

Accessible Path of Travel
Comments from the Seniors' Advisory Committee

Good evening members of Council

I am here today on behalf of the members of the Seniors Advisory Committee.

We are deeply disappointed that after waiting five years for this report we have no alternative but to tell you that we do not support staff's recommendations.

Council's assignment to staff was to make the accessible-path-of-travel by-law the companion piece to the new Building Code amendments. Together these two amendments would have made Vancouver a leader in accessible building requirements for single homes, duplexes and stacked townhouse.

What you have before you eliminates many accessibility features from the building code as a condition of legislating a path of travel to no more than 20% of these selected types of new builds.

Staff has failed to recognize the growing population of people who want to age in place with provisions for visitors who have limited mobility.

In our minds this was never an either or proposition; the two pieces should go hand in hand.

Staff organized only one joint meeting with advisory committee members, builders and architects. This meeting was poorly designed and facilitated and there was never any effort to bring the groups together to create any constructive dialogue. From that point forward staff negotiated separately with the advisory committee members and industry.

That brings us to this evening where we are speaking against this by-law change. You will have only some of the information you need to make an informed decision; the yellow memo does not accurately reflect some of the opinions expressed by those who attended the last information session. Therefore, we are forced to oppose the report.

Our committee just published a major report on isolation and loneliness. The SILAS report notes that the inability to visit or receive visitors can be a risk factor for isolation and loneliness. Instead of advancing the City's often repeated goals to become accessible, socially engaged and age-friendly this by-law amendment is a giant step backward.

On February 21 this year you assigned staff the task of reporting back on curb cuts. On May 2nd you told staff to begin work on an accessibility strategy. Now staff is asking you to make a decision that that will enshrine an accessible path of travel at the expense of Building Code requirements that make units accessible.

Our committee wanted the opportunity to make newly built homes accessible at grade and with modifications that would allow owners/tenants to age in place. What we have instead is a reduction in the accessible features for the residents in lieu of a path of travel allowing them to receive visitors with mobility issues.

To summarize these are the committee's specific objections:

There was no meaningful discussion with the other players (builders, developers and designers) over the five-years since this matter was referred to staff.

Trading an accessible path to a building for a reduction in the accessibility features in the incorporated in a building is not appropriate

Mandating that only 20% of new builds include an accessible path of travel, and allowing exemptions to that number, is unacceptable.

We are extremely disappointed that after waiting five long years, we have received a by-law amendment insufficient and unacceptable to us and the seniors we represent.

I am here to tell you that this by-law change is not something that we support.

We urge you to reject this proposal and send it back for a more appropriate consultation with all stakeholders.

Thank you

Colleen McGuinness
Chair, Seniors' Advisory Committee