

Report

Date September 6, 2023
Subject Accessibility Action Plan

File:

PURPOSE

To introduce the draft Accessibility Action Plan and Public Feedback Mechanism.

BACKGROUND

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* received royal assent on June 17, 2021. It provides a framework to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility and represents an important step to make B.C. a more accessible province.

Under the Accessible British Columbia Regulation, by September 1, 2023, local governments and other organizations must:

- establish an accessibility committee;
- develop an accessibility plan; and,
- create a tool to receive public feedback on accessibility.

DISCUSSION

Establish an Accessibility Committee

On April 5, 2023, Council approved the Terms of Reference for the Accessibility Advisory Committee and began advertising for members. The first meeting of the Committee took place on June 15, 2023.

Develop an Accessibility Plan

A draft Accessibility Action Plan was created with input from the Accessibility Advisory Committee as well as feedback from staff and was endorsed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee on August 24, 2023.

As this is North Cowichan's first formal Accessibility Action Plan, and there are many potential areas of focus, initial actions were chosen based on their ability to help establish the processes and knowledge base necessary to allow for accessibility improvements that can be accomplished in the short term and with limited budget in this initial year. It is anticipated that action plans will be regularly reviewed and updated and that staff will report regularly on progress towards meeting the plan's goals.

Create a Tool to Receive Public Feedback

The communications plan includes soliciting public feedback through ConnectNorthCowichan.ca. The public will be asked to provide feedback on the plan's actions and identify specific recommendations for future accessibility enhancements. Comments and questions can be left on the site, as well as using a mapping tool that allows people to put a pin in an area on the map that they feel needs improvement.

Public feedback will be reviewed and incorporated into this first action plan and used to help prioritize future enhancements.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT Council:

- (1) Endorse the Accessibility Action Plan as attached to the September 6, 2023, report from the General Manager, Corporate Services; and,
- (2) Direct staff to create a page on North Cowichan's Public Engagement site to gather feedback from the public on the Accessibility Action Plan.
 - The Accessibility Action Plan was created to include projects that could be realistically completed within the short-term time frame and limited budget available. Minor language updates were made to the Plan attached to this report based on feedback received from the Accessibility Advisory Committee on August 24, 2023.
 - Through the Accessibility Advisory Committee, progress towards actions in the plan will be monitored, and actions in the plan will be updated continually.

2. THAT Council refer the Accessibility Action Plan to the Committee of the Whole for consideration and recommendation of any amendments to the Plan.

- The Accessibility Action Plan is a living document that is expected to be updated regularly as new opportunities arise and projects are completed.
- Should Council wish to amend this first plan, the document will be updated on the website's Connect page, and the details of the amendments will be shared with the Accessibility Advisory Committee at their next meeting.

IMPLICATIONS

The Accessible BC Regulation requires local governments to establish an accessibility committee, develop a plan and create a tool to receive public feedback by September 1, 2023. North Cowichan has met these requirements by publishing the draft plan on the municipal website and releasing the ConnectNorthCowichan page, which will be activated upon Council endorsement of the plan.

The first plan includes action items that can be accomplished in the near term, with a limited budget and items that will help ensure North Cowichan is able to make continuous and long-lasting improvements to accessibility.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council:

- (1) Endorse the Accessibility Action Plan, as attached to the September 6, 2023, report from the General Manager, Corporate Services; and,
- (2) Direct staff to create a page on North Cowichan's Public Engagement site to gather feedback from the public on the Accessibility Action Plan.

Report prepared by:



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Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Talitha Soldera - Acting
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments: Accessibility Action Plan