

ACCESSIBILITY WORKING GROUP
MEETING OF JUNE 3, 2019 AT 4:30 – 6:00 P.M.
COOK ST. VILLAGE ACTIVITY CENTRE,
380 Cook St #1, Victoria, BC V8V 3X7 (Craft Room)

1. Welcome and Roll Call

AWG members: Steve Bertrand, Susan Gallagher, Chris Dobbie, Chris Marks, Paul Jones, Robin Bayley

Regrets: Linda Bartram

Council Liaisons: Sarah Potts, Jeremy Loveday (on the phone for first part)

Guests: Bill Eisenhauer, Director of Engagement, Elizabeth (member of the public)

Liaison and Support: Doug Nutting and Barbara Michel

2. Approval of June 3, 2019 Agenda

Agenda accepted as circulated with the addition of new item, City's approval of Patios that obscure sidewalks (Paul).

Moved by Robin, seconded by Susan, carried

3. Approval of May 21, 2019 Minutes

Robin moved that the Minutes be accepted as circulated.

Seconded by Chris Dobbie, carried

4. Consultation: Town Hall on Accessibility and engagement on the draft Accessibility Framework for public input – (Bill Eisenhauer)

Director Bill Eisenhauer reported that the Town Hall on accessibility is set for July 4, 2019. The new Strategic Plan makes a commitment to hold 4 per year, and the AWG recommended that one of the first be on accessibility. The Town Hall provides the opportunity for people in the community to speak directly to Council. The date was set when it looked like it could be used to provide *feedback* on the Accessibility Framework report. Now that the timeline for the Framework report is prolonged, Town Hall feedback will provide *input* to the Framework discussions prior to the report.

He announced decisions already made. The Town Hall will be:

- held in City Hall Council Chambers
- a listening format where people who attend in person can speak for 5 minutes. No interaction, discussion, Q&A
- 6:00 doors open 6:30 -8:30 is the actual meeting.
- Depending on how many people want to speak, staff might decide to extend meeting or restrict time each speaker gets.
- webcast live
- unable to stream live video as a means of participating remotely
- include some opportunities to impart a message if not there in person.

If people have a slide presentation, they can send that in to staff in advance, to be run when they speak. Or speakers can show up that night, and get on the list to speak.

He sought AWG advice on how to organize the event and the room, and how to get the right people out to attend.

AWG recommendations:

- Have sign language interpreter (should be standard) and publicize
- No scents notice – (should be standard)
- No pets notice - (should be standard)
- Reserved area for those with assistance animals, so animals are not dispersed
- Water available for animals but no animal food.
- Ushers to help people with limited vision find seats
- Address lighting and glare
- Serve only water to human attendees
- Leave gaps in seating plan to allow for wheelchairs and power chairs.
- Have staff circulate with two roving microphones for speakers who cannot come up to a podium and so everyone can hear speakers well.
- Screen placement and size should be such that everyone can see them from anywhere [rejected – can't change Council chambers set-up]
- Staff could reformat presentations sent in by public to be in large font by requiring that they be submitted early, and/or publish guidelines for presentations (e.g., large size font and no more than two bullets a screen and good row spacing.)
- Guidelines for PowerPoint – limit use of graphics or visuals and where used, have speakers describe what others can see. Have Mayor explain this in her opening remarks
- Make submissions available online.
- Publicize presence of hearing loop

Discussion:

- July 4 date is pending, but not on City website yet. Director Eisenhower said he wanted to hold off on details until he knew more about how it will work. Will update website tomorrow. [<https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/city/town-hall.html>]
- Mr. Eisenhower reported that the Framework consultants advised that holding the Town Hall in advance of the Framework report would be valuable. If AWG thinks it would be more useful later or another meeting later, staff could look at that. There will be an opportunity for the public to comment on the Framework later.
- Paul – We often mention that our concerns may not entirely reflect concerns in the community. This could lead to a better product.

Question, Susan – What is meant by “public”: Groups representing people with disabilities, or the general public? People won’t come to events that they don’t see as affecting them.

Answer, Eisenhower – Asked for AWG input to ensure that Engagement has a good list of organizations to personally invite. The City will also take usual steps like newspaper advertising and social media to get word to general public.

AWG Members: AWG developed a good list of organizations for the Survey and shared it with Engagement to get the Accessibility Survey sent out in Spring 2017.

There was a discussion of other potential formats that would be more interactive than speaker after speaker and no reaction from Council or interaction with other attendees. Reference was made to a Housing Summit, strategic planning public event and other forums. Members had hoped for a conversation and interaction for real engagement.

Group considered whether this format could work if the AWG wants to postpone and have another type of engagement on accessibility and came to consensus that there was value in holding the Town Hall in this format on July 4, rather than postponing to some uncertain event in the future.

[Joined by guest Elizabeth.]

Mr. Eisenhower briefed the AWG on technology suggestions that could be piloted for remote participation, based on ideas from Mike Palmer, CIO and Chris Coates, Clerk. He warned that they may be technologically “clunky”.

- Microsoft Teams, provides a means for people who cannot attend in-person. People go to a web address to get in a virtual queue to speak. It is only audio. A voice would be heard in room, live, when it is the speaker’s turn, but no image or video of the speaker is provided.

- People who do not attend can watch or listen to the webcast. Staff have been working on real-time closed captioning of webcasts. It is being piloted for Council webcasts and would be used for the Town Hall.
- Also proposed a telephone number to dial in to listen if remote audience cannot get on the computer.
- Speakers can pre-record a 5 minute video address. Upload to a site. Staff could run it for the audience in the speaker's time slot, but wouldn't be live.

Director Eisenhower asked if the regular phone number is all that's needed or another phone system? AWG feedback on remote participation options:

- The "remote participation" options are inferior in many ways.
- Both speakers and audience miss a good deal of the message without the visual component. The remote audio-only speaker can't get cues from the audience, given that cameras will be on Councillors, and the audience and Council can't get cues from a remote speaker.
- Sending in a pre-recorded message is not equivalent. In-person attendees can modify their comments based on what other speakers before them have said, but someone who has to send it in advance cannot. There may be technical problems and not everyone has the capacity to record and send a video file.
- One loses a lot of information watching a webcast remotely when the viewer can't determine what they see – someone else controls a camera which generally focuses on a screen for a presentation, or whoever is speaking. Someone watching the webcast can't see the speaker when a presentation is on, or reactions in the room when someone is speaking.

Action – Members with further thoughts on how to make this Town Hall more accessible should provide them to Mr. Eisenhower.

5. Business Arising:

a. Food at public engagement sessions

Robin reported that as an exception, Council agreed not to have food at the Accessibility Town Hall. Robin did not think that Council was informed of and considered the risks to people with allergies when it made the decision at COTW to include food in Town Hall events.

For the Fairfield neighbourhood plan engagement, every in-person opportunity to meet with staff was held in a food-related forum. Ability to write in is not equivalent.

AWG provided our accessible meeting checklist to staff. This document addresses food-related barriers. Engagement have chosen to accept or reject our recommendations without seeking clarification or explanation. Staff revised the Consultation Roadmap and its engagement practices without any further discussion with the AWG.

The number one means of sharing food allergens is through contact with shared surfaces. People touch food and then touch doorknobs, etc., leaving food traces. People with allergies touch that and get it on their hands. When you habitually have food on the premises, you increase the risk. City Hall is primarily a place of business where food should not be necessary. Would like to see staff & Council understand the issues and mechanics of allergen transfer and mitigation.

Discussion of potential mitigations of this introduced risk:

- Steve suggested having food in a separate room, outside the main meeting area. Robin did not think it makes much difference, if people come into the business room with food traces on their hands or bring food in.
- Do wet wipes help? They can, but hand washing is the best way, but for people to do it, it has to be easy and the opportunity needs to be right there. They won't all go down the hall to a washroom to wash their hands after eating.
- Are there protocols in place to reduce risk? Yes, Robin has been talking to Sarah Madelung, Recreation Supervisor about how to manage food allergen risk in recreation programs.
- Hand Sanitizer does nothing. It does not remove allergens – it only kills germs. It is a common misconception that it helps.
- Facilities could bring in hand wash stations and people could be asked to wash, or wet towels passed around.
- Serve things without “priority allergens” – the foods most likely to cause harm, although people can be allergic to any food.
- A lot that can be done but first you need to acknowledge the risk and accept the right of everyone to be at the table and to be safe.

[Councillor Loveday left the meeting to catch a flight. He had been on mobile phone speaker. There is no teleconference capability at the CSAC.]

b. Update: Accessibility Framework process (Doug Nutting)

Robin stated that this is on the agenda because the report on the process for completing and having the Framework approved submitted by staff for the last AWG meeting had a lot of blanks, including Council and Senior Staff training.

Since then, a recent Quarterly update indicates that staff intend to hold off delivering Accessibility Awareness Training in order to include it in mixed training re. a variety of marginalized groups. This would likely water down the information on accessibility and human rights of people with disabilities and decrease time spent on accessibility.

Doug Nutting – He has had no additional word from staff since its last report on the Framework.

Robin asked if there is a new consultant working on the Framework (as she had heard).

Director Eisenhower delivered a statement.

I can let you know that there was a consultant working on the project. They got the project to a particular point. Fraser & his team are looking at next steps of its evolution. Whether it will involve another consultant or who that will be, he could not say. The Framework is not completed. Still work to be done and decision has not been made completely regarding who will do it. MNP has finished their work. The work that they were contracted to do has concluded. Currently, there is not another group working on the Framework. Fraser Work will provide a full update on the work done to date and still to be done. Once final decisions have been made, AWG will be informed.

Paul and Steve expressed grave concerns about the City's contracting practices, the loss of information provided to the consultants and lack of consistency this disruption will cause.

Robin reported that the AWG only spoke to the consultants, not staff on the issues and our vision for the Framework. If those consultants aren't still on the project, no one still involved in the project heard directly from the AWG about the work the AWG advised be done and what the Framework should include. Anyone new won't likely have this information at their disposal. AWG has experienced loss in accuracy when messages are filtered through other's experiences and passed on. The AWG invested a lot of time preparing to speak to the consultants and interacting with them.

Doug - A draft Framework report will be provided to AWG with enough time for members to consider before a meeting with staff. Doug – if first step is delayed, then later steps will be too, to allow AWG time to absorb and review materials.

AWG's ability to participate meaningfully is directly related to the notice it receives and ability to meet to discuss amongst ourselves. AWG membership is so low (7 of the allowed 12) that it will be difficult to plan a special meeting during the summer and get quorum. It requires advance planning.

Linda's draft timeline indicated mid-June AWG receipt of Framework. AWG has had no reaction to the timeline and proposed steps from staff. Have they accepted or rejected any of the AWG's proposed steps?

Action: Doug Nutting will contact Fraser to again ask for a plan and next steps and share this with the AWG as soon as he knows.

c. Accessibility Survey

[Re. the AWG recommendation from October 2018:

That Council direct staff to provide an estimate for the cost of completing analysis of the AWG Accessibility Survey which closed May 2017, on a priority basis, and report the results to the AWG and Council. The analysis should include theory-based quantitative analysis to help understand who said what and a summary of write-in responses, to aid in understanding the reasons behind tick box answers. The qualitative analysis should be done in a way that protects privacy of respondents (e.g., analyzed by an independent third party).]

Director Eisenhauer reported that survey respondents' data was shared with the consultant (MNP) working on the Framework to consider how it could be most effectively used as part of the situational analysis and foundational work. Staff decided that the AWG should revisit whether additional analysis is required when they see what the consultants have extracted from the data. The onus will be on the AWG to request further analysis if it is not satisfied.

He stated that the survey had a lot of open-ended questions. No budget or plan was created for analysis when staff helped the AWG design and distribute the survey.

Robin observed that this did not seem to be the same treatment that other surveys undertaken by the City get, with timely, comprehensive analysis planned and published.

d. Truncated Domes at mid-block crosswalks (Susan)

Susan proposed a Motion:

The AWG recommends that the City of Victoria follow the example of Saanich and other municipalities and install tactile dome markings and tactile strips at mid-block bus stops, as an example, stops along Yates St. between Douglas and Fernwood.

Susan – if you don't have good vision and the bus stop is not near a corner, it isn't easy to find the bus stop, especially on long blocks. Saanich just puts them by the bus stop. The motion is intended to ask Council to ask staff to look into it.

Doug clarified that Susan meant tactile indicator strips.

Robin – Don't people with no vision rely on domes to alert them to a danger in front of them, rather than directional cue?

Doug – there are two uses; they can indicate something perpendicular to where you are. It will be important to coordinate with other municipalities and check with Linda as a representative of the blind community.

Action - Doug will take it directly to Philip Bellefontaine

Steve seconded. Paul abstained. Motion Carried

e. Paws in Parks

This issue has been on the AWG agenda and deferred many times. We have seen pro-pet-dog related measures coming up for Council decision frequently. They get on Council's agenda and motions are made in the Strategic Planning process, even though there is a pending policy exercise on the POSMP. Yet measures to improve accessibility are held back because there is a planned formal exercise pending.

Robin is seeking a way to indicate that the AWG has an interest in this issue and wants a place at the table when such a committee is formed. Also to give a message to Council that there are accessibility concerns relating to pet dog policy. Would prefer that Council postpone making decisions on these matters, until after the comprehensive, consultative process, so that those who are negatively affected don't have to keep having to fight one-off proposals.

Moved by Robin

1. That Council include Accessibility Working Group representation on any Paws in Parks type committee, a planned action in the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan, and analyze and consider accessibility perspectives on all pet dog related initiatives such as off-leash areas.
2. That Council postpone considerations of any pet dog related initiatives until after this already-planned and inclusive review of pet dog policy is undertaken.

Further, absent the committee being formed, whenever such issues come up, accessibility analysis should be done and reported. For instance, input received on vulnerable people being injured should be reported to Council (referring to the latest 3-park, 3-year "pilots", where such a report was not mentioned.)

Doug responded that he had spoken to Parks who reported that Council has not given direction, and staff has not been working on it.

Robin reported that the action is in the approved 2017 POSMP plan as a short-term item and she understands it is staff's responsibility to bring up those approved actions for Council's consideration in the order they are in the plan.

A concern was expressed about the motion being descriptive enough to be understood. Doug responded that staff are aware of the accessibility implications and barriers of pet dog policy.

Susan seconded. Carried.

Future of the AWG

Paul inquired about Robin's use of the phrase, "demise of this committee" in the context of getting all known accessibility issues on the Issues List before the AWG mandate expires.

Robin explained that the Interim Terms of Reference for AWG approved in January says that this iteration of the AWG will expire one month after the approval of the Framework. By that point a consultant should have advised the City and staff should have developed recommendations about a new TOR for an AWG-type advisory committee. There seems to be an intent on Council's part to have some sort of committee on accessibility. But by then, some members will have served officially for 4 years [first meeting was November 2015]. Founding members who worked on forming the committee have been involved for 5 years. It is up to Council to decide if they will appoint any current members willing to continue to serve under new terms.

f. Balancing accessibility concerns with pollinator habitat

Doug – spoke to Michael Creighton in Parks, who is working on the issue.

Parks discussed AWG feedback on Derrick's presentation re. the Songhees Park extension plan last month, including Robin's feedback on the high allergen status of plants in the plan. Doug reported that Staff intend to come to share with the AWG a list of all the criteria that staff look at when making decisions on selecting plants, such as site-specific characteristics. There are about 7 criteria they look at and pollination and pollinator habitat are among them.

Robin found this confusing – The Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP) has a number of planting criteria and those do not include human health risk. She is unaware of any policy that requires the City to consider accessibility of the planted environment. The AWG made a recommendation to have this consideration formalized in policy. Doug said It is not a policy, but horticulturalists take a number of factors into consideration.

Robin provided background. The only direction Council has given staff on this AWG issue is from Nov. 2017 – to work with the AWG and UFT to balance accessibility of the planted environment around playgrounds with pollinator habitat. The motion's intent was accessibility but it was burdened with the pollinator consideration in a hostile amendment. In September 2018, staff reported to Council two actions they planned to take, arrived at without discussion with the AWG. Those are very narrow actions that are reportedly still in progress and are intended to produce non-binding guidelines and public information.

Council did not approve the AWG's Financial Plan recommendation for a policy project to look at ways to improve accessibility of the planted environment. It was referred to the Framework, but AWG has no idea if it is in the scope of the Framework, as it has been told nothing about the contents of the Framework.

This week, two issues are on the COTW agenda that will negatively affect people with environmental allergies and some other conditions.

The first was Growing in the City Urban Food Program, **Food Bearing, Pollinator and Native Plant Landscape Design Guidelines**, that will see public land turned over to food (including nut tree) and native plant growing and encourage the public to provide pollinator habitat. The Accessibility Impact Statement (AIS) in one staff report references the known barriers, but does not contain an effective plan to mitigate them. The purported mitigation is a document that is not complete and not appended, so Council could not learn of the extent it would address the accessibility issue. It is an optional fact sheet with limited application.

[Its AIS says in part:

Increasing urban gardening and food production may also increase pollen count and provide habitat for stinging insects, which can affect residents, particularly those living with allergies. Staff have developed guidelines, Urban Gardening and Pollen Allergies in the City of Victoria, for gardening and a low allergen plant list. This resource also offers tips to promote pollinators while also considering selection and placement and planting low allergen plants.]

Another initiative, **Food Bearing, Pollinator and Native Plant Species Landscape Design Guidelines**, mandates 30% pollinator, food bearing and native plants in all new developments. It may mean that people with certain allergies can't live anywhere new, if they would have to walk past buzzing bees and nut trees. Staff are aware of the issue, but there is another public policy objective in play that appears to be viewed as more important than accessibility. They recommend expedited consultation that does not include a plan for expert public health input.

[Its AIS says in part:

Staff acknowledge that the presence of some common landscaping plants can have adverse impacts on individuals with asthma and plant-related allergies. Lower-allergenic species can be planted without detracting from desired objectives; however, the ability to require or mandate specific low-allergen plant species varies between each development permit area and the rationale for their establishment as outlined in the Local Government Act.]

Council approved a motion to refer the proposed Official Community Plan amendments to the Accessibility Working Group and the Urban Food Table for

comments, but did not answer Councillor Loveday's question about what level of engagement.

This April, Robin was given the opportunity to provide constructive feedback on the guidance for gardeners. Her feedback aimed to make it more balanced to accessibility interests. Staff have not engaged with her since receiving feedback. She had no involvement on the Plant list.

The Committee generally discussed the need to be told "No" if something has been rejected and is not going to happen, using words like respect. Otherwise, members waste valuable time and energy when there is no chance of success.

Sarah Potts – There is a new Staff member working on this. [Food Systems Coordinator, Alex Harned]

Action: Doug will meet w. Parks staff on Wed or Thursday and will convey AWG input and concerns.

g. Accessible voting

Robin reported Linda's issue and motion. Prior to last October's election, Linda asked staff to bring in voting machines that would allow blind people to vote independently. Currently, they require the assistance of an elections staff member. City staff told her that there wasn't enough time. There may be a by-election for a Councillor seat after the Fall federal election. Robin also has an accessible voting issue. Cook St. Village is only City facility that has a policy prohibiting pet dogs from entering. On voting day they did not enforce the policy to stop pet dogs.

After the Fall City election, a staff report went to Council that did not mention these two accessibility issues which staff were aware of, and Linda and Robin know of no meaningful action taken or planned.

Linda's Motion, moved by Robin:

The AWG recommends to Council to direct staff to make civic elections as accessible as possible to persons with disabilities including, but not limited to, employing accessible voting machines and banning pet dogs from attending voting locations.

There was discussion about the scope and definition of dogs. "Pet dog" is necessary because Councilors always ask about assistance animals when the AWG raises issues around dog allergens, despite the law being clear that the latter are allowed. When staff consider or develop a policy, they can devise the best wording: no pet dogs or welcomes assistance animals.

Members agreed that City policy should ban pet dogs from voting locations even where they are ordinarily allowed.

Steve seconded, carried unanimously

b. New Business

- a) Upcoming member absences (to aid in planning Accessibility Framework meetings)

Robin asked AWG members to let her know if they have vacation or other absences coming up this summer, to aid in planning meetings including any extraordinary meetings on the Accessibility Framework. Some members shared their away dates.

Action: All members asked to confirm their away dates by an email to Robin/Linda

- a) Meeting Agendas

Paul made a statement about his desire to see fewer items on the agenda, so we can get through it and give sufficient attention.

Discussion.

- Robin - It looked manageable but we could not anticipate how long the Town Hall discussion would take.
- All items (minus request for summer absences) were carried over.
- This committee on a limited time, and it needs to get items on the issues list, even if they cannot get substantive discussion.
- General consensus that fewer items is preferable.

7. Next meeting

Members agreed to meet on Tuesday July 2, due to a Monday statutory holiday.

The committee was not able to schedule its special meeting to consider the Accessibility Framework, as it still does not know when it will receive the draft report.

8. Adjournment