

BACKGROUND

In November 2019, staff brought forward a draft Accessibility Framework, Policy and Action Plan for Council consideration. The purpose of the Framework and Policy is to operationalize the goal of providing accessible facilities, services, regulations, programs and employment to address systemic barriers faced by individuals within the community. The intent of the Framework and Policy is to take a comprehensive and pro-active approach to removing and preventing barriers for people with disabilities.

On August 6, 2020, the Committee of the Whole received a report from staff that included a summary of the engagement feedback, as well as the further proposed changes to the draft Accessibility Framework, Action Plan and Policy. At that time, Council approved a number of motions related to the staff report. The current report is specific to direction received on August 6, 2020 as follows:

“Direct staff to report back on the accessibility lens as it relates to the future equity lens and on potential tools to assist with balancing competing rights and interests.”

In October 2020, Council adopted the Accessibility Framework, Short Term Action Plan, and Accessibility Policy. Through the staff report, staff recommended an interim measure to develop an equity-based decision-making tool for Council and staff that could consider a number of competing interests, including accessibility. Council further directed the establishment of a new Accessibility Advisory Committee, and added the following provisions to the Terms of Reference to establish for the new Committee:

“Review proposed tool for balancing competing rights and interests and provide comments and recommendations to Council after review; and

“Review and update current guidelines for writing an Accessibility Impact Statement (AIS) so the document can function as an Accessibility Lens.”

In March of 2021, the Accessibility Advisory Committee was established. Through the 2021 First Period Triannual report provided to Council in June, staff provided the updated Accessibility Impact Statement guidelines that have been adopted for future Council reports. Work is also currently underway to finalize the Accessibility Lens with Accessibility Advisory Committee input.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

The City is subject to numerous legal requirements, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the BC Human Rights Code that must be considered as part of any City bylaw, policy, or project. The City currently takes steps to meet these legal obligations through appropriate reviews and analysis when developing bylaws, policies or projects.

There is a complexity of process thinking and design that is required to ensure that the City takes a comprehensive assessment of equity impacts across a number of groups in order to ensure design mitigations that minimize any adverse impacts of decisions prior to proceeding with a variety of courses of action. The development of a formal decision-making tool is intended to bring greater transparency to this process. This requirement is not unique to accessibility issues. As staff indicated in a previous report, a proper decision-making tool would more appropriately be part of the Equity Framework so that it is comprehensive and consistently applied across the full spectrum of bylaws, policies, and projects in addition to accessibility considerations.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

The intent of the Equity Decision-Making Tool is to provide a logic model of thinking processes to assist staff and Council to undertake an assessment when making changes to programs and services that involve the use of public dollars. The emphasis of the tool is balancing competing rights and interests in City decision-making.

Attachment A contains the proposed interim tool, which is anchored around existing project management practices, as well as priority groups for equity considerations identified by Council through the Equity Workshop in November 2019. The tool follows a series steps and guiding questions to be assessed, including:

- Step 1: Will the project have adverse impacts on one or more equity seeking groups? If yes, what values, interests, and rights would be adversely impacted (is the impact solely on operational issues)?
- Step 2: Are the adverse impacts avoidable?
- Step 3: Are the objectives important enough to justify some level of impact?
- Step 4: Are the impacts minimized to achieve the objective (what is avoidable)?
- Step 5: Are the adverse impacts proportionate to the benefits of the project?

The diagram below is a depiction of the steps that new initiatives go through, and where the decision-making tool fits.

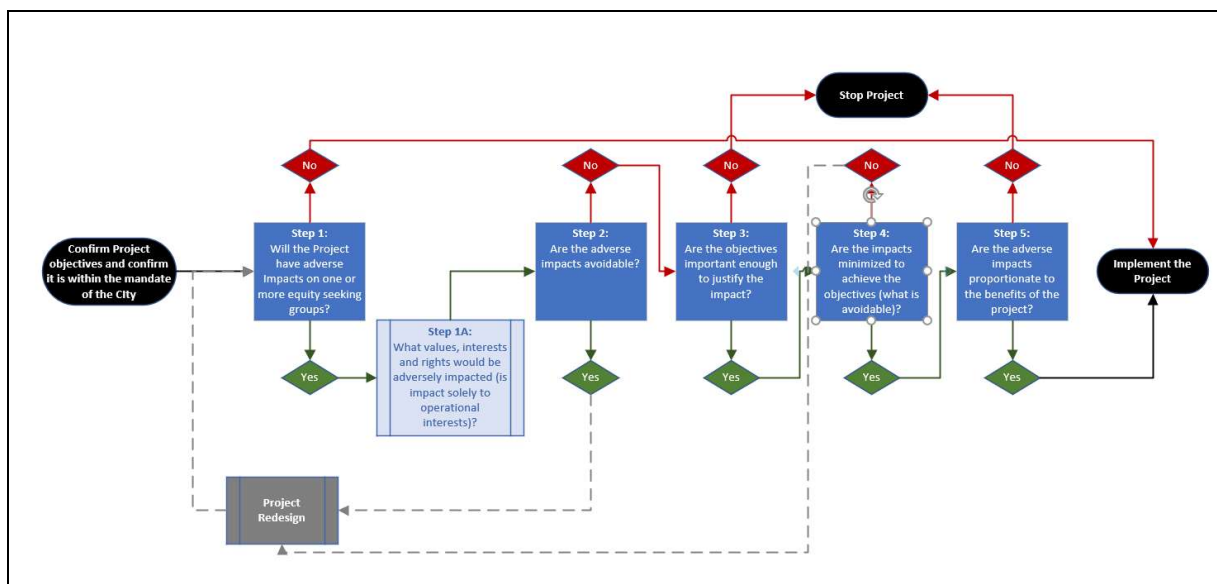


Figure 1: Interim Equity Decision-Making Process Steps

Accessibility Impact Statement

This report is in direct response to Council direction regarding the strengthening of accessibility considerations in program and service design. As a procedural equity consideration, it is being presented to Council as an interim approach pending the Accessibility Advisory Committee review. Further review from an overall structural equity perspective will be undertaken through the proposed adoption of an Equity Framework. This tool is intended to be a companion to two other directional documents – new Accessibility Lens Assessment and strengthened Accessibility Impact Statement requirements for staff writing Council reports.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

This report is in alignment with the Strategic Plan Objective #1 – Good Governance and Civic Engagement to “Develop an Equity Framework” as well as Objective #5 – Develop and Implement an Accessibility Framework.

Impacts to Financial Plan

There are no financial impacts related to this report.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The development of a tool that can be applied across a range of equity-seeking groups is consistent with OCP priorities and objectives.

CONCLUSIONS

In the coming months, work is continuing with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to finalize the Accessibility Assessment Lens. Pending Council approval of this interim tool, the Accessibility Advisory Committee will be further engaged. These actions reflect the completion of three of the eight deliverables assigned to this committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Mandi Sandhu
Head, Service Improvement & Innovation

Susanne Thompson
Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

List of Attachments

A. Interim Equity Decision-Making Tool