

Accessibility Working Group

Report to Council

Updated: December 9, 2016

INTRODUCTION

The Accessibility Working Group's (AWG) mandate, according to the Terms of Reference, is:

- To provide policy recommendations, expertise and experiential knowledge to an Victoria City Council on accessibility issues with the aim of making City of Victoria infrastructure and facilities more accessible for all by:
- Identifying barriers for persons with disabilities created by current City of Victoria infrastructure;
- Making recommendations as to how to remove these barriers;
- Establishing criteria by which barrier removal can be prioritized and the allocating of funding can be determined; and
- Working with the City of Victoria to draft policies and procedures to prevent the creation of barriers in the future.

For the past year the AWG has been required to concentrate on trouble shooting existing accessibility barriers that its members have encountered and those, which have been brought to its attention by persons with disabilities who have become aware of the AWG. Many of these concerns are still on the Issues List. In the meantime, each month, another one or two accessibility barriers are brought to AWG's attention, growing the list.

Since its formation in the Fall of 2015, the Accessibility Working Group (AWG) has held monthly meetings (November – present). In addition, two special meetings were held at the call of the chair. AWG members have also participated in public consultations, focus groups and attended meetings of other city advisory groups. There have been two requests for members of the public to join the Accessibility Working Group but several of the original and added members have since resigned. Currently, there are seven active and committed AWG members, one of which is unable to attend meetings in person as there are no scent-reduction policy or pets restrictions in place at City Hall. Councilor Loveday and Councilor Alto are the Council liaisons, and Brad Dellebuur the staff liaison

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

The AWG was quick to realize that it could not be aware of all accessibility concerns experienced by persons with disabilities in Victoria, and one of its first tasks in December 2015 was to develop an on-line survey. The purpose of the survey was established and basic questions drawn up. After attempting to set up the survey on Survey Monkey, the AWG was advised to pass the project on to Citizen Engagement. The AWG is awaiting its follow-up.

Early in 2016, the AWG was approached by Barrier Free BC asking for its support in requesting Victoria City Council, to pass a motion to endorse the enactment of a British Columbians with Disabilities Act by the provincial government. AWG members attended City Council and subsequently promoted this motion at the 2016 UBCM meeting, at which the motion was passed.

Upon request from the city, over the past year The AWG has provided feedback with regards to the following:

- Johnson St. Bridge Public Realm
- Sidewalk café bylaw
- David Foster Harbour Pathway
- Parks and Open Spaces Masterplan
- Accessible parking
- Fort Street bike lane

And upon request from the AWG, as they had not been asked to participate:

- Downtown Public Realm Plan and City-wide Wayfinding Strategy.

The following are the accessibility issues raised by the AWG members over the past year, the AWG's actions/recommendations and the status to date:

Issue:	Curb cuts posing a safety risk to persons who are blind
Action:	The AWG passed a motion: that truncated dome mats be installed on all new curb cuts, and that the City retrofit all existing 'no-lip' curb cuts on an immediate basis. December 2015
Status:	Engineering Department researching installation standards for truncated dome mats.

Issue: **Sandwich boards** obstructing sidewalks
Action: The AWG reviewed the relevant bylaw.
Status: AWG members were informed that the public needs to report locations where sandwich boards are not in compliance with the bylaw.

Issue: Access for persons in wheelchairs to **heritage buildings** with steps at entrance.
Action: AWG members are planning to attend a Heritage Advisory Panel meeting. AWG members attended the DVBA to explore solutions.
Status: On-going

Issue: **Accessible Pedestrian signals** for pedestrians who are blind
Action: The AWG passed a Motion requesting that *Council undertake a review of the position statement of the Accessible Pedestrian Signals and make recommendations for implementation. April 2016*
Status: AWG awaiting Staff review of the issue.

Issue: City Hall is not accessible for people who are **hard of hearing**
Action: City staff have installed hearing loops using existing budget. An additional hearing loop for the City Hall Council Chambers is proposed in the 2017 budget.
Status: Resolved

Issue: **Accessibility at Citizen Engagement meetings**
Action: The AWG reviewed existing accessibility policy and procedure. This was found to be outdated and very limited in scope
Status: The AWG is developing an Accessibility check list to be adopted by Citizen Engagement and other City Departments

Issue: The painting of **puzzle pieces on crosswalks** at Yates and Douglas posing a safety risk to those with limited vision.
Action: The AWG brought this to the attention of City staff who promptly had the painting modified. Council discussed these concerns and stated that future public realm projects of this sort will be referred to the AWG.
Status: Resolved.

Issue: The operation of **audible pedestrian signals**. Audible signals do not last as long as visual walk signals.

Action: The AWG was told that there are noise complaints if the audible signal lasts too long. City staff will increase the length of the audible signal

Status: City staff monitoring complaints regarding this change

Issue: Accessibility of **Royal Athletic Park** including washrooms.

Action: The AWG was informed that these issues will be resolved with ongoing operational and capital budgets.

Status: Engineering Staff will continue discussions AWG members to develop action plan.

Issue: Accessibility of **Capital City bus station washrooms**

Action: The AWG is investigating the situation to determine exactly what the accessibility issues are

Status: On-going

Issue: Accommodation of allergies and **Crystal Pool activities**

Action: The AWG was informed by City staff that there is a policy and procedure (P&P) in place, but it is not written or communicated to the public.

Status: AWG investigation of the P&P has determined that it is not adequate.

The AWG has also addressed concerns that have been raised by individual citizens with regards to personal issues they have encountered.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

It has become apparent that there are very few policies and procedures, check lists or accessibility assessment tools to assist City staff make the City more accessible, and those which do exist appear to be very limited in scope. As a consequence, the risk that decisions will continue to be made which create barriers for persons with disabilities is very real.

The AWG believes that what appears to be needed in order to move forward and achieve its delegated mandate is beyond the capacity of the volunteer AWG members and the staff liaison, with his many other duties, working alone.

The AWG would like to make the following recommendations to Council:

1. An individual be contracted/hired to work with the AWG in identifying barriers for persons with disabilities, examine existing City accessibility policies and procedures, make policy recommendations, develop an accessibility framework, and provide on-going staff training and support.
2. That Council instruct Recreation Services to research, develop, codify and publicize a robust disability accommodation process for recreation facilities and programs.
3. That scent reduction and pet restriction policies be developed and implemented for City Hall.
4. The Accessibility Working Group become a standing committee of City Council.
5. Accessibility funding be allocated annually.