



CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

Municipal Hall
1229 Esquimalt Road
Esquimalt, B.C. V9A 3P1

Staff Report

File #:24-452

TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: October 7, 2024

Report No. ADM-24-066

TO: Council

FROM: Deb Hopkins, Director of Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Draft Township of Esquimalt Accessibility Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council receive the draft Accessibility Plan for information and direct staff to make the plan available for public feedback for at least 30 days.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In December 2023 Council directed staff to join the Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee with six partner municipalities and to prepare an initial Accessibility Plan with a focus on employment and service delivery. Staff, in collaboration with our partners, has completed the draft inaugural Plan and is seeking Council direction to provide notification of its availability and to invite public comment and feedback prior to Council's consideration of approval.

BACKGROUND:

At the December 18, 2023 meeting, Council directed staff to formally join the Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee (CWAAC) comprised of six partner municipalities including the City of Colwood, District of Highlands, City of Langford, District of Metchosin, District of Sooke, and Town of View Royal. This direction recognized the CWAAC as the Township's Accessibility Committee as required under new legislation enacted in June 2021 under the *Accessible British Columbia Act*. At this meeting Council further directed staff to prepare the initial Accessibility Plan with a focus on employment and service delivery in collaboration with the CWAAC. CWAAC held its first meeting on November 23, 2023 appointing Langford as the host municipality providing the Committee with administrative support for the first year.

CWAAC has met four additional times with meeting minutes provided to Council and published on the Township's website. Business completed to date includes conducting two surveys and conducting seven public engagement sessions with the assistance of consultants with lived experience.

Chronology:

- March 13, 2023 - Council authorizes partnering with Westshore municipalities to form the joint sub-regional Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee (CWAAC).
- August 28, 2023 - Council approves continued participation in the Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee, but provides further direction to establish a standalone Esquimalt Accessibility Committee comprised of staff to allow Esquimalt to commence activities for this initiative, with the goal of transitioning the committee to members with lived experience as quickly as possible.
- August 29, 2023 - Accessibility page published to Township website and accessibility email established as formal feedback mechanism.
- Fall 2023 - Staff completed formal training through Accessible Spaces 101 (University of Athabasca in partnership with the Rick Hansen Foundation).
- November 2023 - Terms of Reference for CWAAC established, and Council direction generally aligned for partner municipalities.
- November 23, 2023 - First CWAAC meeting held, Terms of Reference Amended to broaden the membership of the committee to persons with lived experience within a 12-month period.
- December 18, 2023 - Council approves CWAAC as Esquimalt's Accessibility Committee and directs staff to work with partner municipalities to prepare the inaugural Accessibility Plan.
- December 8, 2023 - January 31, 2024 - Survey 1 conducted to seek input on how people wish to be engaged (163 responses).
- March 1 - April 7, 2024 - Survey 2 conducted to identify barriers experienced to municipal employment (including volunteering) and service delivery (185 responses).
- July 16 - 26, 2024 - Three in person and four virtual public engagement sessions held. Esquimalt hosted an in-person session at the Gorge Pavilion on July 25. The fourth in person session in Sooke had to be adapted to a virtual session as a result of the Sooke Potholes Area Wildfire.
- January 1, 2025 - City of Colwood assumes hosting duties and administrative support for CWAAC.

Advisory Body Recommendations:

At the Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting held on September 25, 2024, the Committee recommended that all partner municipalities forward the draft inaugural Accessibility Plan to their respective Councils and seek public feedback.

ANALYSIS:

CWAAC members worked collaboratively to prepare an initial Accessibility Plan focussed on employment and service delivery representing the first two standards outlined in the *Accessible British Columbia Act* and in accordance with Council's direction. The remaining six standards will be incorporated into the Accessibility Plan over time as the Plan evolves.

This development of the Plan was achieved by conducting two surveys in late 2023 and early 2024 that focussed on how people wished to be engaged and identifying barriers experienced in employment and volunteer opportunities and service delivery. Nealy 350 responses were received, and a summary of this engagement was provided to Council in May 2024. This work formed the basis of the facilitated public engagement sessions held in the summer through Changing Paces, an Ontario-based consultancy with lived experience.

Changing Paces subsequently led a series of seven public engagement sessions with staff support from partnering municipalities as follows:

Date	Time	Location
July 16, 2024	7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Virtual
July 18, 2024	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Virtual
July 22, 2024	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Colwood City Hall
July 23, 2024	7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Langford Legion
July 24, 2024	10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Virtual
July 25, 2024	10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Esquimalt Gorge Pavilion
July 26, 2024	10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Virtual*

* Replaced Sooke's scheduled in person session due to the Sooke Potholes Area Wildfire

The consultants subsequently presented their report to CWAAC at a special meeting in early September which included recommendations for the draft Accessibility Plan. The consultant's report, together with survey responses, and Township leadership staff input form the basis of the draft Township of Esquimalt Accessibility Plan (Attachment 1). The other partner municipalities are using similar opening and closing sections, but the core of the plans is specific to each municipality.

The next phase of this initiative will be to invite public input on the draft Plan prior to bringing it back for Council's consideration of approval. Council's approval of the Plan will satisfy the Township's legislative requirements to develop a Plan under the *Accessible British Columbia Act*. The Accessibility Plan provides a framework for the actions and initiatives to be undertaken to improve or enhance accessibility by removing barriers to municipal employment and service delivery in Esquimalt. The Plan will serve as the tool for accessibility-related employment and service delivery enhancements for an initial three-year period in support of our goal of becoming a barrier-free community. The Plan is required to be reviewed every three years going forward.

In addition, the Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee membership is transitioning to community representatives from each of the partnering municipalities by the first meeting in 2025. Recruitment for an Esquimalt representative is currently underway as part of the annual Advisory Body recruitment process. An amended Terms of Reference is provided in Attachment 2 that takes effect in 2025 and coincides with the City of Colwood's assumption of hosting responsibilities and administrative support for the next year.

The collaboration with the partner municipalities has resulted in mutually beneficial cost sharing of the consulting firm and annual hosting responsibilities and administrative support. The intermunicipal committee structure successfully facilitated the preparation of shared content of the Plan and in reflecting the diversity within the partnership.

Municipal staff provided input to the actions and initiatives tables included in the draft Township of Esquimalt Accessibility Plan and the draft was reviewed by the leadership team prior to bringing it before Council.

OPTIONS:

1. That Council receive the draft Esquimalt Accessibility Report for information, and direct staff to provide notice of its availability and invite public input.
2. That Council request additional information from staff.
3. That Council provide alternate direction to staff.

COUNCIL PRIORITY:

Good Governance and Organizational Excellence
Engaged and Healthy Community
Strong Relationships and Partnerships

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There are no financial impacts related to the receipt of the report for information and direction to seek public input on the draft Plan. However, the actions and initiatives that are contained within the Plan may have financial impacts that would form part of future annual budget cycles.

COMMUNICATIONS/ENGAGEMENT:

If directed by Council, the draft Accessibility Plan will be published to the Township's website for public review and comment. Comprehensive public notification will be completed in accordance with the Township's Public Notice Bylaw, 2024, No. 3136.

TIMELINES & NEXT STEPS:

- Publish the draft Accessibility Plan on the Township's website for public review and comment - October - November 2024.
- Bring the Plan and comments back to Council in December for consideration of approval- December 2024.
- Finalize document with consistent branding and inclusion of appropriate images - January 2025.
- New membership appointed for term commencing in 2025 and Plan consultation with the new community-based Committee begins - February 2025.

REPORT REVIEWED BY:

1. Ian Irvine, Director of Finance, Reviewed
2. Dan Horan, Chief Administrative Officer, Concurrence

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Township of Esquimalt Accessibility Plan
2. Revised Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee (CWAAC) Terms of Reference