

Accessibility Working Group Minutes

August 12 2019

1. Welcome and roll call:

AWG Members – Linda Bartram, Robin Bayley, Paul Jones, Chris Marks, Susan Gallagher, Steve Bertrand. Regrets: Chris Dobbie
Council Liaison: Jeremy Loveday
Liaison& support: Doug Nutting, Kelly-Anne Malcomson
Guest: Christine Paisley – Action Committee (Inclusion Resource Person)
Staff: Derrick Newman, Assistant Director of Facilities

2. Approval of agenda: moved by Linda, seconded by Susan, carried

3. Approval of July 2, 2019 minutes: moved by Linda, seconded by Steve, carried

4. Business arising:

a) Staff reply to request for notes of staff verbal reports to COTW regarding accessibility

Doug received the following email from Christine Havelka on June 21:

“We wouldn’t have any notes on verbal updates. Any updates made at COTW would be in the minutes (which are generally ‘action’ minutes, so very little discussion) or part of the webcast.”

Motion: The AWG recommends that Council refrain from requesting or receiving any verbal-only staff reports, especially when it relates to matters of accessibility, as they are not accessible to all members of the AWG. And that the matter of Council information accessibility be referred to the Accessibility Framework project so the City adopts policies and procedures to ensure that public information provided in graphic or verbal format also be provided in agreed upon accessible alternative formats.

Moved by Robin, seconded by Paul, carried

Paul questioned whether AWG motions were even being raised in Council. Jeremy indicated that AWG motions were being raised in Council and that it is good to have a record of motions regardless of whether the result is what the AWG is seeking. Paul expressed strongly that he feels that the lack of actions that result from AWG motions is so disingenuous.

b) Accessibility Framework update:

Doug confirmed with staff that AWG will have the opportunity to present their report on the Accessibility Framework to Council at the same COTW meeting following the staff report.

Doug reported the following proposed timeline for Framework discussion: Sept. 6 – draft to AWG, Sept 9 – AWG only discussion of draft, week of Sept 16 – joint AWG/Staff/consultant meeting, rewrite of draft, second opportunity for AWG to comment, Council receives draft 2, public consultation, final presentation to Council, Council adoption, AWG mandate terminated one month after adoption

Awareness training of Staff and Council – Jeremy has asked the City Manager to follow up. AWG members were in agreement that they do not wish to proceed with discussions with Staff about the Framework until Staff and Council have received at least a 2 hour training session.

Jen (Urban Matters) joined the meeting by phone. She reported that they have created a matrix of actions and recommendations from all the data and feedback collected looking for common threads and have put this into an action table using the Social Determinants of Health to categorize the actions. Urban Matters have reviewed/ developed and Staff are reviewing:

- Prioritization Tool for the City to help advance accessibility initiatives from a capital infrastructure (built environment) perspective
- Accessibility Advisory Committee Terms of Reference
- Accessibility Coordinator job description with the recommendation that the position sit within the City Manager's Department
- Public Engagement guidelines

Action: Linda to send Jen the latest Facilities Accessibility Checklist once it is approved.

Urban Matters will deliver the following to Staff on August 14:

- Full Framework which is a strategy to help situate where the City is in the landscape of accessibility around the concept of the UN Declaration on Accessibility, Human Rights, where the City of Victoria should be in relation to where the federal and provincial governments are on Accessibility. It identifies four key focus areas to be achieved in the life of the strategy with an action plan

where City needs to demonstrate leadership in developing policies many of which AWG has been recommending for quite some time.

- Action Plan which looks at short, medium, long term and on-going actions which will probably not include built environment actions which will be addressed by the Prioritization Tool, but rather the operational (people, services, programs) actions
- Overarching Accessibility Policy consistent with how the City develops policy (comparing existing City policies and Council's Statement of Commitment). Will not include such policies as reasonable accommodation policy and pet restriction and scent reduction at City Hall policy that have been recommended by AWG and which staff have said would be included in the Framework. These would be a level down. They might be included after Staff reviews Urban Matters draft. They will be captured in the Action Plan likely as a short term goal (first 3 years)

AWG will receive a text-based Word document which will be no more than 70 pages, some of which will contain background information which will not require intense review.

c) Doug's retirement

Linda informed AWG that this was Doug's last meeting as he is retiring from his contract with the City at the end of August. Doug has been talking with Nav Sidhu about succession planning. Linda thanked Doug on behalf of the AWG for the very responsive assistance he has provided. Doug has offered his knowledge and expertise if required in the future and will provide feedback on the Framework.

d) Air Clearance Report (ACR) for City Hall

Derrick Newman reported that the ACR was to establish a base line for the condition of the air in City Hall. It was conducted on a Thursday (COTW) over an 8 hour period in areas frequented by the public. Air quality was within accepted guidelines.

Short comings of testing:

- scents and pet dander allergens may only be present for a short period of time in a limited area and then would be filtered out by the air handling system and would not necessarily be detected by such testing.

Action: Derrick will approach the consultant to discuss this shortcoming

- The public does not attend COTW so scents and pet allergens would probably not be present during testing

- The vacuuming regime was not taken into consideration

Action: Derrick to meet with Human Resources who deal with health and safety, to discuss the policy aspect of this issue

Scent-free cleaning products are now being used at City Hall. Christine reported that this has made a big difference for her.

Action: Derrick to check if scent-free products (soap, air freshener etc.) are being used in the washrooms

The HVAC system is slated to be replaced and a different filter that screens out particles from 1 – 3 microns, is being used in the meantime. A hand held testing device was used after the nearby fire when City Hall was shut down for 3 days and the established baseline was very helpful in determining when Staff could return.

- e) Wharf St bike lane public education and poster re: cyclists and pedestrians who are blind

Linda passed around the poster which raised much concern in the vision loss community and at the Disability Resource Centre. Staff did not consult with AWG or run the poster by them before distribution. The language and graphics were confusing and not politically correct. Sarah Webb indicated that the poster could be reprinted based on the feedback provided and new wording and graphics are being proposed.

Action: Linda will forward new wording to Susan for feedback

Linda and a sighted companion checked out the new bike lane on Wharf St. and the pilot APS to cross the bike lane to the bus stop. There is a locator tone so she was able to find the APS and tactile domes so she could line up correctly to cross. When the button was pushed, a voice indicated that the flashing yellow light had been activated. There is also a sign indicating that cyclists were to yield to pedestrians which appeared to be quite visible. Cyclists did stop but Linda was still not fully confident when stepping out as she had no way of knowing that they had stopped. They did not communicate with her. This is the message that the poster will now portray – Stop and communicate.

Linda also discovered that there are 2 locations, foot of Yates and foot of Fort where it is necessary to cross over the bike lane to an island where the pedestrian signal button is now located, so two more barriers have been created. The Inner Harbour is no longer accessible to her. Robin stated that there is a systemic issue that has not and will not be addressed by the Framework document. Staff are not coming

and learning what the barriers are, and they are not developing policy and standards when they do acknowledge there is a barrier.

Linda also reported that in order to activate the audible signal at the scramble crosswalk, it is necessary to hold the button in for a few seconds. There has been no mention of this in any publicity seen by the AWG despite the AWG's recommendation to get the word out months ago for the previously installed APS. Steve is very concerned that the City is creating barriers upon barriers and it will probably only get worse as the protected bike lane network expands. He has experienced physical barriers to do with the bike lanes.

Motion: Whereas the City did not consult with the Accessibility Working Group (AWG) regarding the Pandora bike lane during the design phase of the project; and

Whereas safety concerns of pedestrians with vision loss, crossing over the bike lane to the bus stops on Pandora were pointed out to the City prior to the opening of the bike lane but were not addressed; and

Whereas a Human Rights complaint has been launched by concerned pedestrians who are blind regarding this safety issue; and

Whereas the City did consult with the AWG regarding the design of the Fort Street bike lane and no new uncontrolled crossings were installed; and

Whereas the AWG chair was assured by Engineering at the then Cook Street bike lane public engagement session, that the Pandora design would not be repeated; and

Whereas the City did not consult with the AWG regarding the Wharf and Humboldt Street bike lanes; and

Whereas there are at least two places where pedestrians have to cross the bike lane on Wharf to reach an accessible pedestrian signal (foot of Yates and Fort Streets); and

Whereas persons with vision loss cannot see cyclists approaching the crossing or hear their approach as they would hear a vehicle; and

Whereas it has been observed by both pedestrians who are blind and City staff that cyclists do not stop for pedestrians waiting at a marked uncontrolled crossing; and

Whereas the onus is on the pedestrian to watch for when the crossing is clear at uncontrolled crossings; and

Whereas pedestrians who are blind have found it necessary to limit their travel on the bus on Pandora; and

Whereas pedestrians who are blind will now have to limit their travel to Wharf Street and activities in the Inner Harbour; and

Whereas to date, satisfactory mitigation measures have not been tested and implemented by the City to alleviate these safety concerns with the existing bike lanes; and

Whereas the City continues to install uncontrolled crossings of bike lanes regardless of AWG's continuing opposition

The AWG recommends to Council that they direct staff to put a moratorium on the installation of any further uncontrolled crossings over bike lanes until measures acceptable to pedestrians who are blind are put in place at the existing inaccessible crossings.

Moved by Linda, seconded by Paul, carried

Action: Linda and Steve will present the safety issues at an upcoming Council meeting

Action: AWG members to inform Christine Paisley when they plan to speak at Council meetings as this is part of her role with the Action Committee.

f) Brochure re: pollinators and allergies

AWG members felt comfortable with Robin speaking on AWG's behalf on this issue as she is the resident expert. AWG does not wish to be acknowledged in the brochure as it sends the message that AWG condones this approach to the issue which it does not.

Action: Linda to send an email to Alex Harned indicating that the mention of AWG's contribution to the brochure is to be removed, explaining why

g) Feedback from the Accessibility Town Hall

Steve reported that he needed help to use part of the outdoor ramp system and if there is a more accessible ramp, it needs to have better signage.

Action: AWG to address this issue at a future AWG meeting

h) Accessible voting

Motion: AWG recommends that Council direct staff to:

- make an accessible voting machine available for the next municipal election or bi-election on polling day and that it be located at City Hall or another equally central polling location;
- ensure that there is at least one polling station in a pet-free facility available to all voters on polling day and that the no-pet policy is enforced; and
- Widely publicize these accessibility options well in advance of polling day

Moved by Linda, seconded by Susan, carried

i) Enforcement of accessible parking stalls on private property

Removed from agenda as City has no jurisdiction over such parking

j) Sidewalk patios – obscuring sidewalks & accessible seating

Deferred

5. Next meeting: tentatively scheduled for September 16 at 4:00

Action: Doug to approach Staff requesting that we have our AWG only meeting on September 16 and the meeting with Staff the week of September 23. (This was approved the following day)

If AWG receives the draft Framework late then AWG will request for meeting dates to be pushed forward accordingly.

6. Adjournment : (approximately 6:45)