decision-making processes, especially decisions that affect them directly. Inclusion and accessibility enables participation by all, ensuring all voices are part of shaping a sustainable, healthy and vibrant community.

## The City's Accessibility Commitment

The City's accessibility commitment is a statement that shares our view and promise to the community regarding accessibility and inclusion for people with disability.

- The City of Victoria is committed to identifying, preventing and removing barriers across its services, programs and infrastructure, in order to benefit the community in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.
- The City of Victoria values the contributions from all citizens and believes that diversity strengthens the community. The City recognizes the essential knowledge and perspectives of people with lived experience and commits to making sure those voices are part of community planning and decisions.
- The City of Victoria will ensure that staff and council are aware of their roles in influencing accessibility for people with disabilities and accept their responsibility to support positive City community attitudes.

The commitment stated above is reinforced with our corporate Accessibility Policy, which is a part of our broader Accessibility Program.

## Key Principles

The City has adapted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) core principles that underpin the rights of people with disabilities in combination with the emerging provincial principles on accessibility, as follows:

- **Inclusion:** All people should be able to participate fully in our community with dignity and individual autonomy.
- **Diversity:** All people will be respected for their differences and lived experiences, regardless of ability, age, gender identity and expression, race, sexual orientation, place of origin and religion. Our framework acknowledges that other aspects of identity interact with ability to determine how individuals experience barriers and inclusion.
- **Respect:** All people should be treated with respect so that they can make their own choices, contribute to civil society and thrive through independence.
- **Collaboration:** While the City does provide a leadership role, the City cannot address accessibility alone. We must collaborate with other stakeholders, levels of government, agency partners, advocacy organizations and service providers to eliminate barriers and support innovations towards an accessible society.
- **Adaptability:** Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

“A city that is well designed is well designed for all. Accessibility, as a collective good that benefits all, should be considered a central component of good policy to achieve inclusive and sustainable urban development”<sup>6</sup>.

## Policy and Legislative Context – Province of BC

Creating a more accessible City of Victoria requires an understanding of the policy and legislative context. In the absence of an accessibility specific legislation in British Columbia, such as a Disability Act, the province relies on the BC Human Rights Code. The BC Human Rights Code (the Code) is a law created by the B.C. legislature in 1973<sup>7</sup>.

The purposes of the Code are to:

- Foster a society in B.C. where there are no impediments to full and free participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of B.C.

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<sup>6</sup> UNDESA-UN Habitat Forum on Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development, October 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Code, RSBC 1996, c 210. Retrieved on 2019-08-13 from <http://canlii.ca/t/53j4j>

- Promote a climate of understanding and mutual respect where all are equal in dignity and rights.
- Prevent discrimination prohibited by the Code.
- Identify and eliminate persistent patterns of inequality associated with discrimination prohibited by the Code.
- Provide a means of redress for those persons who are discriminated against contrary to the Code.

The Code prohibits discrimination in certain areas of activity (for example, employment). The Code also creates the tribunal and sets up a process for making and resolving complaints of the types of discrimination it covers<sup>8</sup>. The City of Victoria’s Accessibility Framework ensures that the listed purposes of the Human Rights Code above are taken in stride for people with disabilities who live in, or visit, our community.

The Province’s jurisdiction includes areas of responsibility, such as building code, education, health care, and income assistance. In September 2019 the Province announced consultation on new Accessibility Legislation.

The provincial government also has a plan titled “Building a Better B.C. for People with Disabilities.” The plan views an inclusive society as one that provides opportunity for persons of all abilities to fully participate in society, which requires challenging our attitudes and beliefs about disabilities. The motivation comes from recognizing the value and contributions that people with disabilities make to our workplaces, communities and economy<sup>9</sup>.

## Policy and Legislative Context – Canada

The Canadian Disability Rights movement began in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and advocates for Canadians with physical, sensory and cognitive impairments. On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1975, the United Nations (UN) issued the *Declaration on the Rights*

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<sup>8</sup> BC Human Rights Tribunal. “Guide to the BC *Human Rights Code* and Tribunal”, Retrieved on 2019-08-13 from <http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/law-library/guides-info-sheets/guides/human-rights.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Government of British Columbia. Building a Better B.C. for People with Disabilities. Retrieved on 2019-08-13 from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/accessibility>

*of Disabled Persons* outlining key rights and encouraging countries to protect people with disabilities rights and opportunities.

In 1981, the UN promoted the International Year of Disabled Persons, which catalyzed Canadian public and political interest to secure the rights and opportunities of people with disabilities in the final draft of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* and the *Employment Equity Act, 1986*<sup>10</sup>. During the 1980s and early 1990s, a global recession deeply affected the disability community. Escalating public debt and deficits in Canada produced an era of fiscal restraint and austerity. During this time social assistance was slashed, subsidies to disability organizations were removed and official political liaisons were reorganized or removed<sup>11</sup>.

In response, the Canadian Disability Rights Movement increased its efforts and by the 2000s, saw “significant revival in public interest and political commitment. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Canada ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD), alongside other countries. The ratification committed Canada to a series of principles and measures to improve the socio-economic well-being of the disability community while improving their legal and political rights. In June 2019, Canada legislated the *Accessible Canada Act* (Bill 81).

The international, federal and provincial policy and legislative context is rooted in the Disability Rights Movement. It is important to understand how the City of Victoria aligns and contributes to broader accessibility efforts.

Following the decision to sign the UNCRPD, the *Accessible Canada Act* (Bill C-81) received royal assent on June 21, 2019. Its goal is to create a barrier-free Canada through proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers to accessibility. Furthermore, Canada has a strong framework for protecting the human rights of Canadians. The Canadian Human Rights Act Promotes equality of opportunity and protects people from discrimination. Bill C-81 supports the objectives of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and does not diminish any obligations under that Act.

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<sup>10</sup> Galer, D. (23 APR 2015). Disability Rights Movement in Canada. *Canadian Encyclopedia*. Retrieved on 2019-08-01 from [www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca)

<sup>11</sup> Galer, D. (23 APR 2015). Disability Rights Movement in Canada. *Canadian Encyclopedia*

The pivotal direction of the *Accessible Canada Act* is to enhance the full and equal participation of all persons, especially people with disabilities, in society. This is achieved through the realization of a Canada without barriers<sup>12</sup>. The *Accessible Canada Act* creates new standards and regulators for sectors with federal jurisdiction, which includes, banking, telecommunications, transportation, and the Government of Canada. However, there are no legislative elements that municipalities must directly comply with.

## Policy and Legislative Context – International

In 2006, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was released with a purpose to “promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity”. The UN Convention is a blueprint to ensure people with disabilities have access to the same rights and opportunities as everybody else – it re-affirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It stipulates that signatory countries adopt the following key commitments:

- Adopt appropriate legislative and administrative measures to abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against people with disabilities.
- Promote and develop universally designed goods, services, equipment and facilities and embrace principles of universal design in the development of standards and guidelines.
- Provide accessibility training for professionals to provide effective and non-discriminatory assistance and services to people with disabilities.

The commitments within the UN Declaration reinforce the responsibility of the City to eliminate obstacles in society, such as physical access to buildings, roads and transportation, and access to information through written and electronic communications. Equally as important, the Convention identifies the City’s responsibility to reduce stigma and discrimination and to embrace respect for difference as a part of our collective human diversity, which are often reasons why

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<sup>12</sup> Government of Canada. (2019). Bill C-81: An Act to Ensure a Barrier-free Canada (Accessible Canada Act). (2019) Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-people-disabilities.html> on 2019-08-1

people with disabilities are excluded from education, employment and health and other services.

## The City's Role

The *Community Charter* and the *Local Government Act*, are the legislative frameworks under which all British Columbian municipalities operate<sup>13</sup>. Under this context, Victoria recognizes its local government responsibility to remove barriers across public spaces, and across programs and services. The key areas of responsibility that the City can consider in its goal of identifying, removing and preventing accessibility barriers include:

- Public infrastructure
- City programs and services
- Municipal information, regulations and policies

And the City's role, related to:

- Leadership by example
- Advocacy and partnerships

The City will work within its jurisdictional authority to deliver accessibility improvements in the community, which aim to complement the actions of other regional agencies who play important roles in improving the outcomes for people with disabilities. Health authorities, regional and provincial governments, community associations, commercial and institutional enterprise, and non-profits all directly impact the accessibility of programs, infrastructure and supports across our community. The City recognizes that strong leadership, collaboration and coordination can help address accessibility challenges throughout our community.

In order to deliver the most benefit, the City will build upon its organizational knowledge. The City must increase its awareness and skills so that it can achieve higher standards in accessible design, programs and service delivery.

The following elements represent the nature of accessibility work required from the City:

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<sup>13</sup> Bish, R. & Clemens, E. (2008). *Local Government in British Columbia (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Union of British Columbia Municipalities. Retrieved on 2019-08-28 from [www.ubcm.ca](http://www.ubcm.ca)

- **Capacity building** – Focused education and training: Increasing staff awareness, skills, knowledge and competencies will help guide accessibility improvements in design and service delivery.
- **Prevention** – Introducing new accessibility design standards: Design policies and standards for facilities, transportation, information and services will help the City better integrate accessibility requirements into design processes, avoiding the creation of barriers so that they can be optimized alongside other project requirements.
- **Removal** – Retroactive accessibility improvements: Many barriers exist due to infrastructure, program and technology design and installation, implementation, decisions and trade-offs made in the past.
- **Insights** – Accessibility data and information: Information related to the community profile, types of barriers, their prevalence, impact and patterns will help the city better manage priorities.
- **Planning** – Prioritization and coordination: Project planning and prioritization should occur in an integrated fashion with annual program budget cycles and coordinated with other capital and operational investments and programs, to take advantage of any and all synergy opportunities to maximize benefits. The City must carefully balance a wide range of community interests, resource and investments to achieve the required accessibility outcomes.

## Balancing Needs Across Community

Planning and design of the City infrastructure, programs and services requires careful balancing of changing and often competing needs. Trade-offs are always part of the design process, and designers, project managers and service-providers must carefully balance safety, security, affordability, equity, sustainability, quality, time, cost and other important requirements. Careful attention and intelligent management is required to avoid inadvertently introducing risks to one user group, when reducing the risks to another. Often situations arise where compromises are required for many users, to ensure the minimum acceptable needs are met for all.

Education and enforcement of the desired user behaviours are also important factors to ensure the infrastructure and programs function as intended. Having

enhanced accessibility information, awareness and creative approaches will help reach more optimal trade-offs. With accessibility requirements at the design table, the City will be in a better position to balance important community needs.

## Focus Areas – Directions for the City

The Framework is broken down into three key Focus Areas, outlined below, which group our actions into core segments of accessibility work that closely align with the business and structure of City work and planning. These Focus Areas embed goals and priorities across departments in the City, and are strengthened by action plans, contained in the appendices. The Focus Areas are as follows:

1. **Built Environment:** Promoting accessibility as a collective good and a key component in urban policy, design, planning and development. This focus area includes the systematic reduction of physical barriers across transportation and mobility, facilities and public spaces.
2. **Government and Services:** Removing barriers and increasing participation in local government programs, services, information and public decision making.
3. **Capacity and Collaboration:** Develop increased corporate capacity to deliver professional services in a more accessible manner. Develop partnerships and advocate to other levels of government and community stakeholders for change. Collaborate with key community partners and set a strong example for community accessibility attitudes and awareness.

Each of these focus areas is detailed below with objectives and key commitments. City services, infrastructure, and program design will rely on new lessons and tools that have been developed. A key approach for addressing accessibility is “Universal Design”. The concept of Universal Design was developed in 1997 by a working group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers. The purpose of the principles is to guide the design of environments, products and communications. These principles may be applied to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and educate both designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable products and environments.

## The 7 Principles of Universal Design



- Principle 1: Equitable Use: The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
- Principle 2: Flexibility in Use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use: Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- Principle 4: Perceptible Information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
- Principle 5: Tolerance for Error: The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
- Principle 6: Low Physical Effort: The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
  - Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. (2014). The 7 Principles. Retrieved from <http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/The-7-Principles/#p2>

## Focus Area 1 - Built Environment

A liveable community enhances an individual's independence, accommodates their needs and fosters engagement in civic, economic, and social aspects of the community. People with disabilities can live more freely when the built environment is designed and/or modified to support their mobility requirements. Technology can also play a significant role in removing liveability barriers.

Creating liveable communities for people of all abilities is more than modifying the physical environment. It applies to activities, facilities, housing, road design, walkability, transportation, and supportive services, and creates opportunities for social connection, engagement and well-being. Infrastructure investments will need to incorporate Universal Design Principles for public spaces including buildings, parks, playgrounds, plazas and streetscapes. We will also need to continue to develop and apply design standards that align with industry and other municipal best practices.

### Transportation and Mobility

Mobility relates to the ease of moving, whereas accessibility may address the ease of reaching desired destinations. Planning for accessibility considers safer public and private transportation systems and incorporates decisions related to rights of way, land use and development that reduce barriers and effort required to access important destinations and services.

### City Facilities

The City owns 100 buildings including recreation centres along with major event venues such as the Save-On-Foods Memorial Arena, Royal Athletic Park stadium and the Victoria Conference Centre. In addition, the City maintains buildings that support other municipal services such as park operations, public works, fire and rescue and police operations.

## Parks, Open Spaces and the Public Realm

The City of Victoria's parks, plazas and open spaces are a vital piece of the city's character, culture and vibrancy. Serving residents and visitors alike, they offer important opportunities for socializing, recreation, relaxation, play, learning, and connecting with nature. These spaces are intended to contribute to quality of life for people of all ages and abilities.

### What We Heard

Public input highlighted the importance of accessible public spaces such as village centres, pedestrian pathways, parks, recreation facilities and public transit. Stakeholders noted examples of areas in the City that had high standards of accessibility and areas where there were significant concerns. Examples included wheelchair access at intersections, width and conditions of sidewalks, playground equipment diversity, designated places for mobility aid parking, access to accessible parking, public transit and taxis, and the overall need for improved design standards. Victoria is one of the oldest cities in British Columbia, and as a result, its infrastructure reflects 150 years of varying urban design standards. This provides opportunity for us to innovate and rethink urban design standards in order to promote inclusive and accessible design while recognizing our history.

### Objective

To remove and prevent barriers in public spaces, mobility systems and City-owned buildings and facilities.

### Key Commitments

- Prevent and remove barriers from City infrastructure and places, transportation infrastructure, facilities, parks and open spaces.
- Evaluate and prioritize retrofits to existing City places and spaces to meet modern accessibility standards.
- Develop accessible indicators for mobility, facilities, parks and open spaces.

## Actions Taken or Underway

- Introduced new accessible features at City intersections, pedestrian signals, tactile domes, all of which are now becoming standard for new or replacement downtown and village locations.
- Completed new sidewalk and pathway upgrades and widening projects to support mobility scooters and aids.
- Upgrading transit shelters and dedicated loading zones for accessibility support vehicles such as HandyDART buses.
- Modernization of accessible elevators and staircase markings at parkades.
- Completed Rick Hansen Foundation Accessible Facility Assessments for 22 City-owned buildings.
- Upgraded several City owned facilities with accessible design features in public washrooms, new entrance ramps, power-operated doors, “scent-free” cleaning products, new accessible change room at the Crystal Pool, and lift at the Victoria Conference Centre.
- Introduced new accessible picnic tables and outdoor furniture as well as accessible outdoor fitness equipment and play features in parks.
- Designed wheelchair accessible planting beds for some community gardens
- Initiated accessibility audits in parks.

## Focus Area 2 - Government and Services

People with disabilities face multiple forms of barriers preventing full participation in local government activities, such as inaccessible services, information, events, discussions or engagements. Universal design principles also translate to the focus area of government programs and services. Accessible government enables increased opportunity for participation in the system of municipal business and public life, so that persons with disabilities can engage on matters that affect their own lives and their communities. These opportunities may include the right to vote, to be elected, gain employment, to participate in public affairs, including serving on advisory committees and enjoy a complete level of access to City services including the website, City documents and webcasting. Participation is important

to the City because it helps the City arrive at better decisions, informed by a diversity of voices within our community.

## Access to Municipal Programs, Services and Information

Planning for accessibility allows people with disabilities to take full advantage of municipal programs, services and information. Through the review of existing services and information platforms, the City can ensure that people with disabilities have more opportunities to participate.

## Participation in Municipal Decision Making

Encouraging people with disabilities to participate in government decision making processes requires intentional efforts and resources to create a supportive environment and accommodate different needs. These efforts will allow all residents to engage more fully on matters that affect their own lives and their communities.

## What We Heard

Public and stakeholder outreach identified several barriers. The most common were the need for full access to City Council meetings, the need for document formats suitable for those with visual impairments, information for people with hearing loss, and making public information easily searchable and navigable via City websites. Making elections fully accessible for people with disabilities was identified as a critical goal. Improving access to information through a variety of technology and education options can increase civic participation and ensure a diversity of views are reflected in local government decision making.

## Objective

To provide all residents and visitors with equitable access to municipal programs, services, employment opportunities, information and engagement opportunities.

## Key Commitments

- Align our public website, on-line digital resources, communication guidelines and publication standards with latest accessible communications standards.
- Increase our customer service standards at all City public service counters for people with visible and non-visible disabilities.
- Increase offerings of recreational program opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Support and include people with disabilities in City-led special events and ceremonies.
- Encourage and support full participation by people with disabilities in City engagement processes.
- Ensure formal staff reports include pertinent accessibility information and impact statements.
- Improve accessibility of municipal election processes.
- Advertise, encourage and promote diverse participation in city advisory committees and boards.

## Actions Taken or Underway

- Partnering with Island Health in the Supportive Child Development Program to provide one-on-one assistance for children who require extra support to participate in summer camp programs.
- Inclusive swimming lesson programs at Crystal Pool.
- Initiated review of the Council Procedures bylaw to find opportunities to increase accessibility in City Decision Making.
- Improvements to the inclusion process for recreation programs regarding managing allergic risks.
- Introduced 'screen readable' online open data platform and website.
- Installation of a hearing loop and braille directional signs at City Hall for Council meetings.
- Piloted accessibility improvements in town hall meeting

- Delivery of the “helping hand” program for solid waste management to support people with disabilities.
- Initial electronic / remote access capabilities for City meetings.
- Introduced mail ballot voting, curbside voting, special voting opportunities at care facilities, and legislated ballot marking assistance.
- Approved an accessible voting machine for next voting opportunity.
- Introduced accessible Council meeting features (webcast meetings and closed captioning).
- Developed additional platforms for participating in City-wide engagement processes.

### Focus Area 3 – Capacity and Collaboration

The City must increase its knowledge and develop the skills and standards to identify, remove and prevent accessibility barriers across programs, services and projects. The City also has a role to play, in helping support a new standard of accessibility across the broader community.

In Victoria, there are several organizations focused on improving the lives of people living with disabilities. Integrating with these stakeholders will help the City to make better-informed decisions that result in positive impacts. These organizations are often a direct and essential support system for people with disabilities and are considered important partners and experts.

The City also has an important role to lead by example to improve community attitudes related to disability. It has been recognized that some “attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities may be considered a significant barrier to their full access and inclusion. International consultation teaches us that the attitudes towards people with disabilities are often determined by ignorance, fear or the lack of opportunity to interact. Supporting positive attitudes involves increasing awareness and changing negative perceptions”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> New South Wales, Australia, DIAP guidance

The City has a leadership opportunity to integrate accessibility as part of its core business, and demonstrate high standards of inclusion.

## What We Heard

Improved awareness, knowledge, understanding, and new capabilities are required to make positive accessibility impacts. Building corporate capacity is done through education, awareness, hiring and training and can be supported in the community through stakeholder communications engagement. Working closely with community organizations will help give a voice to individuals and groups who need support.

The Accessibility Working Group identified the importance of ensuring the voice of lived experience is always part of accessibility actions in municipal planning and that people with disabilities are experts in their own right. They not only provide expertise in the area of accessibility but come with other skills and abilities valuable to the process which need to be recognized and respected. The City subscribes to the principle of inclusion, and values that we must partner together to truly understand the perspectives, information, and ideas of persons with lived experience.

Throughout the public engagement process, the City heard about the importance of fostering positive attitudes regarding disabilities. The City's actions on improving accessibility for the infrastructure, services and programs it controls and the services it regulates can set an example for the broader community and people's ability to recognize barriers that make life harder for disabled people. Removing these barriers can create equality, independence, choice and control to improve overall quality of life.

## Objectives

- To ensure City employees have the knowledge and capacity to meet municipal accessibility needs.
- To lead accessibility change-making within the City mandate.
- To help promote more collaborative, positive, attitudes towards an inclusive community.

## Key Commitments

- Provide enhanced training and awareness to foster a welcoming corporate environment for people with disabilities.
- Demonstrate inclusivity in City publications and materials.
- Introduce resources and processes to support and coordinate accessibility efforts, projects and programs.
- Facilitate regular activities to improve the City's knowledge and understanding of lived-experience and accessibility challenges across our community.
- Engage with and collaborate across local disability stakeholder groups.

## Actions Taken or Underway

- Creation of the City's Accessibility Working Group to provide input and advice on accessible planning and action.
- Introduction of accessibility statement on all employment postings.
- A long standing respectful workplace policy and staff training programs.
- Provision of accessibility awareness training for senior leaders and key staff members.
- Continued departmental liaison with community disability and accessibility resources.
- Provision of annual customer service training on accessibility inclusion for staff at Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre.
- Introduction of Accessibility Impact Statements as part of staff reports to Council.

## Implementing the Framework

Taking action on accessibility will be guided by the commitments in the framework, and supported by good governance, an action plan, resources and regular reporting on key measures to ensure we are on a trajectory of success. The City is a dynamic environment, so the program must also respond to changing circumstances and

priorities, while making meaningful progress to accessibility. The following outlines how the City will manage these challenges to purposefully advance to the objective of a more inclusive, barrier-free society.

### Accessibility as a part of Broader Inclusion Efforts

The Accessibility Framework addresses a single element of community equity and inclusion and is part of an important set of emerging actions and priorities that aim to improve overall social health and well-being across the city. As planning and programs develop, the City will continually assess how to best integrate these disparate but related initiatives, to maximize impact and resource efficiency. The City's work on inclusion will plan and determine the most appropriate role of an advisory body, made up of persons with lived experience, to help guide the City and its programs related to issues of accessibility and inclusion.

### Taking Action

A series of actions have been identified to deliver the commitments laid out in this framework, and are part of the City's overall Accessibility Program – which includes the policy, Framework, resources, governance and action plans. These actions are integrated into the City's financial planning and project management processes, and structured in short and longer term priorities, to be reviewed and reported as part of the City's business reporting cycles.