

Accessibility Working Group Minutes
December 2, 2019

1. Welcome and roll call

AWG Members: Linda Bartram, Robin Bayley, Susan Gallagher, Chris Dobbie, Steve Bertrand, Paul Jones. Regrets – Chris Marks

Council Liaisons: Sarah Potts, Jeremy Loveday

Staff: Alannah Rodgers, Kelly-Anne Malcomson

Guests: Keith and Mary (ASL interpreters), Christine Paisley and Elizabeth Syring (Action Committee)

2. Approval of agenda with additions of:

Facilities Masterplan RFP and AWG meeting times

Moved by Linda, seconded by Paul, carried

3. Approval of October 7, 2019 minutes

Moved by Linda, seconded by Chris D, carried

4. Business arising

- a) Field trip scheduling to view accessibility treatments (truncated domes, new curb let-downs, audible signals) at several intersections – Wednesday December 11, 2:30 – 4:30, participants to meet the van at Pandora & Government

Intersections to be visited - Blanshard & Fort, Fernwood & Pandora, Scramble crosswalk, (possibly Wharf at floating bus stop, Cook and Dallas Rd and McKenzie and Quadra). There is room for 12 participants if 3 w/c users are to participate. Most AWG members expressed an interest in participating. Linda expressed a desire to invite additional wheelchair users and persons with vision loss. AWG members indicated that they would forego their space to someone who is directly affected by the treatments being checked out.

Action: Linda to determine final list of participants and let everyone know if they are on the list.

b) Recent decision on West Songhees project

Parks were invited to attend today's meeting to explain this decision but indicated they would not be able to attend but would come to the January AWG meeting. Robin reminded AWG that Derrick Newman attended the May 2019 AWG meeting asking for input regarding the West Songhees project.

AWG made the following recommendations:

- b.1) Ensure there are "way-finding" features at nodes of connection and along the edges of pathways which are tactile but do not impede wheelchair movement.
- b.2) Concerns about the potential for food traces accumulating, attracting stinging insects, on concrete tiers in the terraced seating area as well as any wooden benches due to the porosity of their surfaces. Need to be treated or sealed.
- b.3) All but one of the proposed trees for the site rate high on the OPALS™ (Ogren Plant Allergy Scale) scale for allergenicity and the grasses are unspecified so could also be problematic.

Motion: The AWG recommends that Council direct staff to make the Songhees Park Expansion a demonstration pilot for low allergen planting and to collaborate with experts and the AWG in development of the planting plan from the ground cover to trees.

Moved by Robin, seconded by Linda, carried.

- b.4) All stairs need railings and the edges of steps need to contrast highly with the rest of the step.

In July 2019, staff reported to Council that they would proceed with a low-allergen planting pilot but did not highlight to Council

that this decision resulted from an AWG formal motion. Staff also verbally reported to Council the caveat that due to the windy location, it might not be a good candidate for such a pilot, but this concern did not appear in their written report to Council. Councilor Potts undertook gain an assurance that any changes in direction would be brought back to the AWG and that there would be no surprises. On November 14, 2019 however, Staff reported to COTW a project update that was billed as a “project concept refinement” that was in Robin’s opinion a complete “about face” from a low-allergen planting pilot to a Gary Oak forest (high allergen). Staff did not mention this change in the publicly available written report but reported this verbally to Council on the day. This did not afford Robin an opportunity to react in time to inform Council of the informational errors being verbally reported. It should be noted that verbal reports are not reflected in COTW minutes. This is a governance issue which needs to be addressed.

Contrary to staff’s verbal report which outlined more detail as to why the windy location would not be a good low-allergen planting site, Robin’s extensive research and consultation with Internationally published experts, determined that it would actually be an ideal site for such a pilot. The waterway is a pollen mote and there are very few allergenic plantings already in the area.

AWG finds it difficult to understand why staff avoided coming back to AWG when the change in direction was being considered when they had assured our Council liaisons that they would.

Councilor Potts reported that the City had been in conversations with the Songhees Nations regarding a partnership to restore this site but that this partnership was not agreed upon until quite recently. The Songhees requested that the area be rehabilitated back to its natural state with natural plantings. This has put the City in the challenging position of being torn between its commitment to reconciliation and its original commitment to AWG. Councilor Loveday explained that the area in question was where the City moved the Songhees

people (original reserve) and then moved them again. This is a particularly sensitive parcel of land.

Councilor Loveday reported that since November 14, staff have indicated to him that a Gary Oak forest is not necessarily how they plan to proceed. Councilor Potts believes there is still a desire to go with low allergen plantings but that there is now another layer with the requirement for natural plantings.

AWG accepts that there may be competing rights and interests in play and that the decision to go with AWG's recommendation may have to be modified but the fact that staff did not come back to AWG to explain this does not demonstrate respect for the members of the AWG. The Accessibility Framework needs to ensure that tools are put in place to assist staff to deal with competing rights and interests.

Action: The Council liaisons will raise the process issue with staff prior to the January 2020 AWG meeting

Action: Robin will write a facts-based report to counter anticipated inaccuracies that may be reported by staff when this issue goes back to Council in case AWG is given an opportunity to speak to the issue again.

c) Peter Pollen Waterfront Park consultation

AWG has been invited to participate in a stakeholder's workshop. AWG members feel that the City should now have enough knowledge and understanding based on former consultations, to make the park and its amenities accessible to persons with disabilities.

Action: Linda will indicate that AWG does not wish to participate in the stakeholder's group and will provide staff with excerpts from previous consultations/minutes for their reference.

d) Proposed Phase 3 AF Collaboration Plan

Action: Final comments on the main Framework document and Action Plan to be sent to staff by Sunday Dec 8.

Chris Coats will come to the Monday Dec 16 meeting to discuss the Accessibility Policy and Terms of Reference for an advisory body. AWG feels that someone else who is working on the Framework should also be in attendance (Sarah Webb or Fraser Work).

Action: Alannah will get the answer to the question, “Is staff willing to entertain including more measurable statements (drill down a layer from the high-level statements presented to date) in the Accessibility Policy?” by Dec 9. Alannah will also circulate the proposed documents which will be discussed at the Dec 16 meeting by Dec 9.

Staff is proposing January 13, 2020 to discuss the updated Framework, Action Plan, Policy and Terms of Reference for the advisory body.

Action: AWG will be provided with the revised documents in early January, Dec 6 at the latest.

e) Action Plan (cont'd)

Focus Area – Government and Services

GS.1) Accessibility Policy – to remain as an action if high level Policy Statements are adopted with the Framework with the understanding that the drill down will happen as part of the action plan

GS.2) Introduce accessible voting machine and other recommended accessibility procedures at upcoming bi-election – will probably have to be implemented prior to the Framework adoption but action plan could address aspects that were not put in place for the by-election

GS.3) Develop a formal Accessibility Accommodation Request Process for members of the public seeking support to access City Services and programs – HIGH PRIORITY – needs a pot of money

- GS.4) Easy way for persons to connect with the City regarding accessibility issues – HIGH Priority (e.g. link on Home page, phone number, “Single Point of Entry”)
- GS.5) Refine guidelines / processes for accessible public meetings, special events, and community engagement
- GS.6) Review the Council Procedures bylaw opportunities to increase accessibility in City Decision Making – needs to be broader to include all City governance as Council follows procedures which are not included in the Council procedures by-law.
- GS.7) Update the City’s website to be compliant with latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines – HIGH PRIORITY
- GS.8) Review and update access to webcasting for persons with hearing and vision challenges. – HIGH PRIORITY
- GS.9) Update City communication guidelines and visual standards to increase accessibility of public documents – HIGH PRIORITY - this should include all public documents regardless of format
- GS.10) Participate in the provincial annual Access Awareness Day – City needs to be cautious about publicly proclaiming its accessible status before it has put its house in order
- GS.11) Develop and implement special event accessibility requirements for permitted events and encourage best practices for inclusive events and festivals being held in the City of Victoria – again, City needs to put its own house in order first so not considered a high priority
- GS.12) Review accessibility requirements and criteria for the City's Participatory Budgeting program - ensure that the process for applying for current grants is accessible as well as that funding is only given to projects that are accessible to all. This may need to be a separate action item.

Focus Area – Capacity and Collaboration

- CC.1) Hire an Accessibility Coordinator – see this as a central agency function and needs to be a very skilled individual, Robin has interviewed individuals in such a position in Ontario and has input to share, Accessibility coordination is a “specialized profession” which The AWG feels the City needs to recognize.
- CC.2) Develop terms of reference for an external advisory body. – hopefully will be done prior to approval of the Action Plan
- CC.3) Establish an external advisory body to enable ongoing input from persons with lived-experience on issues relating to accessibility – HIGH PRIORITY
- CC.4) Add the Accessibility Framework to City’s website. – extend to include the development of an Accessibility Program page and publishing Framework in accessible formats
- CC.5) Develop a tool for balancing competing rights and interests. – HIGH PRIORITY
- CC.6) Develop an Accessibility Lens and refine procedures for writing Accessibility Impact Statements – HIGH PRIORITY – AWG would like to see 5 & 6 already developed as an appendix to the Framework but if not then are high priority actions. Alannah indicated that the Equity Lens is going to Council in January and that she believes that accessibility is a part of this lens.
- Action: Alannah will see about getting the Equity Lens to AWG to see if the accessibility component is sufficient.**
- CC.7) Initiate a community-wide accessibility data survey to obtain localized, accurate and statistically relevant information on disabilities in Victoria. – AWG concerned this might drain resources and feels that there may be other less expensive ways of getting this information (e.g. ask Stats Canada to do a special run). Councilor Potts is concerned about the dangers of how such data would be applied. Staff want the data to help determine priorities but there is concern that if there are not

sufficient numbers of individuals being affected, their needs would not be considered a priority even though the consequence to those individuals may be significant. With Universal Design, numbers are not important as everyone is potentially positively affected.

CC.8) Integrate accessibility as a topic into Small Business Information Sessions offered through the Business Hub – Councilor Thornton Joe has an initiative, Barrier Free Businesses which she is already working on.

General comments:

There appears to be several accessibility initiatives already under way which are not reflected in any of the Framework documents.

#4 and #5 actions under Built Environment should be under Government and Services.

Training needs to have an action.

Also need to look at hiring practices to ensure that the process is accessible and that job descriptions are bonafide and not ruling persons with disabilities out (e.g. need for a driver's license when getting around can be achieved by other means). Also, the City should be hiring individuals with accessibility knowledge in the given area of responsibility. Capacity is increased both by training and bringing in more knowledge.

f) AWG meeting time

Moved by Chris D, seconded by Paul that the AWG meeting time be from 4:30 – 6:00, carried.

It was suggested that there be a discussion of priorities at the next regular AWG meeting.

5. Adjournment: 6:20