

Accessibility Working Group Minutes
January 6, 2020

1. Welcome and roll call

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

Council Liaisons: Regrets - Jeremy Loveday, Sarah Potts

Staff: Sarah Webb (until 5:25), Philip Bellefontaine, Kelly-Anne Malcomson, Derrick Newman, Thomas Soulliere

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

2. Approval of agenda

Moved by Linda, seconded by Chris D., carried.

3. Approval of December 2, 2019 minutes

Spelling correction – mote should be moat

Moved by Linda, seconded by Paul, carried.

4. Business Arising

- a. Dallas Rd CRD Waste Water Forcemain project – Sarah Webb gave a verbal report regarding amenities associated with the project – new washrooms at Clover Point, plaza space, new benches, bicycle path, lighting, road repaving, new and upgrades to existing crosswalks, sidewalk widening, redesign of on-street parking, multi-use pathway through Beacon Hill Park from James Bay to Fairfield neighbourhood. The City is taking advantage of opportunities to add to the scope of work as they partner with the CRD throughout the project. Completion date is December 31, 2020. Accessibility considerations – design of public plazas and viewing platforms, washroom facilities, accessible parking, planting of trees and shrubs, roadway and bicycle path crossings, pedestrian lighting.

AWG concerns:

- a.1. Outdoor washing station needs to be accessible with ability to wash off wheelchair wheels without getting water in the electronics. Staff suggested this should be located at accessible beach access.

a.2. Wheelchair beach access matting needs to extend past the soft sand to hard pack

a.3 There needs to be at least one pedestrian controlled crossing over Dallas Rd. Staff stated that there are no crossings on Dallas Rd that would warrant a traffic signal (warrant takes into account volume of traffic, gaps in traffic, number of pedestrians, geometry of street, consistency and predictability). AWG questions why the City cannot go above and beyond the standard to ensure accessibility. Staff also stated that pedestrian activated traffic signals do not make the crossing safer as pedestrians tend to just press the button and go without looking. Paul stated that when we are talking about persons with disabilities, persons who are blind or deaf are not likely to just push the button and go. Staff's comment may pertain to able bodied pedestrians, but traffic lights make crossings safer for persons with disabilities. AWG members who live in the area indicated that cars do not stop for pedestrians waiting at the current marked crosswalks so how is an elderly or vision impaired pedestrian supposed to cross safely if they cannot know when there is a gap in the traffic sufficient to cross? Staff indicated that they could add a pedestrian activated flashing yellow light to warn traffic but not a traffic signal with a red light to stop traffic. Flashing beacons also have a warrant system but they can be considered for possibly Moss, Cook, Douglas and Dock keeping in mind that there is evidence that unwarranted signals can decrease pedestrian safety for the general public. The City will continue to assess needs after the project CRD is completed. AWG indicated that seasonal tour buses and City transit traffic needs to be taken into consideration when assessing traffic and pedestrian volume.

a.4 Concern about the grade of a pathway from Moss Street across the park to the clifftop pathway – Sarah will check the design drawings as the CRD was looking at 7% slopes. There will be other pathways not yet constructed.

a.5. Planting of Garry oaks – As of July, the number of Garry oaks planted is 29, very near the cycle and walking path. They are high pollen producers with a minimum of 200 metres pollen distribution. Staff stated that the Landscaping is to be native species. 96 trees will be planted, and a portion will be Garry oaks as they are native to the area. AWG pointed out that the UN Trees in Cities Challenge which Victoria has signed on to directs Cities to avoid planting allergenic species and asked if going forward, allergenic species will be avoided. Staff indicated that the contract was signed several years ago and there would be time and cost implications associated with changes. AWG pointed out that there are health costs to vulnerable individuals if changes are not made. AWG was to have been consulted earlier and as this did not happen, the City made uninformed choices. Going forward, AWG does not feel the City can justify the planting of any more highly allergenic trees. This view is supported by International experts who have advised AWG on this situation, advising that highly allergenic trees are not suitable as the plantings are next to

active transportation corridors; the cliff-side walking path and the new cycle path.

Staff explained that the design guidelines which were shared with the CRD were developed by staff and signed off by Council. There has been a growing understanding of “Barrier Free” but there are still tradeoffs. Council has expressed a desire to see Garry oaks planted and staff have no direction from Council to stop planting Garry oaks. AWG does not believe that Council really understands the impact of promoting a species which affects the bodily integrity of vulnerable individuals which is protected by the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It appears that when accessibility bumps up against another well-established value, accessibility loses. Should not both interests have to give a little and a compromise be found? The Framework must address this challenge going forward. It was observed that we are now seeing the results of decisions made before the heightened accessibility awareness of staff and that this will be more evident in projects that are completed after the existing AWG members are no longer at the table.

a.6. What treatments are planned to facilitate safe crossing of the cycle path?

- b. West Songhees project - review of the refinements to the park concept plan that Council approved, and the detailed design process that will proceed over the coming few months.

Derrick Newman presented the latest design drawings. There has been a lot of work done to design for less than 5% grade to all of the paved pathways. There are also unpaved trails through the ecological restored areas to protect plantings from those who choose to take a short cut. There will be handrails on stairs, high contrast markings and tactile warnings. All paved pathways will have lighting. Furniture in the upper plaza will be movable, accessible and non-porous. Wooden bench seating will be sealed and stained.

Recommendations: There needs to be space for a wheelchair to sit alongside the benches without blocking the path. Guard rails need to be designed as to not impede the view for persons in wheelchairs.

There will be a coastal forest planting area (evergreens), a Garry oak meadow grass area and a shoreline area planted with shorter shrubs and trees to preserve the view. Efforts are being made to balance ecological restoration with low allergy plantings based on the OPALS rating and final plant choices will be made in the next few months. Still looking at low/no allergen grass choices for the turf areas.

Action: Director Soulliere to ensure that the project is provided with Robin's research on lower pollen ground covers and traditional lawn grass species.

Robin indicated that if there are a large number of Garry oaks, then it pretty well does not matter what else is planted. If Garry oaks are to be planted, then mitigation of the effects needs to be considered. These could include planting the minimum number to make it a viable Garry oak habitat. A study of the prevailing winds would help with location of the Garry oaks to minimize exposure to pollen. A GOERT publication seems to indicate that this area was not a Garry oak meadow in the late 1800s so does it need to be restored as a Garry oak habitat or could it be restored to the plantings of another era? Robin also pointed out that there are some non-native tree species on the supplied plant list which are high on the allergy scale such as the Lodge Pole Pine. Derrick indicated that the list is not finalized.

It is the hope of the AWG that both accessibility and ecological restoration for First Nations reconciliation can be viewed equally when final decisions are being made in keeping with the accessibility undertakings in the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan.

- c. In light of the Council motion of December 12 to direct staff to amend the Urban Forest Master Plan to reflect the updated canopy cover estimates, AWG made the following motion:

The AWG recommends to Council to direct staff to amend the Urban Forest Master Plan to include consideration of human health.

Moved by Robin, seconded by Paul, carried.

Robin mentioned that the AWG has been advocating for this for some time, but has never made a formal recommendation, so it has not been reported to Council. There may be various ways to do this including making clear that Goal #4, Maximize community benefits from the urban forest in all neighbourhoods, includes public health as a community benefit. There are a variety of human health impacts that could be positively influenced as a result of such an amendment, in addition to impact on people with allergies and asthma.

- d. Report for Field Trip to examine Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) and Curb Let-down Treatments, December 11, 2019

Participants: 3 Engineering staff, 1 AWG manual wheelchair user, 1 AWG power wheelchair user, 1 totally blind AWG member, 1 AWG member who has experienced vision loss, 1 guest with minimal vision

Intersections visited: Fernwood and Johnson, Bay and Richmond, Quadra and McKenzie, scramble intersection. There was not time to include Blanshard and Fort or crossing to bus stop on Wharf.

Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS)

Observations: Staff indicated that APS are now the standard for new/updated audible signals. They feature:

- locator tone

Recommendation: need to adjust volume if volume is reported to be too low, making the button difficult to locate for the blind pedestrian.

- large push button which must be held for 3 seconds to activate the audible signal

Recommendation: need to publicize this.

- Button vibrates when audible signal sounds

Recommendation: need to publicize this

- directional arrow

Recommendation: should be mounted as to point towards the truncated dome mat/curb let-down whenever possible

- other audio features such as announcing street name

Recommendation: need to explore other navigational audio features which would assist blind pedestrians

Scramble intersection

Observations: One locator tone was not loud enough. Finding and lining up at the curb would be challenging for blind pedestrians. The audible announcement stopped once the visual walk signal finished but there was no audible indication of the visual countdown from 25.

Recommendation: Truncated domes should be installed.

Recommendation: Determine if an audible countdown is possible.

Curb let-downs with 10 mm lip and scoring

Observations: The curb lip was not very easy to detect with a white cane. The horizontal scoring warning of the curb is not detectable when tapping the cane tip or even when using constant contact, as scoring runs the same direction as the cane is moving. Scoring, if detected, can be confused with cracks in the pavement. Vertical scoring may be more detectable, but none was available to trial. Vertical ridges (wayfinding at McKenzie and Quadra) were helpful in finding the truncated dome mat and curb. The way finding ridges did not create a barrier for wheelchair users.

Recommendation: Do not use scoring as a tactile warning.

Recommendation: Other way finding treatments such as those at McKenzie and Quadra should be installed if the crossings are not at a right angle to assist in finding the truncated domes especially when the APS is located a long way from the truncated domes and the curb.

Truncated domes

Observations: Blind pedestrians rely on the curb edge not only to know when to stop walking but also to line up to cross straight. This is very important particularly at unfamiliar intersections. An APS locator tone gives some warning that a curb is coming up, but the blind pedestrian still needs to find the curb and line up properly. Truncated domes warn of the curb and facilitate alignment if installed optimally. The truncated domes at the locations visited did not create a barrier for the wheelchair users.

Recommendation: Truncated domes are needed as a tactile warning at all controlled intersections, even those with a 10 mm lip.

General observations/recommendations:

- One general standard cannot meet the needs of pedestrians with disabilities at all intersections. There needs to be two or three standards each of which would be applied depending upon the configuration of the intersection, location of the APS pole etc.
- Black truncated dome mats could be an option where the stainless-steel buttons are creating a barrier for wheelchair users (Blanshard and Fort).

5. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 6:08