



Accessibility Advisory Committee

MINUTES

Wednesday, August 23, 2023, 5:30 p.m.

Open to public attendance in Committee Room G

Lower Level, City Hall

Committee members may attend electronically

PRESENT:

Councillor Jaimie McEvoy	Chair
Anne Bélanger	Committee Member
Karen Basran	Human Resources Business Partner
Iris Cheng*	Committee Member
Shannon Dolton*	Committee Member
Hazel Fitzpatrick*	Committee Member
Nancy Kato	Committee Member
Vic Leach	Committee Member
Karla Olson	Committee Member

REGRETS:

Taryn Bruckshaw	Committee Member
Julia Schoennagel	Committee Member

STAFF PRESENT:

Mike Anderson*	Manager of Transportation, Engineering
Hailey Finnigan	Communications Coordinator, Office of the CAO
Anur Mehdic	Social Planner, Climate Action, Planning and Development
Carilyn Cook	Committee Clerk, Legislative Services

*Denotes electronic attendance

1. CALL TO ORDER AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Councillor McEvoy opened the meeting at 5:37 p.m. and recognized with respect that New Westminster is on the unceded and unsundered land of the Halkomelem speaking peoples. He acknowledged that colonialism has made invisible their histories and connections to the land. He recognized that, as a City, we are learning and building relationships with the people whose lands we are on.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

None.

3. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

The following items were added under New Business:

- Item 7.1 – Principles and Values by Councillor McEvoy;
- Item 7.2 – Committee Consultation by Karla Olson, Committee Member;
- Item 7.3 – The Importance of Universal Design by Karla Olson, Committee Member;
- Item 7.4 Community Advisory Assembly by Anne Bélanger, Committee Member.

4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 July 26, 2023

MOVED and SECONDED

THAT the Minutes of the July 26, 2023 Accessibility Advisory Committee be adopted with the removal of the discussion comment under Item 7.1 Universal Design.

Carried.

All members present voted in favour of the motion.

5. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

5.1 Accessibility Webpage

Karen Basran, Human Resources Business Partner, shared that staff are seeking input from the Committee on the draft Accessible New West webpage which will be added to the City's website and updated over time with the various accessibility initiatives and projects that are taking place or planned to take place across the city.

Ms. Basran further advised that the draft Organization Accessibility Plan is also in draft form and that it is anticipated that the Plan, which incorporates much of the discussion had so far, will be shared with the Committee for input at the next meeting.

Hailey Finnigan, Communications Coordinator, provided an overview of the draft Accessible New West webpage which outlines the Accessible BC Act, the Committee's work and the importance of it, achievements and ongoing work with respect to the pillars of the accessibility plan which includes the built environment, communications, service delivery, and employment. Ms.

Finnigan noted that use of plain language was implemented on the webpage to make it as simple and straight to the point as possible. She welcomed feedback from Committee members.

In response to questions from the Committee, Ms. Basran and Ms. Finnigan provided the following comments:

- The Disability Alliance BC guide and toolkit were addressed during earlier discussions of the Committee and started discussion on the pillars of the City's Accessibility Plan. The guide and toolkit are meant as starting points for municipalities to use as they move through the pieces that are applicable to their municipality and communities;
- A number of links are included on the webpage including a link to the Committee's webpage and the Province's Accessible BC Act;
- The draft webpage is a starting point and, as it is built up, it will include links to other city pages related to projects, initiatives, and services while maintaining easy navigation of the page;
- The City is starting from scratch in creating the Plan whereas some other municipalities have already had something in place that they are building upon. As such, our initial projects may be geared towards having definitions, principles, and concepts to expand on;
- There has been a lot of staff involvement and we are starting to build out things that are already being done across the city as well as looking towards things that we want to do;
- While there are eight categories, as per our discussions we have honed in on the four most relevant to New Westminster and things we have influence on;
- Having to update the Plan each year will allow us to focus on other categories and possibly explore partnerships with the Federal Government and other agencies;
- Currently, an email address is provided as a way for people to provide feedback and consideration of other feedback mechanisms, such as a phone line, public engagement, etc., must also take into account staff resources. Currently no one staff member is dedicated to accessibility in the City;
- Consideration is being given to including accessibility engagement opportunities on the City's Be Heard website in the future;
- It is challenging to come up with a way to present all of the work that staff have done on this so far;

- Things that may have been left off the webpage include some hyperlinks and developing out our own focus when it comes to accessibility because it is so widespread across different staff teams;
- We can always add more to the webpage but need to keep it simple, easy to read, and provide ease of access to all of the information. This may include building out over a number of pages;
- The expressions “all people” “without barriers” and “community member” were used as they seemed to be the most inclusive as per previous meeting discussions included things such as poverty, sanctuary city, etc.;

Discussion ensued, and Committee members provided the following comments:

- The first paragraph does not describe why or for whom action is being taken. There is no mention of people with disabilities nor what the barriers are;
- Should have a definition of the word “accessibility” that includes equitable access to programs, those that have English as a second language, and other barriers that go beyond disability so that people know that they are represented;
- The request for feedback on how the City can improve accessibility is fantastic as it encourages engagement;
- The guide and toolkit offered by Disability Alliance BC, which were created to guide this process, is not acknowledged;
- Examples of what has been done so far could be more complete and a list of things scheduled to be done would be helpful;
- The Committee needs to ensure that what is supposed to get done with respect to accessibility, actually gets accomplished;
- The Committee’s mandate and a prioritized list and dates of recent and future work, including categories, could be included on the page;
- Work on employment and service delivery is being prioritized by the Provincial Government;
- A short note at the top of the website could outline the definition of accessibility, the Provincial legislation, and the eight categories and how they impact the City;
- Too much information can be overwhelming to some and a barrier itself;

- Including accessible dog parks on the page may not be helpful nor as essential as other initiatives as they are not all as accessible as needed nor as important to people as other things;
- Additional hyperlinks could include future/planned work, a definition of plain language, the opening date and other information regarding the t̄m̄əsew̄tx̄w̄ Aquatic and Community Centre, a list of the programs for which people may receive discounts, and an explanation of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (DEIAR) Framework;
- A glossary of terms and definitions may be beneficial to those navigating the page, including a definition of barriers;
- A sentence letting people know where their feedback will go once received should be added;
- Consideration of those that use screen readers to read websites must be taken when creating and updating webpages;
- Accessibility and the legislation around people with disabilities is not included on the webpage. We are not using the word “disability” nor explaining why the legislation was put into place;
- The DEIAR Framework and Universal Design are ways to change how we think about, approach, and look at barriers;
- The webpage is missing why accessibility is important and who it helps;
- Adopting plain language and simplified design to make communication easier for all types of people and their backgrounds brings people back into it;
- Focus should be put on the purpose of accessibility projects and initiatives;
- The Accessible BC Act does not include the word “accessibility” under their definitions and not having something well defined risks exclusion;
- There is nothing about making the employment process more diverse, equitable, or inclusionary which informs decision-making processes across the organization;
- Could use “all people” and “without barriers”, but also include “people with disabilities / different levels of disabilities” in the language.

Councillor McEvoy advised that we need to remember where we are in the process and that a lot of changes will take place as a result of the work being done here; however, it will take time as we do not have all the answers yet. The webpage is not a “one-off” and it will continue to evolve as accessibility work moves forward. He also noted that in the disability community there are different perspectives on

what language to use to describe things and something that one person finds acceptable, another may not.

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

6.1 Organizational Accessibility Plan Update

This was addressed under Item 5.1.

7. NEW BUSINESS

7.1 Principles and Values

Councillor McEvoy advised that, while he was not looking to have a discussion today, he wanted to share with the Committee his ideas with respect to principles and values. He would then seek input from Committee members via email or phone call and not necessarily wait until the next meeting for input. He shared the following principles for the Committee's consideration:

Principle: Universal Accessibility/Universal Design

"Universal accessibility was born from a need to eliminate the barriers found in much of our environment. These barriers still impede a large group of people from carrying out simple tasks independently.

This can be defined as 'the conditions for easy access that would allow any individual (including those whose mobility, communicative ability, or understanding is reduced) to access and enjoy a place, product, or service, and to do so freely and independently.'

This difficult task involves social transformation: a reconfiguration of an environment eagerly seeking change, as well as new actions and strategies.

...When we do this, we realize that accessibility is a subtle and effective way of ensuring social inclusion and preventing discrimination."

--David E. Cedeno (Fundador y director de Discapacidad Cero) (Founder and Director of Zero Disability).

Councillor McEvoy acknowledged that there are many different definitions for universal accessibility and noted that the quote was from a gentleman who founded an organization for the purpose of seeking universal accessibility. He stated that this is a potential principle for the Committee to consider and that all of the principles will not necessarily be defined by the time a report goes to Council regarding the Accessibility Plan.

Principle: POUR

POUR = Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust.

“Many of the technology challenges faced by disabled people/people with disabilities can be described using one of the POUR principles. Read to learn more about POUR.”

--CUNY, Central University of New York, Library Services, “Accessibility Toolkit.”

Councillor McEvoy shared that this could be a guideline supported by Council that exists at City Hall to guide staff.

Principle: Visible and Invisible Disabilities

Councillor McEvoy shared that the City of New Westminster was involved in the formation of Honour House, which provides housing for first responders and emergency workers while receiving treatment. From the beginning, the mandate was for people with visible *and* invisible injuries.

It is worth the City looking at how to incorporate that dual meaning more robustly, effectively, compassionately, and with greater expertise.

Principle: Standards of Accessibility

Councillor McEvoy advised that the Americans with Disabilities Act has five standards with a lot of sub-standards in the following categories:

1. Information and Communication Standards.
2. Employment Standards.
3. Transportation Standards.
4. Design of Public Spaces Standards.
5. Customer Service Standards.

He noted that the City could adopt a “Standards for Accessibility,” incorporating those similar to the Americans with Disabilities Act as an example, and look at how British Columbia’s own Standards of Accessibility can be combined for a Standards of Accessibility statement to guide city staff and actions.

Principle: Information, Goals, Measurability

“What gets measured gets done.”

“If you’re measuring something then the probability of you acting on the information you now have is a lot higher.”

- Peter Druckeer, Management Consultant.

Councillor McEvoy stated that the City of New Westminster needs a way to compile statistics, create measurements, and be able to identify progress and areas still needing improvement. This is in almost all other fields. For example, if we can define the housing needs in the City, we can define how well we are meeting them. This is often something that is missing in the disability work of institutions – actually understanding the need.

Principle: Inclusion

Councillor McEvoy shared that disability justice is a principle of inclusion that has a specific meaning. He queried what inclusion means to disability work and how would that be a mandate for the City.

Principle: “Nothing for Us Without Us”

Councillor McEvoy revealed that he has personal experiences with this aspect and that money should not be spent on something that is not actually going to work. He advised that “Nothing for us without us” could be an actual principle that the City adopts.

Principle: Before and After

Councillor McEvoy acknowledged that this principle could be sensitive as we do not want people to feel inadequate about the work that they have done or are doing when the “before” is discussed.

He shared that examples of before and after could include that change is ongoing, professional, inclusive, and intersectional. The before would still be a part of the City’s work and the after would be continuous development of capacity, expertise, programs, capital, ongoing and permanent effort and improvement.

Examples of before and after include:

- One-off projects vs a capital program to create Universal Accessibility;
- Side of desk projects and personnel vs professionalization (job descriptions and permanent tasks, development of expertise and training, taking of courses, attending of conferences, journals, accessibility work as part of job descriptions or work assignments with adequate time fully allotted):

- Internal champions vs empowered internal champions, internal work assignments, regular internal meetings, some departments' vs all departments and units, Senior Management Committee regular agenda items;
- Waiting for accessibility through development, and gradualism, vs a timeline to full accessibility in the city;
- Accessibility as a special or extra cost (when beyond building code) vs advanced accessibility as core cost requirement of every project.

Councillor McEvoy advised that these suggested principles will be emailed to Committee members for their consideration and feedback and that this will be an ongoing topic for discussion at meetings, including a session specifically dedicated to a roundtable sharing of ideas, without debate. The goal would be to understand what people's values are and how to incorporate them in the principles and, as the work progresses, stakeholders and the public will be included in the discussion.

Councillor McEvoy suggested that one universal accessibility project that could be undertaken would be removing all of the three-step entrances at facilities, noting that the Committee would do a good job to provide a framework for this project.

In response to a question from a Committee member, Councillor McEvoy stated that the City must have a mandate to train staff in accessibility with ongoing responsibility of the work that is done.

Discussion ensued and Committee members provided the following comments:

- We do not want to lose the knowledge and experiences that have already happened; however, it will be great to have accessibility incorporated into the City's culture;
- Accessibility considerations should be ingrained in capital project planning and not an afterthought;
- This problem can be seen everywhere – projects being done inadequately without fulsome consideration or thought;
- This is the right track to be on and it is good that it's for the long term;
- A lot of barriers that are encountered are a result of accessibility being an afterthought.

7.2 Committee Consultation

Karla Olson, Committee Member, queried what the Accessibility Advisory Committee's role is with respect to consultation and what influence the Committee may have over Council decisions. In response, Councillor McEvoy advised that the Accessible British Columbia Act requires that cities consult with their accessibility committee to provide feedback on recommendations that go to Council for consideration, including decisions around staff resources and the city's budget.

Discussion ensued and Committee members noted the importance of staff reporting back to committees with updates on the recommendations that they have sent to Council in order to empower the committee.

Councillor McEvoy shared that Council discussions regarding recommendations are made public, with the exception of a rare few, and that sometimes Council will amend a recommendation and may ask staff to come back with a report as to what the impact of the request would have with respect to finance and staffing.

7.3 The Importance of Universal Design

Karla Olson, Committee Member, expressed that universal design has not been discussed at Committee meetings enough. She shared that the term universal design was coined by an architect named Ron L. Mace, a wheelchair user, in response to barrier-free design. The thought was that when you looked at barrier-free design, the focus was on the disability. She noted the removal of the three-step entrances as mentioned previously during the meeting would benefit more than just wheel chair users, such as families with strollers, and that one of the nine principles of universal design is to create a design that works for the broadest amount of people.

Ms. Olson shared that at her school she addressed an issue regarding the Dean's List which required students to be enrolled in a certain number of classes at once in order to be eligible to be on the Dean's List. The school reviewed the standard and reduced the barrier of the number of fulltime courses required to make being on the Dean's List more accessible; however, as it is still based off the original system and she proposed using the university design model to open the List up to every student who attends five course sequentially. She also noted that a lot of disabled students rely on grants to fund their education and can only attend part time. She advised that the example was a good way to look at universal design since if we

look at applying universal design at the start of a project or initiative, then it will not need to be fixed later.

7.4 Community Advisory Assembly

Anne Bélanger, Committee Member, sought clarification regarding how the new Community Advisory Assembly may impact the Accessibility Advisory Committee. In response, Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk, advised that the Community Advisory Assembly would not be replacing the Accessibility Advisory Committee which is mandated under the Accessible British Columbia Act. Ms. Cook offered to invite someone from the City's Public Engagement Team to speak at a future meeting regarding the Assembly.

8. END OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 7:22 p.m.

9. UPCOMING MEETINGS

September 27

October 25

November 22

Certified correct,

Original Signed

Councillor Jaimie McEvoy

Original Signed

Carilyn Cook, Committee Clerk