



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of November 7, 2019

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** November 1, 2019
From: Fraser Work, Director of Engineering and Public Works
Subject: Accessibility Framework – Endorsement and Next Steps

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council direct staff to:

1. Complete stakeholder engagement on the proposed draft, finalize edits and ready the document for final Council approval, in Quarter 1 2020;
2. Continue to participate in stakeholder consultation processes on the development of Accessibility Legislation in the Province of BC;
3. Endorse the policy statement noted in Appendix D and direct staff to report back with a formal policy for consideration in Q1 2020;
4. Refer consideration of adding a staff resource to the 2020 financial planning process; and
5. Report back on the Terms of Reference for an Advisory Body to enable ongoing input from persons with lived-experience on issues relating to accessibility.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City has created a draft Accessibility Framework for Council's consideration. The document has been developed with consultant support and Working Group input, over the past year, to illustrate the City's commitments to accessibility and inclusion, and to set the structure for operationalizing new standards, goals, targets and actions, across all City business.

The framework includes outlines of accessibility, disability and barrier types and definitions, policy context, overarching commitments, City role, and three main-focus areas for actions, including the built environment, government programs and services, and collaboration and capacity.

The draft framework includes the initial edits and inputs from the Accessibility Working Group and staff request Council's support to continue with additional engagement on the Framework and its associated documents before readying these drafts and planning tools, for final approval. Staff also highlight in the report the required investments for 2020 in order to further priority actions, including the staffing of a dedicated Accessibility Coordinator.

BACKGROUND

In February 2017, the City and the Accessibility Working Group (AWG) identified the importance of developing a city-wide Accessibility Framework (herein referred to as “the Framework”) to operationalize the goal of providing accessible facilities, services, products, programs and employment. Taking a comprehensive approach to accessibility will facilitate the shift from a reactive to a proactive approach to removing barriers for people with disabilities.

The City of Victoria’s 2015-2018 Strategic Plan includes an Objective to “Facilitate Social Inclusion and Community Wellness” and identified two actions in 2018:

- An Accessibility Framework is in place and is used to guide improvements to city facilities and public spaces.
- The Accessibility Framework is used to guide budget development in 2019 and beyond.

As a part of the 2018 budget process, Council approved a project to develop a new Accessibility Framework to move the prioritization and planning of accessibility improvements across the City, in a manner that is integrated with core service delivery and established program planning. The Framework is also intended to build internal organizational capacity and knowledge to enable effective and meaningful accessibility planning, design and operation of City assets, programs, planning processes and services.

The City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in the first quarter of 2018 for external support to help develop the Framework and establish accessibility policies, guidelines, and tools necessary to equip City teams with the information and guidance to systemically reduce barriers for people with disabilities, in the following areas:

- Physical access to City services and programs.
- Access to transportation and mobility systems and services.
- Access to city facilities, public spaces and infrastructure.
- Access to communications, information and decision-making.

The City did not receive any bids for the project after the first RFP release. Staff completed an evaluation of the scope of work, available budget and timings, and released a second RFP with increased funding levels, relaxing elements of scope and timeline. The RFP was awarded to MNP consultants, and the City began working on the project in the summer of 2018.

After a period of review, internal planning and initial agency engagement, staff transitioned to a second phase of framework development in April 2019. The goal of this second phase was to expand the comprehension of the Framework document, drawing on the findings and inputs from Phase 1. Phase 2 included further exploration on approaches in other jurisdictions, specific components of an accessibility policy, the development of an initial Accessibility Action Plan and robust tools to accompany the Framework.

The scope of work included the following elements:

- General profile of persons with disabilities in our community.
- An initial synopsis of existing barriers as identified through the first phase of engagement.
- A scan of best practices, other accessibility plans and policies from other jurisdictions within and beyond Canada.
- Identification of emerging directions in Provincial and Federal legislation and third-party design standards.

- Review of accessible customer services and employment standards.
- Requirements and focus areas for staff training.
- Development of an accessible public meeting checklist and guidelines for engagement processes.
- Development of a draft City Accessibility Policy.
- Preparation of a governance and policy documentation, staffing requirements, integration with City decision-making, and other key tools and information.
- Examination of public survey results undertaken prior to the Framework project commencing.
- Review and dialogue with members of the Accessibility Working Group and exploration of the issues / motions and topics that have been raised over the past four years.
- Internal departmental staff workshops with senior staff.
- Focus groups with community organizations who specialize in accessibility and inclusion and a public Town Hall event.
- Engagement with the Accessibility Working Group to review of the draft Framework.
- Development of an accessibility-focused program prioritization tool.

Engagement Summary and Outcomes

A number of activities have supported the development of the Framework. The City and its consultants worked with the Accessibility Working Group, reviewed past community survey results from 2017 on barriers in Victoria, and held community focus group sessions. A summary of the engagement is outlined below:

- **Agency Partner Workshop (Phase 1)** - the City invited agencies that support and advocate for people with disabilities. Representatives included Barrier Free BC, Inclusion BC, Disability Resource Centre and the University of Victoria Society for Students with Disabilities. Led by our consultants, this workshop aimed at facilitating a dialogue to identify the barriers in the City, suggestions for improvements and how third-party organizations can support the City in planning and implementing improvements to accessibility and inclusion.
- **Accessibility Town Hall** - On July 4, 2019 the City of Victoria held a Town Hall based on the theme of “accessibility in the community”. Attendees were given a brief overview of the Accessibility Framework and told that outcomes, topics and ideas generated at the Town Hall would contribute to the development of the Framework.
- **Focus Groups with Lived Experience Community (Phase 2)** - Following on the momentum of the Town Hall, the City then held 3 workshops, inviting members of the public and agency representatives to share lived experiences to ensure the Framework includes a variety of perspectives. The workshops were attended by representatives of Recreation Integration Victoria, members from the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind and seniors that frequent the Cook Street Village Activity Centre.
- **Staff Workshop and Training** - The consultants facilitated a discussion with the City’s Senior Leadership Team with a purpose to understand each department’s opportunities and constraints to be accessible as an employer and as a service provider. This workshop was reinforced by core training from SPARC BC on the foundations of accessibility inclusion.

- **AWG Discussions** - The consultants conducted workshops with the Accessibility Working Group for opportunities to share information, recommendations and expectations for improvements to the governance and the infrastructure in the city.
- **Email Feedback and Commentary** - Through the promotion of the Town Hall and the workshops, members of the public that could not attend in person or who had more to say, reached out to staff and/or Council on issues, experiences or feedback regarding accessibility and inclusion.

These recent engagement activities and many previous discussions with members of the AWG has aligned key considerations, which include the following:

1. That meaningful and sustained City accessibility improvements will be delivered through dedicated efforts on prevention as well as barrier-removal.
2. The importance of training, education and capacity building at the City to build understanding and expertise to help improve accessibility.
3. The need for independence for people with disabilities when interacting with City infrastructure, programs and services.
4. The importance of continued consultation and collaboration with those with lived-experiences to ensure that design of City services and infrastructure are accessible from outset and that interventions to improve accessibility of existing services and infrastructure are successful and inclusive in both process and outcome.

All engagement discussions emphasized the importance of a city commitment to accessibility and dedicated resources to further important action on both prevention and barrier-removal. Broader engagement on the draft Framework and its contents is planned, and part of this report's recommendations.

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

The Framework is intended to integrate accessibility considerations and planning across City operations and services. Through the development of this document, it has become clear that the City can enhance accessibility and inclusion across its programs, infrastructure and services by preventing future barriers through better design and decisions and removing barriers that exist through proactive planning and investments over time. The Framework is intended to drive improved inclusion in City business and communicate the importance and requirements to all City employees. The Framework also represents a key component of a wider accessibility program that is needed to truly embrace our commitments. 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.

City's Accessibility Framework - Overview

The Accessibility Framework is broken down into two major sections – first an introduction to understand accessibility and why it is important in our community, and the structure for how the City will take action to prevent and remove barriers. The Framework has the following detailed breakdown:

- Introduction
- Relevant Accessibility definitions
- Lived Experience
- Disability and Barrier Types

- Community Accessibility Profile
- City Accessibility Commitment
- Policy and Legislative Context
- The City's Role
- Directions for the City
- Universal Design Standards
- Focus Area 1 - Built Environment
- Focus Area 2 - Government Programs & Services
- Focus Area 3 - Capacity & Collaboration
- Implementing the Framework

BC Provincial and National Accessibility Governance

The Province of BC is currently developing accessibility legislation, which opened for public commentary in September of 2019. This consultation focuses on legislation development process and outlines the principles from the United Nations Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and previous provincial consultation on accessibility/disability as well as its 1973 Human Rights Code. These foundations are also contained in the City's draft Framework.

The BC legislation is meant to complement the federal government release of its Accessible Canada Act (June 2019), which sets requirements for sectors or organizations under federal jurisdiction. The BC legislation will likely do the same for areas of provincial jurisdiction, which could include local governments.

Staff assess that the City's Framework aligns and supports the principles, structure and content of these different governance documents. The City's Framework would be one of the first comprehensive Frameworks from a BC municipality.

Draft Accessibility Policy Statements

As part of this work, staff have prepared draft policy statements to ensure that the City takes the necessary steps to ensure people with disabilities are treated with respect and have equitable access to participate and contribute to the City. These policy statements have been written with guidance from policies in other Canadian cities and is focused on inclusion and the requirement to integrate accessibility prevention and barrier removal as part of our core business. The policy statements can be found as Appendix D. They include City statement of commitments and are supported by specific instructions for employees, such as:

- knowledge of and maintain compliance with this policy;
- participation in identifying accessibility barriers and planning for barrier removal;
- provide a welcoming environment for people with disabilities, including any person with a disability using assistive devices or accompanied by a support person or service animal;
- attend relevant training appropriate to the duties of their role, which may include acquiring skills and competencies necessary to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers.

Lessons Learned - Accessibility Planning

Over the last few years, the City has begun the process of investing more deeply into the issues of accessibility and exploring how our programs and infrastructure help or hinder people with disabilities. The benefits of a comprehensive Framework and Accessibility Program will lead to improved awareness, new skills, and thoughtful practice from City departments that will support

the planning and standards needed to deliver improved designs, programs, services, plans and processes, so that meaningful long-term accessibility changes can be realized.

The following key lessons shape program development and staff recommendations:

- a. **Capacity Building:** Training, education and experiential learning is required in order to improve understanding of accessibility, barriers, and the roles and responsibilities of a local government.
- b. **Resources:** Dedicated resources are required in order to support the change-management and capacity building requirements to reach new standards in accessibility and inclusion. Project and program budgets will need to account for achieving universal design principles.
- c. **Meaningful Collaboration with the Public:** On-going dialogue between persons with lived experience and City professionals is required to deliver meaningful change.
- d. **Balancing the Needs of Community:** Careful balancing of competing needs and interests will always be required when managing the design of projects, services and infrastructure. Better understanding will deliver better outcomes. Tools are required to help prioritize projects and make wise design decisions.
- e. **Long-Term View:** Building and maintaining a truly accessible City takes time and sustained efforts to change and improve. Strong programs, standards and processes, together with new tools and strong insights, will be required to deliver high value improvements, year on year.

Action Plan

Staff have developed an initial action plan with 1-3 year and 3–5 year priorities. This action list has been developed through staff consideration of AWG inputs, consultant advice and assessment across ongoing City projects to find synergies. The action plan priorities include several key enablers necessary to build a new capability within the City:

1. Hiring of dedicated staff to help coordinate program delivery through liaison with key department staff and community resources.
2. Develop new design standards for city programs, facilities, transportation systems, public realm, engagement processes, information sharing and decision-making activities.
3. Develop and start implementing staff training and awareness programs (general and specific subject-matter training).
4. Establish Terms of Reference for an Advisory Body that will be able to provide ongoing input into inclusion issues.

The full action plan can be reviewed at Appendix C and includes reference to previous AWG motions and proposals. In some cases, specific solutions or actions recommended by the AWG have been proposed as a higher-level action and reflect staff's assessment of priority and synergies across program areas.

The draft 2020 Financial Plan includes a number of planned capital projects and investments that will positively impact accessibility and reduce existing barriers in the City. Examples include sidewalk projects, crosswalk installations and upgrades, traffic signal upgrades, and retrofits to a number of public washrooms.

Accessibility and Inclusion - Planning Considerations

The Framework addresses an important element of community equity and inclusion and is part of a set of City emerging objectives that aim to improve overall social well-being of our community.

The integration of these related initiatives into a single program has already been recognized by Council as part of their recent adoption of the Trans Inclusion TNB2S + Plan, where Council took the action to “develop a City Inclusion Policy Statement to broadly affirm an intersectional approach to implementing diversity and inclusion measures and provide public and staff guidance”. If done well, holistically managing issues of inclusion programs and governance will help ensure the City takes advantage of a consistent approach, shared model, complimentary objectives, synergies, unique needs, so to improve communications, avoid confusion and any duplication of effort.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Council has a set of program documents for consideration related to the Framework, the Policy, Action Plan, and other key documents. The broad options for considerations are outlined below, but each element of the document package should be considered for approval or alternative action.

Framework Document Completion

Option 1: Refine and Finalize Current Draft after final engagement activities (*recommended*).

Significant inputs have already shaped this draft, and additional sessions are required to complete discussions on various documentation, to gain further AWG and other stakeholder commentary and perspectives. Staff assess that this final engagement can be completed within 3 months, and can improve the final draft, and be ready for publishing within the first quarter of 2020. This action would include this report’s recommendations to advance the program priorities.

Option 2: Approve draft materials and publish.

Council could adopt the current draft as written and forego any further engagement or refinements. This would expedite timelines but would remove opportunity for valuable inputs from stakeholder groups.

Option 3: Rework the Framework and Associated Documentation.

The Framework and associated documents could undergo additional review, redirections or amendments, if Council requires a different approach or configuration, which may more closely align with Council expectations, but will take additional resources and time to complete.

Option 4: Await Provincial Policy Direction before Finalizing Draft.

As the provincial legislation is currently undergoing the initial engagement stage of development, the City could await the outcomes of that process, before publishing its own plans. This could avoid confusion or misalignment in the future, but may add significant timelines to the City’s communications and planning. If the eventual BC program aligns closely with the City’s efforts, then churn would be minimized, which is difficult to forecast at this time. Based on the use of governing resources like the UNCRPD and the BC Human Rights code, and the initial framing of the BC documents, it seems reasonable to forecast that the City’s current Framework will align closely with any future BC program.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

This program is a direct action, under Strategic Objective 5, Health Well Being and a Welcoming City (2019 action number 3).

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

Inclusionary planning and improvements are part of the OCP values, objectives, goals across several program areas, and thus capture the requirement to continually improve accessibility and disability inclusion standards.

Impacts to Financial Plan

The recommendation in this report requires additional resources for initial operating costs and transfers the year on year responsibility for capital and operating programs to both an Accessibility Program budget, for shared and common initiatives, as well as to department financial planning, as part of core business delivery.

The following key elements are proposed, as part of the 2020 Financial Planning Process considerations:

1. Allocation of \$108,000 per year, for an Accessibility Coordinator Position.
2. Allocate the required operating funds from the \$250,000 budget previously set aside by Council, for priority development of the City's Accessibility Standards, training programs, and external support for first year priority actions.

Accessibility Impact Statement

The development of an Accessibility Program at the City along with resources and support, directly addresses accessibility needs across the city, and intends to deliver accessibility prevention and barrier removals as part of core City services and program delivery.

CONCLUSION

The City's Accessibility Framework and associated documents are in draft format, and have undergone initial improvements via review by staff, as well as via engagement with the City's Accessibility Working Group. Additional review and refinements are required on several documents.

Staff are proposing to complete final engagement activities and complete the Framework for final Council approval. Staff are also recommending the adoption of the City's Accessibility Policy and priority budgetary items, to progress year 1 actions. The development of the Framework represents a milestone in accessibility planning and capacity building in the City, and will aim to continually improve through commitments to make accessibility prevention and barrier removals part of core business, in years to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Fraser Work,
Director of Engineering and Public Works

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

Date:

Josephine Jenkinson
Nov 1, 2019

List of Attachments:

- Appendix A: Draft Accessibility Framework (attached)
- Appendix B: Detailed Engagement Summary
- Appendix C: City of Victoria Accessibility Action Plan
- Appendix D: Accessibility Policy Statements