



COUNCIL REPORT

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Meeting Date: July 9, 2024
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TO: Vancouver City Council
FROM: General Manager of Arts, Culture and Community Services
SUBJECT: Update on Accessibility Strategy and Multi-Year Action Plan Implementation

Recommendations

- A. THAT Council receive this report as an update on *Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change: The City of Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy*, along with its Multi-Year Action Plan (See Appendix A).
- B. THAT Council approve a new focus area, Emergency Management and Climate Change, for the Accessibility Strategy and its respective actions.

Purpose and Executive Summary

On July 19, 2022, Council adopted *Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change: The City of Vancouver's Accessibility Strategy*, outlining key definitions, commitments, focus areas, and high-level actions. At this time, Council approved the scope of work for Phase 2 which included developing a multi-year action plan and directed staff to report back with an update and to identify required resources for any actions not currently resourced for consideration in future City budget processes.

Following this, staff facilitated engagement with disability communities and assembled an internal working group to develop the Multi-Year Action Plan (MYAP) that would meet the requirements of the *Accessible BC Act* (2021).

This report provides an update on the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy and seeks Council's approval on the addition of a new focus area, Emergency Management and Climate Change, which was identified during subsequent engagement with the disability communities.

The MYAP includes the 106 actions across nine focus areas originally identified in the approved Accessibility Strategy. In total, 35 actions have been completed, 44 actions are in progress, and 27 actions have been identified for future consideration. Going forward, staff will provide annual reports on the progress of implementation of the MYAP.

Council Authority/Previous Decisions

- On [September 18, 2018](#), Council directed staff to work with an Accessibility Task Force to develop of Phase 1 of the Accessibility Strategy.
- On [November 3, 2021](#), Council received an interim report on the development of the Accessibility Strategy and approved early actions to respond to key accessibility priorities, as well as endorsed five accessibility commitments.
- On [July 19, 2022](#), Council approved the Accessibility Strategy – Phase 1 (RTS 14734). Please see Appendix B for updates to the specific parts of this decision.
- On [April 25, 2023](#), Council approved the Terms of Reference for the Accessibility Committee and implementing the Accessibility Committee, as regulated by the Accessible BC Act (RTS 15599).
- On [October 3, 2023](#), Council acknowledged the provincially mandated requirement for an Accessibility Committee (RTS 15926)
- On October 31, 2023, Council approved its [strategic priorities](#) for the 2023 – 2026 term, including the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy.

City Manager's Comments

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

Context and Background

Globally, persons with disabilities are considered “the world’s largest minority,” making up an estimated 650 million people.¹ In Vancouver, as of 2022, 25% of persons aged 15 and over live with a disability, representing a 5% increase from 2017 due to the aging population.²

Persons with disabilities will often experience systemic discrimination when accessing basic services. In the past five years, annual reports from the BC’s Human Rights Tribunal show that disability is the most commonly reported (44%) form of discrimination, with an average of 2,037 cases received annually. Becoming a person with disabilities can happen at any point in a person’s life and not everyone experiences disabilities in the same way or to the same degree. The rate at which people are likely to experience ongoing disabilities also increases with age.

Approved by Council in July 2022, *Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change: The City of Vancouver’s Accessibility Strategy* included eight areas of focus along with high level actions, strategically focused on removing barriers and enabling persons with disabilities to access health and well-being free of discrimination. With the adoption of Phase 1, Council also acknowledged the prevalence and impact that a culture of ableism has in public institutions, including the City of Vancouver. Staff have identified ongoing education around accessibility for staff in all City departments as an important way to shift this culture. The proposed MYAP continues to advance the most pressing concerns for disability communities in Vancouver and aims to reduce accessibility barriers within city planning, design, and delivery of programs and services.

Complying with Provincial Legislation

The *Accessible BC Act* (2021) requires all public institutions to develop an action plan, assemble an accessibility committee and develop a public feedback mechanism. The Accessibility

¹ United Nations Enable, Fact Sheet on Persons with Disabilities. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/toolaction/pwdfs.pdf>

² Statistics Canada, 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, “Disability status for persons aged 15 and over, Census Subdivision (CSD), 2022.” accessed through Community Data Program.

Committee and the public feedback mechanism were developed in the fall 2023, and in this report staff are presenting a progress update on the MYAP activities.

Accessibility Committee

The Accessibility Committee is tasked with overseeing implementation of the Accessibility Strategy. On October 3, 2023, Council appointed 16 members to the Accessibility Committee, including 11 from community and five City staff. Committee members hold a variety of intersecting identities bringing a range of perspectives on accessibility issues. Staff are included in the committee to maintain transparency, foster co-learning between community and staff, and ultimately promote accountability for its commitments and actions.

Public Feedback Mechanism

On September 2023, a temporary public feedback mechanism was launched to meet the deadline of the *Accessible BC Act*. Through this temporary mechanism, community members can report accessibility barriers via the City's website or 3-1-1.

Discussion

Community Engagement

In June 2023, staff facilitated engagement from people who have lived experience with disabilities to invite feedback on the focus areas, identified actions and community priorities outlined in the Accessibility Strategy. Staff organized two in-person sessions, one online session, and an online survey through the City's Shape Your City digital engagement platform.

In total, 112 people with lived experiences attended the engagement sessions and 125 filled out the survey. During these sessions, participants identified a new focus area, Emergency Management and Climate Change, be included in the Strategy going forward. See Appendix C for a summary of the "What We've Heard" report of these engagements.

Internal Working Group

In August 2023, staff re-convened an internal working group (IWG) consisting of 38 staff across 10 departments, and 19 divisions in the City. Along with the newly established Accessibility Committee and the IWG, and based on the input from the community engagement, the identified actions were prioritized along with their progress in implementation. In addition, staff identified actions for future consideration that require funding or allocation of staff resources. The following table summarizes actions completed, in progress and for future consideration:

| Focus Areas in MYAP | Completed | In Progress | For Future Consideration | Total Actions per Area |
|---|-----------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Built Environment and Public Spaces | 7 | 4 | 4 | 15 |
| 2. Transportation Services, Policies and Programs | 5 | 8 | 3 | 16 |
| 3. Housing Policies, Programs and Design | 1 | 4 | 2 | 7 |
| 4. Information and Communication | 4 | 6 | 1 | 11 |
| 5. Employment | 4 | 5 | 2 | 11 |
| 6. Governance and Engagement | 6 | 4 | 5 | 15 |
| 7. Capacity and Collaboration | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |

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|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 8. Advocacy and working with other levels of Government and Agencies | 2 | 3 | 4 | 9 |
| 9. Emergency Management and Climate Change (new) | 4 | 7 | 5 | 16 |
| TOTAL | 35 | 44 | 27 | 106 |

Completed Priority Actions

As shown above, 35 out of 106 actions have been completed to date. Some examples of completed actions include:

- Reviewed Vancouver’s Building By-law and Standards of Maintenance By-law to make sure that housing operators have plans and tools to repair broken elevators.
- Updated the accessible parking requirements to the Parking By-law for new developments.
- Updated the Zoning and Development By-law to result in more ground floor units with no entry stairs and allow for units on a single level.
- Added accessibility considerations to standardized communications templates and practices.
- Created disability awareness course for staff.

The Accessibility Strategy’s *Phase 2 Multi-Year Action Plan* (MYAP) gives a full description of actions completed to date in the appendix.

Priority Actions, by Focus Area: In Progress and Future Considerations

The MYAP outlines the status of the remaining priority actions, showing those “In Progress” for 2024 – 2026, and the remainder as “For Future Consideration.” The plan gives a brief background on the development of the Priority Actions in Section 2, and then provides detailed “Work In Progress” updates by Key Focus Area in Section 3.

Following is a high-level summary of the 2024-2026 priority actions that are in progress for each Key Area of Focus in the MYAP. For a complete list of all priority actions, please refer to the full MYAP document.

1. **Built Environment and Public Spaces (15 Actions):** This focus area applies universal design principles to the built environment to ensure access to physical infrastructure. Actions include:
 - Implement Rick Hansen accessibility standards, when feasible, for existing City-owned buildings.
 - Identify potential major renovations for existing buildings that could target Rick Hansen Gold Certification
 - Continue to deliver Universal Inclusive Design and Accessibility Program (UIDAP) implementation for public-facing City-owned buildings.
2. **Transportation Services, Policies and Programs (16 Actions):** This focus area aims to apply universal design principles to transportation planning and design. Actions include:
 - Improve navigation measures through city-wide programs and pedestrian upgrades.

- Reduce the accessibility barriers on sidewalks and pathways through city-wide programs and pedestrian upgrades.
 - Increase the number of seats available on and along sidewalks and other pedestrian paths.
 - Upgrade bus stops for universal accessibility standards.
 - Increase the number and availability of on-street accessible parking.
 - Explore criteria for the installation of accessible parking zones on-street in residential areas.
3. **Housing Policy, Programs and Design (7 Actions):** This focus area aims to ensure accessible, affordable, market and non-market housing that meets people's needs. Actions include:
- Explore changes to the City's Building By-law to improve accessibility in existing regulations and policies with the upcoming changes to the *BC Building Code* to advance accessibility.
 - Explore potential changes to the Housing Design and Technical Guidelines to increase the number of accessible units.
 - Improve accessibility in emergency shelters.
4. **Information and Communications (11 Actions):** This focus area aims to ensure connection and wayfinding throughout the city by providing communication supports, accessible websites, formats and digital content. Actions include:
- Create plain language materials and provide options that consider accessibility barriers.
 - Maintain best practices on plain language on the City's digital channels.
 - Ensure that the City's website meet the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
 - Apply an accessibility lens for all communications and materials during municipal elections.
 - Apply an accessibility lens for all communications and materials during emergency events.
 - Develop messaging to celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities, along with other events.
5. **Employment (11 Actions):** This focus area aims to increase opportunities and reduce barriers for persons with disabilities within the City's workforce. Actions include:
- Continue to provide different types of disability-related training for staff depending on their roles within the City.
 - Communicate the City's medical accommodation guide to staff.
 - Continue to support Employee Resource Groups (ERG), as needed.
 - Increase an understanding of inclusive employment best practices.
6. **Governance and Engagement (15 Actions):** This focus area aims to increase equitable access to municipal programs and services by reducing barriers to participation in civic life. Actions include:
- Identify and plan to accessibility considerations during engagement planning, outreach and delivery.

- Identify and prioritize Council meetings, advisory committee meetings and large-scale events and projects that require Closed Captioning and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters.
 - Create an online directory on the City’s website listing accessible services and supports.
7. **Capacity and Collaboration (6 Actions):** This focus group aims to strengthen the disability non-profit sector to better address challenges in communities. Actions include:
- Explore options to equitably prioritize organizations serving people with disabilities in Social Policy and Projects, and Arts, Culture and Tourism grants.
 - Support the creation of a cross-disability network/coalition in the city.
 - Continue to support non-profit space needs that prioritize organizations serving seniors, people with disabilities, and people experiencing mental health and substance use challenges.
8. **Advocacy and Working with other levels Governments (9 Actions):** This focus area ensures consistent access to public services and participation by collaborating with other orders of government on accessibility issues. Actions include:
- Ensure that the City of Vancouver complies with the *Accessible British Columbia Act*.
 - Advocate to respective governments on accessibility issues that are identified and prioritized through community engagement, and public feedback mechanism, and the Accessibility Committee.
 - Address accessibility issues in TransLink and Provincial rapid transit station designs, guidelines, and requirements.
9. **Emergency Management and Climate Change (16 Actions):** This focus area aims to apply an accessibility lens to all aspects of the City’s emergency and disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities. Actions include:
- Improve the inclusivity of people with disabilities in existing educational and emergency preparation materials.
 - Improve supports, safety, and independence/autonomy for persons with disabilities in extreme weather emergencies, emergency response and recovery plans.
 - Work with organizations to identify accessible spaces during emergencies, such as heat domes and other climate change events.
 - Ensure people with disabilities are supported in the event of an emergency within SROs.

Reporting and Accountability

In addition to the specific focus areas discussed above, there are several cross-cutting activities that are currently underway to ensure that the Accessibility Strategy is successfully implemented and to support a long-term culture shift and systemic change within the City of Vancouver. Accountability is foundational to building trust as well as informing necessary change.

To monitor and track progress on the Accessibility Strategy, staff have continued to advance the accountability framework in developing specific reporting mechanisms that align with the *Accessible BC Act*. This includes:

- Quarterly updates to the Accessibility Committee and City Leadership Team.

- Annual progress report to Council.
- Three-year progress report to the BC Government.
- Five-year review of outcomes impacts and effectiveness of Accessibility Strategy.

Further, the systematic collection and analysis of accessibility barriers reported through the public feedback mechanism will inform the prioritization of future actions related to accessibility. As a first step, staff are working closely with the Accessibility Committee to continue to improve the public feedback mechanism so that it can better receive, respond to and track feedback from disability communities. The goal is to develop a comprehensive mechanism that facilitates internal tracking and responses to accessibility barriers identified by community.

The work of accessibility is a journey where every person continues to learn and challenge their own unconscious ableist biases, stereotypes, and assumptions. To cultivate this, a culture of vulnerability, staff are now also considering the following mechanisms:

- A **community of practice** where staff can learn and share progress and challenges in advancing the MYAP on a quarterly basis.
- A **public partners table** to exchange information and support coordination when addressing accessibility issues, e.g., with Translink, Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver Fire Rescue, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, and Vancouver Coastal Health.
- An **internal knowledge resource hub** on the City's intranet site and other relevant internal information platforms that could provide tools and guides for staff looking to embed an accessibility lens in their work.

Transforming Attitudes, Embedding Change: A City of Vancouver Accessibility Strategy is a call to action. It lays a clear and comprehensive path to change, improve, or augment the planning and delivery of services for residents of the City and it encourages a supportive mindset to change the thinking for how to do things differently to benefit all.

The successful implementation of the Accessibility Strategy requires strong, sustained commitment and investment to achieve the priorities and outcomes outlined by the MYAP. The "actions for future consideration" also form part of the plan to allow the City to meet the accessibility needs of all residents going forward.

Financial Implications

The priority actions outlined in the MYAP will be advanced through existing resources. Some work may require additional funding (e.g., building renovations) and these requests will be brought forward by the implementing departments for consideration and approval through regular budget process.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with endorsement of the recommendations.

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