

Municipality of North Cowichan Accessibility Advisory Committee MINUTES

August 20, 2024, 11:00 a.m.

Municipal Hall - Large Committee Room & Electronically

Members Present Bruce Findlay, Chair
 Barbara Allen
 Heather Touhey
 Ray Hedstrom
 Tracy Hamilton

Members Absent Amber Woodworth
 Vern White

Staff Present Andrea Hainrich, Deputy Corporate Officer
 Kayla Reid-Starck, Legislative Coordinator
 Neil Pukesh, Director, Parks and Recreation
 Shaun Mason, Manager, Parks and Forestry

1. CALL TO ORDER

There being a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 11:08 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

IT WAS MOVED AND SECONDED:

That the agenda be adopted as circulated.

CARRIED

3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

IT WAS MOVED AND SECONDED:

That the Committee adopt the minutes of the meeting held June 4, 2024.

CARRIED

4. UNFINISHED AND POSTPONED BUSINESS

4.1 Emotional Support Animal Policy Discussion

Neil Pukesh, Director, Parks and Recreation provided a presentation on the research conducted regarding service dogs, therapy dogs, and emotional support animals.

4.2 Verbal Update on Short Term Actions

Neil Pukesh, Director, Parks and Recreation provided a verbal update on the Short-Term Action plans, noting 167 recommendations from the accessibility audit and that some of the recommendations will be included in the 2025 budget discussions.

4.3 Verbal Update on Accessibility Action in Parks

4.3.1 Presentation on Accessibility Action in Parks

Shaun Mason, Manager, Parks and Forestry Staff provided a presentation regarding the work done to date in North Cowichan's parks, as follows:

Art Mann Park – the new playground and the new accessible pathway are complete. The concrete platform for the new picnic table has been poured and the picnic table will be installed in the coming weeks. The playground remains closed until all work is completed.

Kinsmen Beach Park – work will be underway soon with an expected completion of Fall 2024.

Sherman Road Park - work is complete.

The Committee suggested that North Cowichan look into installing fences and gates around some of their parks to allow enhanced safety for children.

The Committee suggested that North Cowichan investigate the accessibility concerns related to the entrance and the designated parking stalls at the new RCMP building on Drinkwater Road. Neil Pukesh, Director, Parks and Recreation advised that the Parks Department will investigate the concerns and return with more information.

4.4 Removing Barriers to Participation – Update

Neil Pukesh, Director, Parks and Recreation provided a verbal update on Council's decision regarding the honorarium of \$40 per meeting for persons who are not compensated by their employer to participate in Committee meetings and confirmed that this will be discussed during 2025 Budget deliberations.

5. BUSINESS

None.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting ended at 11:55 a.m.

Certified by Recording Secretary

Signed by Chair;

Emotional Support Animals

Accessibility Advisory Committee
August 21, 2024

Types of Dogs

1. Service Dogs
2. Therapy Dogs
3. Emotional Support Animals

Service Dogs

- Trained to perform specific tasks for a person with a disability
 - *Visual, hearing, mobility impaired (ie – seeing eye dogs)*
 - *Medical condition alerts*
- Demanding multi year training
 - *30-65% of animals pass*
 - *~\$25,000 training costs & 18-24 months training*
- Certified training

There are two ways to be certified:

- 1. Receive a trained dog from an accredited school
- 2. Pass a public safety test

Therapy Dogs

- Not career oriented dogs - volunteers
- Family pets that work part time with organizations (*ie - comfort residents in nursing homes, hospitals, schools*)
- Do not perform tasks – no specific purpose
- Make themselves to be cuddled, petted, or spoken to.
- No certification/training requirements

Emotional Support Dogs/Animals

- Provides comfort and compassion only to owner
- No formal certification/training
- A person's pet prescribed by a person's licensed specialist to be part of treatment program for emotional/psychological disability
- Person must be considered as emotionally disabled by licenced mental health therapist.

Animal Rights

- Service Dogs
 - *legal right to go anywhere their handler can go.*
 - *Equivalent of any other accessibility aid*
 - *Protected under BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act*
 1. It is a Guide Dog and Service Dog Act offence to represent a dog as a guide or service dog when it is not.
 2. The Guide Dog and Service Dog Act makes it an offence to deny a certified dog and handler team access or accommodation.
 - A person convicted of these offence faces a fine of up to \$3,000

Animal Rights

- Therapy Dogs
 - *No particular legal rights*
 - *Often given permission to enter businesses where animals typically aren't allowed to go (schools, hospitals, nursing homes)*

Animal Rights

- Emotional Support Dogs/Animals
 - *Right to travel with owners for free*
 - *no other access rights to public spaces like service dogs*

Challenges

- Training certifications – lack thereof
- Interpretation of service, therapy, & ESA is different
 - *Definition of ESAs (dogs, cats, exotics...)*
- Human sensitivities (allergies, fear, liability) of non-certified dogs
- Misuse/abuse of process (housing, schools, workplaces, eateries)
 - *Easy process to classify an ESA (therapists or online ESA mills)*
 - *Service vests- what is and isn't correct?*
- Confusion– human rights violations/discrimination/mental health?
 - *A “no pets” clause could amount to discrimination*
 - *Landlords and stratas have a duty to accommodate a tenant's disability. The duty to accommodate **may** include allowing you to live with an emotional support animal.*
 - *How does it create undue hardship?*
- Fear of emotional disclosure by patrons to get access