



REPORT

Report Date: October 22, 2021
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VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: November 3, 2021
[Submit comments to Council](#)

TO: Standing Committee on City Finance and Services
FROM: General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services
SUBJECT: Interim Update: *Accessibility Strategy, Phase 1* Development

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council receive this interim report as an update of work to date on the development of Phase I of the Accessibility Strategy, including:
 - i. the draft accessibility commitment statements; and
 - ii. the attached engagement summary.
- B. THAT Council provide provisional approval of the proposed Accessibility Commitment Statements, subject to final community engagement.
- C. THAT Council approve the proposed Action While Planning priority actions that can be achieved within existing resources for immediate implementation.
- D. THAT Council receive for consideration the proposed Action While Planning priority actions that require additional funding of \$200,000 which has been identified as a potential investment for evaluation as part of the 2022 Operating Budget process.

REPORT SUMMARY

This interim report provides an update on the ongoing work of developing Phase I of the City of Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy, as directed by Council in September 2018 (RTS No. 1258). To support and inform the development of the Accessibility Strategy, staff were directed to establish an Accessibility Task Force with membership from the Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee and the Seniors' Advisory Committee, as well as the the People with Lived Experience Advisory on Mental Health and Substance Use.

This report outlines the process that staff, in collaboration with the Accessibility Task Force, are using to develop the strategy, including engagement with other external and internal stakeholders. The work is also aligned with the City's commitment to equity and Council's recent approval of the Equity Framework, focused on creating conditions for the well-being of all. The central focus of the Accessibility Strategy is on people with disabilities.

For the purposes of this strategy, the term 'persons with disabilities' refers to people who experience physical, mental health, cognitive, communication, intellectual, sensory, or age-related impairments, inclusive of seniors and others with age-related impairments, and people with lived experience of mental health challenges or substance use. This work reflects the City's commitment to support the full participation of persons with disabilities by establishing and maintaining inclusive services, programs and infrastructure and by identifying, removing and preventing potential barriers. The work of making Vancouver accessible is broad and complex and calls for an expanded focus beyond persons with disabilities; it is a long-term commitment that will require collective and intentional actions across all City departments.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

On May 2, 2018, City Council passed a motion on accessibility (see Appendix A) which included a request for a report back to Council with recommendations for moving forward with an Accessibility Strategy.

On September 18, 2018, a staff report (RTS No. 12581) was presented to Council with the following recommendations:

- A. Development of Phase 1 of an Accessibility Strategy in 2019
- B. Convening of an Accessibility Task Force with membership from the Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee, the Seniors' Advisory Committee, and the People with Lived Experience Advisory on Mental Health and Substance Use Committee

On September 18, 2018, Council approved the development of Phase 1 of an Accessibility Strategy and identified a set of high-level deliverables and recommendations for additional phases.

CITY MANAGER'S/GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS

Council direction to develop the Accessibility Strategy aligns with the recent passing of the Provincial and Federal Accessibility Legislation. This interim report provides a progress update on Phase I of the strategy development, including a summary of the recent community engagement. Subject to approval, the draft accessibility commitments will strengthen the City's capacity to build on existing efforts to address accessibility across City business units. Accessibility is fundamental to everyone's quality of life, well-being and engagement in the social, economic, cultural, spiritual and political aspects of society.

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY TASK FORCE COMMENTS

The Accessibility Strategy Task Force has prepared the following comments:

1. The proposed Accessibility City Strategy (“the Strategy”) provides the City of Vancouver (“COV”) a prime opportunity to showcase its commitment to developing an inclusive, welcoming city for all citizens and visitors.
2. The primary goal of the Strategy is to establish exemplary accessibility practices, protocols and standards throughout COV programs, policies and procedures. It is acknowledged that this goal will require a progressive process, involving clear, measurable objectives.
3. The successful implementation of the Strategy will require a thorough understanding by all COV staff as to the necessary funding, resources and training which will be required for staff to understand the concepts and philosophy surrounding accessibility and the necessary culture change which must accompany this initiative. It is imperative that all COV staff be introduced immediately to the concept of an accessibility lens, through which COV operations will soon be conducted, in order to ensure the occurrence of the fundamental changes required for the successful implementation of, and adherence to, the central principles of the Strategy.
4. Proper monitoring and regular reporting of the progress and successes of the Strategy must be an integral part of this initiative. The objectives of the Strategy must be clear and measurable and sufficient resources must be allotted to support these requirements. This necessity provides transparency, secures the integrity of the Strategy and promotes COV as a progressive, inclusive and compassionate place to live.
5. The Final Report of this Strategy, scheduled to go before City Council in Spring 2022, will require explanation of those fundamental terms, concepts and principles, and provide context, vital to establishing a thorough understanding of, this initiative. For example, terms like accessibility and disability are not easily defined, while the concepts of intersectionality and universal design are difficult but important aspect inherent to this discussion. The importance of this educational aspect cannot be overstated and will be crucial to ensuring the Strategy’s successful implementation, integrity and longevity.

REPORT

Background/Context

The work of developing the City’s Accessibility Strategy is one of several identity-based strategies through which the Equity Framework will be implemented and operationalized. While the aspect of identity that is of focus here is disabilities, persons with disabilities are often discriminated against in ways that intersect with other forms of discrimination such as sexism, ageism, racism, homophobia, classism, xenophobia and more. This work also aligns with the City of Reconciliation Framework as it seeks to address the root causes of ableism that are intricately connected to settler colonialism and capitalism.

The work of developing an accessibility strategy is complex and highly varied. Insights from staff engagement and research have made it clear that there is no “one size fits all” approach to creating an accessible city. Such an approach would be an antithesis to accessibility as it does

not recognize the nuances of people's lived experiences. From the definition of disability, to what constitutes accessibility, to the best approaches to use, the development and implementation of the Accessibility Strategy will require deep listening, reflection, curiosity, and an openness to stepping into and working within this complexity. Staff will need to work closely with communities to develop solutions to the challenge of inadequate access, evolving these solutions towards ensuring full access and inclusion as the City's understanding grows.

The emerging Accessibility Strategy will aim to serve as a guide to help raise the collective consciousness amongst City staff on how people with disabilities experience the city and how to identify, address and prevent barriers to their full participation in city life, in particular areas for which the City has jurisdiction. A focus on people with disabilities is in full recognition that accessibility work in general is broad in its scope. This strategy is informed by a disability justice lens that considers how disability intersects with identities such as age, gender, race, and sexual orientation, immigration, and religion. This is an '*and/and*' approach that prioritizes disability and takes an intersectionality lens. As indicated earlier, the City will use the term 'persons with disabilities' to reference the complexity and intersectionality of the spectrum of the lived experiences identified above.

Jurisdictional context

In 2019, federal legislation (*Accessible Canada Act*) was passed and the government is currently working on a set of accessibility standards; these will influence similar efforts undertaken by provinces and, by extension, by cities. Following the federal legislation, work began on the BC Accessibility Legislation, *Accessible BC*, which was passed in June 2021. Three other provinces (Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia) currently have legislation in place: in Ontario, the legislation mandates requirements for cities (e.g. establishing accessibility advisory committees, compliance with provincial accessibility standards, etc.). Manitoba and Nova Scotia are both working on accessibility standards. In October 2021, the City of Victoria passed their Accessibility Framework and Accessibility and Inclusion Policy.

The City of Vancouver's emerging Accessibility Strategy aligns with both federal and provincial legislation that focus on safeguarding and advancing the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities. With this knowledge, and in compliance with federal and provincial accessibility standards, the City's emerging Strategy will ultimately recommend to City Council that the City aim to identify, remove and prevent systemic barriers for persons with disabilities.

Process to date

The development of the Accessibility Strategy is taking place in phases.

As directed by Council in September 2018, Phase One includes a set of high-level deliverables and recommendations for additional phases. These include:

- A clear, comprehensive statement of City principles around accessibility - focused on physical, mental health, cognitive, communication, intellectual, sensory, or age-related impairments - and including clarifying terms such as "Universal Design", "Accessibility", and "Disability"
- Dedicated resource(s) with appropriate expertise to coordinate accessibility work across City departments
- Identification of internal and external stakeholders and how projects will engage with them (a stakeholder engagement plan)

- Identification of key barriers to accessibility and prioritization of efforts to address accessibility in the City
- Clarify responsibilities of City departments for addressing accessibility in their roles within the organization
- Outline accountability of departments for implementation of the Strategy
- A scope for the next phases of the Accessibility Strategy, including goals, timelines, and resource

Phase I includes the process underway of developing a draft strategy that sets out commitments, key definitions, principles, areas of focus, a monitoring and accountability framework and outlines future phases of this work, including recommendations for broader engagement and the development of a multi-year action plan. The final proposed Phase 1 Accessibility Strategy will be presented to Council in Q1, 2022.

Since the last update to Council (Memo, April 13, 2021), staff have continued to meet regularly with the Accessibility Task Force which has provided guidance to staff since the inception of this work. The Task Force is made up of representatives from the People with Disabilities Council Advisory Committee and Seniors' Advisory Committee. Given the prominent role that the Task Force plays as champions of accessibility at the City, staff anticipate that they will continue to play an active role throughout the development of the strategy. The Task Force has been actively involved in the creation of the draft accessibility commitment statements and identifying proposed priority actions.

Staff have also completed engagement with various stakeholder groups comprised of people with lived experience of disability, family members and/or caregivers, through targeted community dialogues that were facilitated and/or co-facilitated with community organizations who provide services to these groups. In addition to these dialogues, a survey was distributed to a selected group of external stakeholders, building on the information generated through meet and greet and dialogue sessions. Shared through *Shape Your City*, the goal of the survey was to seek feedback on how the City can ensure that people with disabilities feel included and that barriers to participation in city life are identified and removed – the questions mirrored those in the dialogue sessions.

Internally, a conversation was facilitated with the staff with disabilities *Employee Resource Group*, to hear about staff experiences in working for the City as an employer. A cross-departmental staff working group has also been established and is now meeting regularly to inform the development of the strategy. Representation from all City departments is needed to ensure that accessibility gaps across the City are documented, proposed actions are identified for each department and proposed actions and responses move forward in collaboration.

Modelling Accessibility in Engagement

As staff tasked with the responsibility of developing the Accessibility Strategy, it is important for staff to model accessible practices in the engagement process. Despite time limitations, staff ensured that each dialogue session was accessible by taking the following actions:

- Co-hosted the meetings with a variety of community organizations;
- Prepared meeting materials in accessible format and shared in advance with participants – e.g., the participants' guide was prepared in collaboration with a partner organization to ensure that it was written in plain language;

- Procured an ASL interpreter for each dialogue session;
- Provided Closed Captioning at each dialogue session;
- Began meetings half-hour early to allow adequate time for participants to set up their technology; and
- Captured the discussion in detailed meeting notes that were then sent out to participants to ensure accurate representation of their ideas.

In total, there were 114 community stakeholders, constituting 11 different groups. There was one “general” group for people with disabilities and ten groups of people with disabilities and other intersecting identities.

Type of Group No. of Participants

<i>City Advisory Committees</i>	7
<i>Community Action Team (people living with mental health concerns and substance use)</i>	5
<i>Parents/Caregivers of people with disabilities</i>	10
<i>Individuals with disabilities</i>	16
<i>2SLGBTQIIA</i>	13
<i>Seniors</i>	15
<i>Immigrants</i>	6
<i>NPO staff working with disability organizations</i>	14
<i>Sex workers</i>	9
<i>Deaf/Hard of hearing/Deafblind</i>	12
<i>City staff with disabilities (employee resource group)</i>	5

A summary of - “*what we heard*” - from this initial engagement with the stakeholders identified above is included in Appendix A.

Strategic Analysis

Disability, ableism and accessibility

Disabilities are part of the human condition. Almost everyone will experience a temporary, periodic, or permanent change in their functioning at some point in their life, and those who live to old age will likely experience increasing difficulties in functioning. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), disability is an umbrella term that describes impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, and the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with health condition) and that individual’s contextual factors (environmental and personal factors). WHO describes impairment as a biological or physical factor (e.g. a genetic “defect,” environmental pollution or an accident) that causes difference in body function and/or

structure. Disability then comes about in not being able to function in assumed “normal” ways. It is the impairment impacted by barriers within the environmental, structural or social context. Consequently, socially imposed values are placed on differences in body/mind functioning and/or structure, impacting one’s sense of belonging and overall wellbeing.

There are various models that have been used to understand disability: the medical model focuses on the ‘limitations’ of disabled bodies, calling into question the ways in which non-standardized bodies move, think, speak and act – the premise that it is the “fault of the individual” and that that the individual must change; the economic model views disabled people in terms of their contributions or lack thereof to the capitalist society; the charity model sees basic human rights as “gifts” that the wealthy non-disabled people bestow upon disabled people; and the social model explains disability as a social construct invigorated by institutional policies, processes and practices. The World Health Organization adopted the bio-psycho-social model of disability, recognizing the physical, environmental and social factors that impact how people with disabilities experience society. The understanding of disability as a social construct emphasizes a rights-based approach that rejects the assertion that human rights are a charitable “gift” but rather an inalienable right accorded to everyone, including disabled people. Indeed, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [outlines](#) the ways in which the rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities should be promoted, protected and respected.

Despite the fact that disability is part of the human condition and a human rights issue, the reality is that people with disabilities experience discrimination and multiple barriers in their everyday life. At the root of this discrimination and existing barriers is the system of ableism. [Ableism](#) is a system of thought and organizing based on the construction of disabled bodies and minds as inferior, used to justify neglect, abuse and disposal of people with disabilities who are seen as having less value, burdensome and unprofitable in a capitalist society. An ableist society assigns advantage and disadvantage based on one’s (dis)ability and other social categories; people born with a disability or who acquire a disability at some point in their life have for a long time been seen as less valuable than those who are able-bodied.

Ableism is both overt and implicit. It is embedded in society’s attitudes, beliefs, social interactions, practices, systems and structures. Ableism is largely an unconscious mindset based on learned values and prejudices which distort the realities faced by persons with disabilities trying to deal with the impacts of decisions or omissions. Everyone has a responsibility to reflect on ableism and disrupt ableist attitudes, beliefs and practices when they show up in daily interactions. It is important to name and challenge the dichotomy of disabled versus non-disabled bodies because it works to deny the broad spectrum of human abilities and functioning that exists and the potential for cross-movement solidarity.

Various terms are used to describe the disability community, including ‘persons with disabilities’ and ‘disabled people.’ The term ‘[disabled people](#)’ is used in alignment with the social model of disability described above, which recognizes that people with impairments are disabled by society through the effects of ableist attitudes and systems rather than the functioning of people’s minds, bodies and sense. For the purposes of this strategy, the City will use the term ‘persons with disabilities’ to reference the complexity and intersectionality of the spectrum of lived experiences identified earlier.

Generalizations about people with disabilities are common and fail to see the differences and uniqueness of each person with disabilities. While persons with disabilities share a common experience of physical and attitudinal barriers in an ableist society, they are diverse in their

disabilities, gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, immigration, among others. These compounding identities have implications for how these individuals will fair in society. For instance, a woman living with severe pain and from a lower socioeconomic background may not have adequate access to healthcare and may experience discrimination on the basis of her gender. On the other hand, a wealthy man with a similar disability will have access to the healthcare he needs and will not have to worry about gender discrimination. Planning, program and/or service decisions regarding supports to people with disabilities must take intersecting identities into consideration to avoid simplistic solutions that may further marginalize people, and instead, move towards a more nuanced and inclusive approach to city building.

Reminder: Why a focus an accessibility?

The responsibility of the City of Vancouver to uphold and protect human rights includes creating an accessible city for everyone, prioritizing the needs of persons with disabilities. The *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) and more recently the *Global Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) have sought ways to challenge ableism and to urge countries and indeed municipal governments to take concrete actions to be more accessible and inclusive. Nationally and provincially, the *Accessibility Canada Act* and the *Accessible British Columbia Act* provide the mandate for developing and enacting accessibility standards. Research shows that accessibility efforts focus mainly on the needs of wheelchair users, overlooking the different physical needs of people with disability, including those with mental, cognitive, developmental and other invisible disabilities. The forthcoming Accessibility Strategy is an opportunity for the City to comply with international and regional standards, and strengthen and expand on its current efforts to building a more accessible and inclusive city.

It is difficult to solve a problem that remains unnamed. Without naming the harmful attitudes and system of ableism, the City stands to miss the opportunity to build on existing actions to address crucial issues that stakeholders have identified as key to making Vancouver an inclusive, welcoming and accessible city for all. As a city government with jurisdiction over many areas affecting people's daily lives, the City needs to be in compliance with human rights law and other legislation. Neglecting to address the needs of persons with disabilities has human rights implications for which the City can be held legally liable. Also, as taxpayers, persons with disabilities have the right to receive equitable services, programs and accessible physical infrastructure.

An accessible city benefits everyone. For example, when there are curb cuts on sidewalks, not only do people using wheelchairs benefit, but those with strollers and on scooters also benefit. Or when there is a sign using plain language, not only do people with developmental disabilities benefit, but those with English as a second language also benefit. When the City prioritizes those who experience the most need, everyone benefit. This work is about evolving the culture of the City through addressing systemic barriers, committing to education, improving and expanding service delivery, and creating a welcoming city and work environment for people with disabilities. Ultimately, everyone has a role to play in challenging the biases and stereotypes that exist about people with disabilities. This starts by naming ableist acts and language when one encounter them, and telling different stories about disability. In the spirit of "*Nothing about us without us...*" these efforts should be led by people with disabilities and focus on shifting public thinking towards an acceptance that all peoples' bodies are valuable, and that one body form or way of being is not more powerful or worthy than another.

Draft Accessibility Commitments

The proposed Accessibility Strategy will recommend that City articulate an explicit commitment to support the full participation of persons with disabilities by establishing and maintaining inclusive services, programs and infrastructure, and by identifying, removing and preventing barriers.

At the center of the emerging draft commitment is the principle of “Nothing about us without us...,” a recognition that the City needs to make space and elevate the voices and leadership of persons with disabilities. Therefore, staff will propose that the City adopts the following commitments, co-developed with the Task Force, to guide the prioritization of City efforts towards creating a more accessible city. These commitments will be finalized following further engagement over the coming months. However, this interim update report presents an opportunity for staff to seek Council feedback on the emerging strategy and its commitments. Accordingly, staff are requesting provisional approval of the draft commitments as a signal that the work is on the right track.

Draft Commitment Statements

The City of Vancouver Commits to:	Description:
Respecting the rights, dignity and independence of persons with disabilities over the life course	<p>Because of ableist attitudes and behaviors, people with disabilities have often been treated as 'less than' those who are able bodied. To challenge these harmful attitudes and in alignment with the <i>BC Human Rights Code</i> and the <i>Accessible BC Act</i>, efforts towards making the city more accessible have to start by upholding and respecting the rights, dignity and independence of people with disabilities.</p> <p>These efforts must take into account that disabilities can occur at any time in a person's life and maximizing inclusion will require differing adaptations and interventions depending on age and circumstance.</p>
Fostering a safe environment where all people feel valued, included and a sense of belonging	Many marginalized groups have pointed out that they do not experience the city as a safe place, and that they do not feel like they belong. Safety, both physical and psychological, and belonging are fundamental to building the accessible city envisioned, and thus, this is a core focus of the Accessible Strategy.
Creating opportunities for persons with disabilities to be involved in decision-making and to participate fully in all aspects of city life	An accessible city is one where everyone, and in particular, people with disabilities can fully participate in employment, entertainment, recreation, etc. Also, because they are the experts of their own lives and know what is best for their communities, it is important for people with disabilities to have opportunities to be at decision-making tables.

Demonstrating how the knowledge and perspectives of persons with disabilities are integrated across all City processes, policies and decision-making	As the City works to reflect the diversity of Vancouver’s population in its staff compliment, attracting and retaining employees with disabilities is a critical part of this effort. Demonstrating how the views and perspectives of persons with disabilities are integrated in all City processes is an important step towards removing barriers and building trust between the City and disability communities.
Listening to and addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in City programs, services, and physical infrastructure	The majority of society is designed mainly through the lenses of those who are able bodied. This means that many city programs, services and physical infrastructure are not accessible to persons with disabilities. An inclusive and accessible city, therefore, is one that listens to and commits to addressing the needs of those who are most negatively impacted by its planning processes including the built environment.

Proposed Action While Planning Priorities

As part of the development of the Accessibility Strategy, City departments have been working to develop an inventory of existing accessibility initiatives across the City. An inventory of these initiatives will be presented to Council in Q1, 2022 with the presentation of the final draft Strategy.

Following public engagement on the Accessibility Strategy undertaken to date, stakeholders have identified additional priority Action While Planning initiatives that would help the City to address existing barriers to accessibility.

The first Table below (Table A) identifies the recommended actions that do not require additional resources and that could proceed now. The second Table (Table B) identifies priority actions that will have immediate impact and corresponding budget estimates for implementing them.

Table A: Action While Planning priorities: Achievable with existing resources

Proposed Action While Planning Initiatives: Existing Resources <i>Achievable within existing resources</i>	Proposed Lead Department
1. Development of an Accessibility Toolkit	Social Policy, CityStudio Vancouver & UBC
2. Reviewing job postings to ensure employment equity and accessibility	All-departments

3. Recognize December 3 – UN International Day for Persons with Disabilities	Communications and External Relations and Protocol (City Clerk’s Office)
4. Establishment of an NPO cross-disability network	Social Policy
5. Inventory of accessible facilities	Park Board
6. Continued work on Universal Inclusive Design and Accessibility Program implementation for City owned buildings <i>Current scope of work is funded; implementation across all City sites is planned over-time.</i>	REFM/FPD
7. Update current inventory of different languages spoken among staff	Communications
8. Defining accommodation process for City Staff	Human Resources, Equity Office

Table B: Action While Planning priorities: Achievable with additional 2022 investment

B: Proposed Action While Planning Initiatives – Additional Resources <i>Funding for consideration in 2022 Budget Deliberations</i>	Proposed Lead Departments	Proposed Budget
1. Education and training for senior decision makers (including Council + CLT)	Equity Office Human Resources	\$50,000 <i>ongoing</i>
2. Provide Closed Captioning and ASL interpreters at all City Council meetings and PDAC meetings	City Clerk’s Office	\$90,000 <i>ongoing</i>
3. Create an online directory (CoV Public Website) of accessible services and supports for persons with disabilities	Information Technology ACCS – Social Policy	\$60,000 <i>one-time</i>

Next Steps

A detailed report - "*What We Heard*" - will be shared publicly with various stakeholders in early December. To finalize phase 1 of the Accessibility Strategy, the following items will be completed:

- Public engagement with Indigenous communities and youth;
- Collaborating with the Accessibility Task Force to finalize definition of key concepts, principles and areas of focus;
- Development of a monitoring and accountability framework;
- Recommendations for long-term and short-term actions to implement the Accessibility Strategy;
- Proposed further engagement; and
- Phase I final report and presentation to Council – Q1, 2022.

Public/Civic Agency Input

Summary of community engagement (Appendix A).

Accessibility Task Force comments are provided at the outset of this report.

Implications/Related Issues/Risk

Financial

Staff have included a recommendation for a funding request of \$200,000 to support three Action While Planning priorities. Funding for these priorities are not currently included in the 2022 draft budget and will need to be considered and prioritized by Council as part of the 2022 budget process.

CONCLUSION

The work of developing the Accessibility Strategy reconfirms the City's commitment to creating an equitable and welcoming City for all. Amidst competing strategies and priorities, the ability to have positive impact for people with disabilities and other marginalized communities will be dependent on the implementation and monitoring of identified actions. Adequate resources will be required to further this work, create awareness and provide education opportunities for staff, make space for enacting the principle of "*nothing about us without us*" and more. Ultimately, the City will be more accessible when those who are most impacted can attest to feeling welcome and a sense of belonging.

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Community Engagement – Summary

Introduction

The process of creating the City's first Accessibility Strategy requires deep listening to better understand the diverse perspectives of persons with disabilities, including how they navigate and participate in their community and the daily challenges and barriers they may face. Accessibility is fundamental to everyone's quality of life, well-being and engagement in the social, economic, cultural, spiritual and political aspects of society.

Almost everyone will experience a temporary, periodic, or permanent change in their functioning at some point in their life, and as people age, they may experience increasing difficulties in functioning. Disabilities are a part of the human condition. It is also generally recognized and understood also know that individuals have complex identities that influences their perspectives and experiences, which means that barriers to inclusion may be a result of different layers of identities that intersect with one another.

Accessibility refers to the absence of barriers that prevent individuals and/or groups from participating, contributing and benefiting in all aspects of society. It is a key component of community inclusion and resilience. Done well, accessibility ensures all individuals can access services, navigate the cities in which they live and work, and feel a sense of belonging when they spend time in public places. There is no "one size fits all" approach to developing an accessible community. Accessibility differs depending on who you ask – the specific experiences, identities and perspectives determine what they need across the life course and what they care most about as it relates to accessibility. The objectives of the engagement were to:

- Raise awareness about the importance of improving accessibility in the City of Vancouver.
- Uphold participation rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the City's commitment to civic engagement as a vital part of the democratic process.
- Hear from and build relationships with those with lived experience, their families and/or caregivers and organizations providing services.

The summary that follows provides a high level overview of what staff heard from the disability community – compiled from a series of in-depth conversations and a survey. Staff received much rich, detailed information that reflects the seven proposed areas of focus for the draft strategy along with several emerging themes. There were also some aspects of "what we heard" that are outside of the City's role and responsibility however, they are included because people have complex and diverse needs that must be respected and understood within the context of their lives, and the City can play an important role as an advocate to other public bodies and levels of government.

Community Engagement

Following the "nothing about us without us" principle, staff engaged with the disability community to learn from a variety of perspectives and experiences. Three methods of community engagement were used: meet and greets with organizations, targeted dialogue sessions, and an online survey.

Organization Meet and Greet Sessions

Staff met with several organizations during the months of January – April 2021 that represented persons with disabilities. The meet and greet sessions involved an exchange of information between City staff and community organizations on the City's actions to increase accessibility and organizations programs and services in support of people with disabilities. That the organization the City met with represented a diversity of disabilities and intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, such as the Disabilities Developmental Association, MOSAIC, Creating Accessible Neighborhoods, Rick Hansen Foundation, Spinal Cord Injury BC, and the BC Centre for Ability.

On-Line Community Dialogues

The community dialogues were structured as “intimate conversations between friends” which covered topics such as the meaning of accessibility, the accessibility barriers, and recommendations for the City. There were 14 conversations that took place on-line through the months of April – August 2021. Each conversation was approximately 2 hours long. There were between 5 and 15 participants in attendance which allowed for rich and meaningful conversations. Some of the dialogue sessions were hosted in partnership with community organizations and some hosted by City staff. Meaningful and accessible participation was a priority. ASL and Close Captioning were provided for all sessions and additional accessibility features were provided based on participant needs (e.g. language interpreters, plain language documents, etc.).

Shape Your City Survey

A Shape Your City survey was developed and made available to people who were not able to attend a dialogue session or who prefer this method of engagement. The survey was also sent to all of the meet and greet organizations to share with their members.

Three broad, open-ended questions, co-designed by the Accessibility Task Force and City staff, were asked at the dialogue sessions and in the Shape Your City Survey. The three questions were:

1. When you hear the word accessibility, what does it mean to you? What does an accessible city look like?
2. What are the things that get in the way (barriers) of you or someone you know being able to participate in and contribute to community life in Vancouver?
3. What would make it easier for you or someone you know to participate in and contribute to community life in Vancouver?

There was also an opportunity for participants to provide any additional comments to the City about what to consider when developing an Accessibility Strategy. By asking open-ended questions no limits were placed on responses and respondents were able to convey their ideas and perspectives based on their experience and in their own words.

Who We Heard From

Because people are the experts of their own lives and know what is best for their communities, it was important for the majority of participants to have a lived experience of disability. It was left to

the individuals to self-identify as having a disability. Participants were provided with the definition of people with disabilities being used in the development of the Accessibility Strategy.

The various perspectives that were represented in the community engagement are outlined below.

1. **People with lived experience of a disability** - took into consideration the multiple identities that intersect or overlap including age, race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity.
2. **Family members and caregivers** - parents, guardians, siblings and support workers.
3. **Organizations providing services** - staff or board members that work in the field of disability or other organizations delivering services to a range of people that could include persons who identify as having a disability.

Organization Meets and Greets	27
On-Line Community Dialogues	14
Total Number of People that attended the Community Conversations	114
Completed Surveys through Shape Your City	89

Types of Disabilities Reported	Participant Profiles
Vision loss, Partially Sighted	Community Advocates
Brain Injury	Seniors
Stroke	Refugees
Mobility Issues	Landed Immigrants
Spinal Cord Injury	Sex Workers
Degenerative muscle disease	Queer
Cerebral Palsy	Young Adults
Autism	Service Providers
Chronic Pain/Illness	Family - Parents, Siblings
Intellectual/Developmental	Support Workers
Sensory (light, noise, etc.)	
Neurodiversity	
Mental Health	

Overarching Messages from the Community

People shared stories about the challenges that they experienced and the barriers that they faced everyday including physical, social, environmental, attitudinal, financial and communication and information-related. People also shared the importance of the strategy in building on the human rights of British Columbians to ensure respect for the inherent dignity of the individual. In addition, there were a number of “over-arching” messages that people felt were important for the City to pay attention to as the strategy is being developed. These include:

1. **Implement Accountability Mechanisms** – expressed appreciation for the City’s work to develop an Accessibility Strategy. While it represents a step in the right direction, there was also strong messaging about the importance of the strategy and how it needs to be

well implemented with the appropriate accountability mechanisms in place.

2. **Increase Education Opportunities** - systematic ableism and social stigma are obstacles to participation and inclusion for people with disabilities. Ableism is the belief that somehow persons with disabilities are less valuable or less capable and often underlies negative attitudes, stereotypes and stigma which can lead to discrimination. When this is combined with other forms of discrimination due to other identities such as religion, age, race/ ethnicity, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation, this overlapping of identities means someone can experience multiple threats of discrimination.
3. **Apply an Accessibility Lens** –in order for the strategy to have an impact, the City must apply an accessibility lens which is like a pair of glasses and helps things be seen from a different perspective. An accessibility lens is also a tool for identifying and clarifying issues affecting persons with disabilities that can be used by City staff to access and address the impact of all initiatives (policies, programs, services or decisions) on persons with disabilities. It also contributes to the full inclusion and participation of all residents and employees.
4. **Instill Universal Design Principle** - must be the starting point for an Accessibility Strategy. Systems and structures are created for able-bodied people which then require people that “don’t fit the mold” to ask for accommodations. Adopting the principles of universal design in the design of products and environments means they will be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. While accommodations may be necessary in some circumstances, universal design and true accessibility lessen the burden of constantly needing to request and push for having accommodations.
5. **Expand the Definition of Disability** – people who do not have a disability may only be temporarily able-bodied. This may change over time, therefore the strategy needs to benefit all people across the life course. The definition should also include hidden or invisible disabilities. Because they’re not obvious to spot, invisible disabilities may be overlooked and misunderstood which can lead to discrimination or exclusion and impact a person’s ability to be an active and engaged participant in the community.
6. **Shift to an Accessibility Culture** - an essential requirement of a strategy is a cultural shift on how the City views accessibility and models this to the community as a whole. This includes addressing both attitudinal and systemic barriers and committing to education, changes to service delivery, more guidance to the private sector and the presence of people with disabilities in both work sites and at the table where decisions are being made.
7. **Engage with People with Lived Experience** – the strategy will be beneficial to the disability community only when challenges that impact them on a daily basis are removed and improved. Engaging persons with disabilities from the outset and on a continuous basis ensures that they influence the priorities and strategies of the public sector, and make “nothing about us, without us” actualized in practice.

Themes/Emerging Themes

Prior to meeting with community, extensive work was done in partnership with the Accessibility Task Force to develop the proposed seven areas of focus for the draft strategy which align with

both the *Accessible Canada Act* and the new *Accessible British Columbia Act*. From initial analysis of the information received from the dialogue sessions and the survey, it quickly became apparent that there was agreement between “what we heard” and the proposed areas of focus, with some additional themes emerging that need to be considered as staff further refine the areas of focus. The proposed areas of focus are:

1. Built Environment and Public Spaces
2. Transportation Programs, Services and Policies
3. Housing Programs, Policies, and Services
4. Information and Communication
5. Employment
6. Governance and Services
7. Capacity and Collaboration

Through the community dialogues and the Shape your City Survey, there were many ideas put forward about how to advance accessibility in Vancouver. These recommendations from the dialogue participants and survey respondents are outlined below within seven areas of focus:

Built Environment and Public Spaces

1. Use technology to improve signals for people with disabilities
2. Consider vibration alarm systems at crosswalks; helpful for people who are blind or visually impaired.
3. Do accessibility audits of neighbourhoods.
4. Improve visibility of street elements like curb cuts to help people with low vision navigate City streets
5. Update the building code and adopt the principles of universal design so that the design of products and environments can be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.
6. Invest in infrastructure for intersections, city facilities, sidewalks and public spaces.
7. Consider incentivizing companies (e.g. rebates) to prioritize accessibility for any existing or new facilities.
8. Provide more places to rest and to relax
9. Provide staff with the opportunity to be trained as Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification professionals

Transportation

1. Free parking for persons who have a disability.
2. Free bus passes for persons who have a disability.
3. Put up cautionary signs for cyclists to yield to wheelchairs and people on mobility devices.
4. Develop apps where people can use audio and figure out the best routes to travel.

Housing

1. There should be a range of housing options from supported housing to regular market rentals or to purchase that have basic accessibility built-in.

2. The City of Vancouver should have a policy to have a percentage for persons with disabilities or people who experience homelessness to live in these housing options as well
3. The City should consider ways for property tax easements that would encourage people who are making legal income suites accessible. Many people who can't get low-income housing would happily live in a legal basement suite if it was accessible.

Employment (including recruitment and retention)

1. The City should have explicit affirmative action programs that hire people with a wide range of disabilities.
2. The City needs to remove barriers so people with diverse abilities can apply for and pursue employment with the City and beyond.
3. The City needs to embed flexibility and creativity with the hiring process understanding that there are great candidates out there but the traditional hiring processes may not work.
4. The City should work with unions to remove barriers and promote customized and supported employment.
5. The City needs to learn from other inclusive employers to ensure all people have equal opportunity. The City of Vancouver should be a member of the President's Club – helping companies to be accessible and inclusive
6. The City needs to consider providing work experience opportunities to students who have a disability.

Information and Communication

1. Create a symbol (maybe an ear) that identifies establishments that provide accessible communication; similar to the wheelchair sign.
2. Increase use of an FM system (Phonic Ear Free Ear Integrated FM receiver) which is a wireless device that helps people hear better in noisy situations.
3. Use of a whiteboard available so things can be written down. If working with people who are deafblind, having black or yellow text is easier to see.
4. Have audio description available at significant cultural events such as parades and visual displays help bring out those with sight loss
5. Have sign language interpreters at meetings, events and so forth.

Governance and Services

1. More opportunities for people's voice to be heard right from the beginning.
2. More programs for persons with disabilities at community centres, just as they do for seniors or families.
3. Allowance of additional support people available to persons with disabilities so they can participate in programs
4. More accessible seating at various venues, sports, and arts and culture.
5. Have a centralized hub where people can go to find out more about services in general and accessible services in particular.
6. Have designated place at events where there is a big television that you can see and provide captioning.

Capacity and Collaboration

1. The City should do a mapping process that identifies businesses that are accessible.
2. Create the Office of an Accessibility Advocate.
3. There needs to be a City planner for Seniors and a Seniors Action Plan.
4. An Accessibility Strategy is only as useful as the tools it builds in to enforce and ensure accountability. How will the City build in accountability to the plan?
5. There needs to be a way to measure and actually enforce everything that you outline within the Accessibility Strategy, otherwise most people won't be aware of it and follow through.
6. Think about people with ALL disabilities, not just physical or mental.
7. The City could do more in terms of recognizing those who are doing an exemplary job for being accessible and inclusive and showcase those initiatives.
8. Provide more funding for the organizations that provide services to persons with disabilities, seniors and immigrant services.
9. Challenge the City and particularly the developers to set aside a day where they spend the day in a manual wheelchair and try to do their jobs.

EMERGING THEMES

There were several emerging themes that came out through the engagement. It was acknowledged that the challenge of the pandemic may have heightened these issues.

Income/Financial	High percentage of persons with disability living in poverty.
Racialization/Discrimination	People are discriminated against based on race, homelessness, substance use, mental health and so forth – discrimination and racism is a huge barrier to accessibility and inclusion.
Intersectionality	People have intersecting identities and this has to be taken into consideration. There are multiple things that impact people including geographical accessibility, language, age-related issues, racism, sexism, language, etc. Individuals have different experiences. It reflects are many identities. Women have different experiences than men as do non-binary people and seniors or people facing Anti-Asian racism.
Stigma/Ableism - Awareness/Education/Training	Vancouver needs to change to see disabled people the same as other people. Understanding ableism before addressing accessibility – ableism is at the root of the problem. It is not part of the City's culture to work with people's disabilities and find a way for them to contribute meaningfully and have that sense of normalcy. It's about education and attitude towards change and willingness towards change.
Rights/Advocacy	Knowing peoples rights will be a conduit to reducing the need for self-advocacy.

	Build a culture where individuals and families don't always have to be the ones advocating for themselves.
Health Care	Access to emergency or medical services can be challenging as it can be hard to advocate for yourself if you are very sick. Not enough mental health supports for young people and adults. Put more money into seniors and home care so the elderly can stay in their own homes
Social Isolation/ Inclusion	There is not yet a really strong strategy, one, for identifying people that are socially isolated and knowing where they are or inviting them to participate or being included. People with disabilities experience social isolation and the pandemic has exacerbated and demonstrated that issue. Making sure people don't feel like they are "being othered."
Safety and Security	Being able to get to places in my wheelchair; sidewalks are unsafe for people with canes or other mobility devices.
Education	Universities and schools need to be accessible

Next Steps

A "What We Heard" report will be completed in an accessible format and distributed for the community in early December, in recognition of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. A comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the information gathered from community, and information from additional sources including the Internal Staff Working Group, reports from the Persons with Disabilities and Seniors Council advisory committees and other community engagement data is currently underway. This feedback and analysis will guide the writing of the draft Accessibility Strategy.

Staff will be recommending a much broader community engagement process to take place later in 2022 to ensure that the draft Strategy reflects the community's vision for creating a truly accessible city.