



## Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of August 6, 2020

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**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** July 31, 2020  
**From:** Susanne Thompson, Deputy City Manager/CFO  
Philip Bellefontaine, A/Director of Engineering and Public Works  
**Subject:** Accessibility Framework and Policy

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

1. Endorse the *Accessibility Framework* and approve the proposed *Accessibility Policy* as presented in this report and;
2. Direct staff to initiate the *Recommended Short Term Action Plan* as part of its ongoing work on equity, diversity and inclusion subject to specific project and funding consideration through the annual financial planning process.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a part of our commitment to become a bold, thriving, inclusive and happy city, Victoria is taking positive steps to remove barriers, promote inclusion and support people with disabilities through municipal programs, services and investments. It is through this commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, that staff have developed the proposed final draft Accessibility Framework and Accessibility Policy. These documents will lay a foundation for integrating accessibility standards, goals, objectives and actions, across all City service areas.

The City's Accessibility Working Group (AWG) first introduced the concept of an Accessibility Framework in 2017. The project was initiated in 2018 and involved two phases of work to collect data, explore barriers and issues, engage the community and develop the draft documents with input and recommendations from accessibility-focused organizations, the AWG, subject matter experts across City Departments, as well as insights from individuals with lived experiences.

The Accessibility Framework (herein referred to as the Framework) applies to the spectrum of City planning and operations, from our capital investments and municipal programs, to front-line services for residents and businesses. The Accessibility Policy reinforces the City's commitment to accessibility and is part of an emerging, broader set of policies and programs to support an inclusive, welcoming community.

The Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion with staff complement, pending budget approval, will take oversight and monitoring of the Framework implementation across each City Department

through annual service operations and financial planning processes. Staff will continue to build internal capacity and awareness by working with local disability organizations, technical experts, other levels of government, and people with lived experiences to help fulfil our goals.

While the Accessibility Framework and Recommended Short Term Action Plan has not yet been adopted by Council, the City has initiated a number of projects in 2020 that support accessibility objectives. New actions that have been started or are currently underway include:

- Involvement of accessibility-focused organizations in the *Growing in the City* program;
- Expansion of accessible parking stalls within City parkades;
- On-line learning opportunities for City staff through the Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion;
- Information sharing of accessibility-related resources and the introduction of application questions and/or criteria on equity and accessibility for City grant and participatory budgeting programs;
- Adoption of corporate scent reduction policies in public buildings, including in City Hall;
- Initiation of the Streets & Traffic Bylaw review, including associated fines, to identify strategies and requirements to help reduce barriers on sidewalks and pathways;
- Participation in the provincial annual Access Awareness Day and national AccessAbility Week;
- Retrofit projects such as new accessible public washrooms and intersection improvements;
- Introducing non-graphic design versions of important City documents, such as Council's Strategic Plan, and making changes to internal graphic design approaches to support accessible document development;
- Creation of new accessible parking requirements and design standards. This will apply to private developments through the Zoning bylaw as well to guide the implementation and retrofit of City-supplied parking stalls; and
- Updated guidelines and processes for accessible public meetings, special events and community engagement.

## BACKGROUND

In 2017 the AWG identified the importance of developing a citywide Framework to operationalize the goal of providing accessible facilities, services, regulations, programs and employment. Taking a comprehensive approach to accessibility helps to facilitate the shift from a reactive to a pro-active approach to removing and preventing barriers in our community. Throughout 2018 and 2019, external consultants supported data collection, best practice research and public consultation with agency partners and people with lived experience.

In November 2019, staff presented the draft materials to Council and was directed to:

1. Complete stakeholder engagement on the proposed draft documents, with particular focus on Appendix C (Action Plan), finalize edits and ready the document for final Council approval, in Quarter 1 2020;
2. Continue to advocate for strong and effective Provincial legislation for persons with disabilities and 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. Endorse adding a staff person dedicated to accessibility to be hired as soon as possible in 2020 with funds to come from new assessed revenue;
5. Direct staff to report back with a list of year 1 action items and direct the funding allocated in 2019 for Accessibility Framework implementation to be used for accessibility framework implementation in 2020;
6. 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.

The Framework is intended to guide increased awareness among employees and build internal organizational capacity to enable effective and meaningful accessibility planning, design and operation of City assets, programs, planning processes and services. The Policy serves as a Council-endorsed commitment to ensure that people with disabilities are treated with respect and are both supported and encouraged to participate in City policies, activities, programs, and services.

The adoption of the Framework was delayed due to COVID-19; however, several projects continue to be implemented in 2020 with existing resources through operational programs and capital projects. Staff are also preparing candidate projects for consideration in the 2021 Financial Plan.

Concurrent with the work that has been undertaken over the past year, staff are also in the process of developing an overarching Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Framework and Lens for the City as directed by Council. This draft Framework is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2020 and will provide direction on trade-off considerations for a number of key strategies and plans that the City has adopted or are under development including, but not limited to the Accessibility Framework, TNB2S+ Inclusion Plan, the Seniors Strategy, and the Welcoming City Strategy, as well as local area plans. The implementation of equity, diversity and inclusion plans and strategies will be overseen by a senior leadership steering committee as well as an internal staff working group.

## ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

The Framework integrates accessibility considerations and planning across City operations and services. It includes a commitment to identifying, preventing and removing barriers across services, programs and infrastructure in order to benefit the community in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

The Framework has three key Focus Areas:

- **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 and prevention of physical barriers across transportation and mobility, public facilities, and public spaces.
- **Municipal Governance and Services:** Removing barriers and increasing participation in local government programs, services, information, bylaws, and public decision making.
- **Capacity and Collaboration:** Developing increased capacity to deliver professional services in a more accessible manner. We will also build on community partnerships and advocate to other levels of government for change.

Few municipalities in Canada have taken the approach to developing a framework that addresses all elements of local government operations and spheres of influence. Strong leadership, collaboration and coordination will help to address the collective accessibility challenges throughout our community with a goal of continual improvement.

### Completion of Consultation

After Council's review of the draft document and subsequent directions in November 2019, Staff completed the final phase of public engagement between December 2019 and February 2020. Activities included:

- Two meetings with members of the Accessibility Working Group to review content, feedback and ideas.
- Distribution of draft materials and document review with 13 local and provincial disability service and advocacy organizations.
- Posting of materials on the City's engagement website, including a video presentation with closed captioning describing the Framework and inviting public feedback.
- Promotion on the City's accessibility-focused stakeholder list (110 people).
- A public open house with approximately 45 participants, with all materials also available online.
- In-person meetings, telephone calls and email correspondence with individuals with lived experience.

A full summary of the engagement process can be found in Appendix D. Additionally, City staff have consolidated all AWG motions from 2015 to 2020 (Appendix E) as a record of specific issues that have been raised, outstanding items, or ideas for future projects. There are some outstanding issues that were raised by AWG members in January 2020 that have not changed in the final draft. These include preference for applying an accessibility lens to decision making (versus a broader equity lens), the level of granularity in the action plan (what barriers will be removed, when and where); the desire for a competing needs policy in addition to the Accessibility Policy, and the continuation of the Accessibility Working Group mandate as a stand-alone advisory body.

### Accessibility Policy

The Accessibility Policy is contained in Appendix C. The purpose of the Policy is to ensure that the rights and opportunities of people with disabilities are considered in all decisions made by the City through our continuous improvement processes. The language was adapted from the AWG's "Statement of Commitment" and draws upon best practices from other Canadian cities with an overarching commitment to ensure that people with disabilities are treated with respect and are both supported and encouraged to participate in City policies, activities, programs, and services.

Council has previously approved an intersectional research and policy lens that recognizes that people have multiple and diverse identity factors, which intersect to shape their perspectives, ideologies and experiences. An intersectional approach involves working to address inequality and barriers to inclusion without isolating one factor of an individual's identity from another and recognizing that inclusion impacts people differently due in part to how their many identity factors intersect to influence their experience.

### Recommended Short Term Action Plan

The Recommended Short Term Action Plan (Appendix B) is included as a part of the Framework and identifies several projects and initiatives to be implemented by different City departments.

Each year staff will identify, implement and integrate accessibility-focused projects from the Framework through the annual service and capital planning. Accessibility considerations will also be integrated into the City's project management framework to support integration and scoping in early stages. Reporting on accomplishments will be included in the annual City reporting cycles.

All feedback and comments regarding short term actions were considered. The Recommended Short Term Action Plan is anticipated to be implemented over time with consideration of available staffing and financial resources, partnership and grant opportunities, recommendations and community input from people with lived experience, established Strategic Plan directions and/or commitments in other approved City master plan documents.

#### Lived Experience Advice and Input Moving Forward

AWG members have dedicated significant time and effort through their mandate with a desire for continued meaningful involvement on accessibility issues that draws upon their direct and diverse experiences. Council has committed to a governance review through the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan starting in 2021. This is potentially a more appropriate opportunity to address long-term governance around this initiative and others. Pending Council direction, an intersectional advisory committee(s) may be established with the oversight of the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

City staff will continue to engage accessibility-focused organizations, seek out best practices, and gather feedback from subject matter experts and those with lived experience on specific projects, policies and initiatives.

#### BC Provincial Accessibility Consultation

The City of Victoria was one of four local governments in British Columbia to formally participate in Legislation consultation process hosted by the Province of BC in November 2019. Initial comments from City Staff included recommendations on data collection, standards and regulation development, tools and resources for local governments and new funding opportunities to identify and remove barriers.

The Province has published their engagement summary (Appendix F), however timelines for further advancement has not been detailed since the onset of the pandemic. It is anticipated that accessibility focused legislation will be advanced in fall 2020.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The Framework is intended to be a document that will be updated, adapted and improved upon over time. The City's commitment to accessibility will continue to evolve through the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and with implementation of projects identified in the Recommended Short Term Action Plan. Required updates to reflect the City's commitment to accessibility will also be made to relevant sections of the City's Official Community Plan and will be the subject of a future staff report.

Upon adoption, City staff will circulate copies to agency partners, the Capital Regional District and applicable community organizations. The City will launch a new page on the website, including an introductory video about accessibility featuring American Sign Language and closed captioning. Print copies, including a limited number of braille versions, will be available in City Hall. As part of the initial roll out, staff will initiate an internal awareness program across all City divisions and departments and share copies of the Framework for departmental reference. The Framework itself will also be used as one of several inputs to support the development of the 2021 and ongoing Financial Planning processes.



## OPTIONS & IMPACTS

**Option 1: Endorse the *Accessibility Framework* and approve the proposed *Accessibility Policy* as presented in this report and; Direct staff to initiate the *Recommended Short Term Action Plan* as part of its ongoing work on equity, diversity and inclusion subject to specific project and funding consideration through the annual financial planning process. (RECOMMENDED)**

Input from people with lived experiences, best practice and inter-departmental subject matter experts have informed the development of the Framework, Recommended Short Term Action Plan and Accessibility Policy. Staff have engaged with the AWG, public agencies and internal departments to define a set of focus areas, objectives and actions to support this work. Staff will report back with any changes to documents, as required, following the introduction of Provincial Accessibility legislation.

**Option 2: Defer the final adoption of Accessibility Framework and Council Accessibility Policy until after further consultation and Provincial Legislation is introduced**

Council defer the Framework adoption until the provincial Accessibility Legislation is introduced in the next year to ensure consistency with any guidance for local governments in British Columbia. This approach is not consistent with Council's Strategic Plan goals timelines. Updates to Council Policy and/or the Framework in order to comply with legislative requirements can be made at a future date.

### *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 consistent with OCP values, objectives, goals across several program areas. Staff have discussed and identified a list of required OCP policy updates once the Accessibility Framework is adopted. This will be the subject of a future staff report from the Sustainable Planning and Community Development Department.

### *Impacts to Financial Plan*

Three new staff positions under an Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Corporate Initiatives Department, were included in the 2020 Financial Plan. These positions, intended to support the implementation of the Framework among other equity and inclusion focused priorities, are on hold due to the financial impacts of COVID-19. Pending Council discussion in August 2020, future actions will be a part of annual service planning, capital budgeting and project management planning.

The City has also established an Accessibility Reserve Fund to support capital and equipment investments in barrier removal and universal design that will be considered as source of funds through the City's annual Financial Planning Process.

## *Accessibility Impact Statement*

The adoption of the Accessibility Framework and Council Policy will help to support systematic barrier prevention and removal across City services and programs to improve quality of life for people with disabilities.

### **CONCLUSION**

The completion of the Framework represents an important milestone in equity planning and capacity building in the City of Victoria. The Framework and Policy is intended to continually assess and improve the accessibility to City services, infrastructure and programs through barrier prevention and removal over time. Looking forward, the City will report annually on implementation progress of the Framework, in coordination with other initiatives that support broader equity, diversity and inclusion objectives.

Respectfully submitted,



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Works



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**Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** July 30, 2020

### **List of Attachments:**

- Appendix A: Accessibility Framework 2020
- Appendix B: Recommended Short Term Action Plan
- Appendix C: Council Accessibility Policy
- Appendix D: Engagement Summary
- Appendix E: AWG Motions 2015 – 2020
- Appendix F: Province of B.C. Accessibility Legislation Engagement Summary