

COMMITTEE REPORT TO COUNCIL

1100 Patricia Blvd. | Prince George, BC, Canada V2L 3V9 | www.princegeorge.ca

DATE: March 1, 2022

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Chris Gobbi, Chair, Advisory Committee on Accessibility

SUBJECT: Advisory Committee on Accessibility 2021 Annual Report

ATTACHMENT(S): Advisory Committee on Accessibility 2022 Work Plan
Terms of Reference for Advisory Committee on Accessibility

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Council APPROVES the Advisory Committee on Accessibility 2022 Work Plan attached to the report dated February 4, 2022 from the Chair of the Advisory Committee on Accessibility titled "Advisory Committee on Accessibility 2021 Annual Report".

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the activities and achievements of the Advisory Committee on Accessibility, as well as provide the Committee's proposed 2022 work plan for Council's consideration.

BACKGROUND:

The Advisory Committee on Accessibility is a Committee of Council guided by its Council-approved Terms of Reference mandate to advise Mayor and Council, and City Staff on the identification, removal and prevention of physical and social barriers that impede the full participation of all citizens in every aspect of community life.

ONGOING WORK OF THE COMMITTEE:

On an as-needed basis, the Advisory Committee on Accessibility works on many ongoing items throughout the year including but not limited to:

- 1) Providing feedback on Major Construction and alterations of City owned buildings and parks;
- 2) Providing feedback on proposed changes to City Policies and Bylaws that affect Accessibility and Inclusion;
- 3) Reporting any barriers that we or the public encounter in Civic Facilities;
- 4) Report and track any pedestrian network issues; and
- 5) Provide representation on the City's Advisory Committee on Development and Design in order to include an Accessibility lens to developments.

WORK OF COMMITTEE DURING 2021:

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to make the Committee's work more challenging in that many events the committee traditionally would attend as part of its education and outreach work has not been scheduled.

Although it has been great to return to regularly scheduled monthly meetings in 2021, meeting in person continues to be a challenge with approximately half of the members meeting in person and the other half attending via electronic means such as telephone or video conference. The Committee appreciates access for remote participation in committee meetings and recommends the continuation of remote participation post-pandemic in order to maintain members' accessibility and attendance of committee meetings.

To take a more targeted approach at the 2021 Committee Workplan, the Committee implemented work groups who would meet informally in smaller groups and provide a report with recommendations and action items at the monthly committee meetings. Although there was some success with this approach in certain areas, some gaps remain. To address these gaps, the 2022 work plan reflects a focused approach towards actionable and measureable items in order to improve our ability to affect change.

A primary focus of the committee in 2021 was to address the ongoing and growing concern with pedestrian safety and access at construction work zones affecting adjacent roadways and sidewalks. Correspondence between City Staff and the Committee did not adequately address the safety concerns of the Committee and thusly, the Committee made a presentation to Mayor and Council in August 2021 requesting further action be directed of City Staff to address pedestrian access in construction work zones. As a result of the presentation, Council directed "Administration to review existing City policies, procedures, and permitting processes regarding accessibility of safe pedestrian access to the pedestrian network in work zones to ensure the City aligns with best practices in promoting pedestrian safety and accommodation in work zones." While the Committee awaits a response from City Administration, potential dangers to pedestrians in construction work zones continue.

The Committee appreciated the opportunity this year to review and provide input on signage reflecting universal design for the new pool as well as the proposed Jumpstart Multi Use Court. The Committee encourages Council and City Staff to continue involving the committee at appropriate stages of civic facility development for committee feedback related to all accessibility-related issues.

OVERVIEW OF 2022 WORK PLAN:

Attached to this report is a copy of the proposed 2022 work plan. As in previous years, much of the work of the Committee is continuous and ongoing in nature. We have removed the continuous and ongoing work from the work plan and included it in this Annual Report in order to focus the Work Plan on specific and actionable items that the Committee wants to achieve during the coming year.

Although Mayor and Council were supportive and asked City Staff to review existing City policies, procedures and permitting process regarding accessibility to the pedestrian network, there continues to be safety issues within the City's pedestrian network on a regular basis. Therefore, a priority focus for the Committee in 2022 will be continuing to work with Administration to address ongoing issues surrounding pedestrian safety around construction sites, both for City projects and private development. The committee will continue to document both good and bad examples of pedestrian safety/access in construction zones for Council and Staff's information. Requests have been made to the City to include sidewalk closures on the City's Notice of Traffic Disruptions; however, sidewalk closures are very rarely included. The Committee feels strongly that this needs to be a priority for the City and will continue to work towards getting this resolved. The Committee waits for staff consultation regarding the committee's concerns and a hopeful expedited resolution in addressing this safety issue.

The Committee will continue to advise on the accessibility of City-lead development and projects. While progress has been made in past years, the new downtown pool and library entrance being notable examples, there is still much work to be done in this area to ensure that an Accessibility Lens is applied to all new City-funded development and construction.

In 2022, the Committee plans to focus on creating a presentation that can be used to discuss Accessibility and Inclusion internally within the City and its Committees and externally to stakeholders in development and construction. The Committee feels strongly that the development and distribution of such a presentation will allow us to bring current issues with Accessible Housing, among other things to the people who can enact change.

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

The Committee is not proposing any changes to their Terms of Reference at this time.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The Advisory Committee on Accessibility is tasked with aiding in the removal of physical and social barriers, which impede full participation of all citizens in every aspect of community life. 2021 continued to be a challenging year for the committee as we are sure it was for the entire city. The Committee was unable to meet in person for most of 2021 and still continues to meet with some members attending virtually. The committee continues to be given the opportunity to provide input in most, but not all, city projects, however there is a growing desire from within the Committee to be better utilized on large projects/developments in the City which is why the Committee has decided to focus their work plan for 2022 on developing presentation(s) and reference material.

The Advisory Committee on Accessibility provides input on private development through its representation on the Advisory Committee on Development and Design. The Committee encourages the City to enact best practices regarding the development of accessible housing and to consider ways in which recommendations made regarding Development Permits by the Development Design Committee could be enforced. The Advisory Committee on Accessibility looks forward to continuing to provide input through participation on the Advisory Committee on Development Design in 2022.

The Committee also looks forward to continuing its work removing barriers for all citizens in the City of Prince George. No matter how far we have come there is always room for improvement. The Committee's effectiveness in improving accessibility within the community is dependent on response and action of advice given to City staff and Council and we look forward to further collaboration towards the goal of an inclusive, equitable, and barrier free Prince George.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Chris Gobbi, Chair
Advisory Committee on Accessibility

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: 2022/03/14