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REPORT TO GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 02, 2024

SUBJECT **Capital Regional District Accessibility Plan**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To introduce the Capital Regional District's (CRD's) Accessibility Plan.

BACKGROUND

In June 2021, the *Accessible British Columbia Act* (the "Act") became law and provides a framework to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. To advise the province on matters related to accessibility and to support the development of accessibility standards, the Province of British Columbia established the Provincial Accessibility Committee. This included the creation of a forward-looking, three-year government accessibility plan, determining which other organizations the law will apply to and developing a feedback tool to ensure people throughout the province can provide input on identifying, preventing and removing barriers. Currently the Act applies to the Provincial Government and the following "prescribed organizations": Crowns, Tribunals and Agencies; Regional Districts, Municipalities and Municipal Police; Public Libraries; Public School Districts and Independent Schools; Post-Secondary Institutions; and Health Authorities. The Act does not currently extend beyond the prescribed organizations as listed, such as to non-profit societies or independent corporations established under the *Business Corporations Act*, including the Capital Region Housing Corporation (CRHC).

To support the Act, regulations require local governments to establish an accessibility committee, an accessibility plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility. The CRD established its Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) in September 2023, along with the tool to receive feedback on accessibility. Currently the CRD's AAC has ten (10) members, including the CRD Governance Committee Chair as liaison. Work of the AAC is supported by staff in the CRD Human Resources and Corporate Safety Division, including the CRD's Manager of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility and the Senior Manager of Human Resources and Corporate Safety.

Over the past year, CRD staff and the AAC have been working the development of the CRD's Accessibility Plan (the "Plan"). The CRD's Accessibility Advisory Committee reviewed a draft Accessibility Plan at the July 16, 2024, Committee meeting. A motion was made that the amendments to the CRD Accessibility Plan as discussed be approved, with final comments to be received via email by July 31, 2024. The updated plan was shared at the September 17, 2024, Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting.

Consistent with the regulation and Act, the Plan outlines how the organization will identify, remove and prevent barriers to people in the organization or interacting with it. The Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every three years. In updating the Plan, the CRD will consult with ACC and will consider specified principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design. In updating the Plan, the CRD will also consider comments received through its public feedback mechanism.

As staff seek to improve accessibility within various services and facilities, the CRD, with guidance of the AAC, has identified broad priority areas which include: Built Environment Improvements; Resourcing, Awareness and Training; and Increased Access. Each of these priorities has several actions and action timelines, and the CRD will regularly report on progress on these. The CRD recognizes that each of these priority areas, their objectives, actions and timelines will be updated from time to time, and the feedback received from the public and staff, and the work of the AAC, will help shape the outcome more fully. The CRD also recognizes that additional funding will be required to implement some of the actions.

With the Plan now developed, it will be available publicly and posted on the CRD's Accessibility webpage, which includes our tool to receive feedback on accessibility. A copy of the CRD's Accessibility Plan is attached for information. The final file that will be posted to the website will meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG2) accessibility standards.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Governance Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Capital Regional District Accessibility Plan be approved.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

IMPLICATIONS

Social Implications

In line with the *Accessible British Columbia Act* and Regulation, and with the guidance of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Accessibility Plan outlines priorities for the CRD to better ensure its policies, programs, services, built environments, infrastructure, and outdoor spaces that improve the livability, inclusivity, and accessibility for persons with disabilities in the capital region. Many initiatives have already been undertaken, and our Plan will help provide a roadmap where staff can continue to make improvements.

Financial Implications

Many actions and initiatives can be advanced and funded through the current requisition. Any actions that may require additional funding considerations will form part of annual service planning considerations.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Implications

The CRD's Accessibility Plan directly supports the principle of equity by increasing equitable access and removing barriers to CRD's services. It supports the principles of diversity and inclusion by fostering a more inclusive organizational work environment. The actions in the Plan were developed in alignment with EDI-related actions in the People, Safety and Culture Strategic Plan and the Corporate Communications Strategic Plan. They were also developing in consideration of the Draft Accessibility Standards that the Province of BC shared through public

consultation process. Because the principle of Universal Design underlies the Accessibility Plan, it is expected to positively impact not just people with disabilities but also people from other marginalized groups. The final Plan document is created using best practices in accessibility.

Service Delivery Implications

The CRD Accessibility Plan encompasses the services and facilities within the CRD's authority. The Plan does not encompass services provided by other organizations or entities within the Region, including the Capital Regional Housing Corporation (CRHC) as a not-for-profit. Actions have been established within the CRD's Accessibility Plan to explore inter-organizational collaboration that improves and enhances accessibility including those services provided of the CRHC as a not-for-profit corporation.

CRHC Implications

While the CRHC is not a defined government or prescribed organization under the Act, the CRHC embraces the goal of accessibility. The CRHC is required to adhere to BC Housing's Accessibility Plan through its funding agreements and is subject to all requirements under municipal bylaws, the BC Building Code, BC Housing's Design Guidelines and Construction Standards and/or any other funding, legislative and regulatory requirements as may be applicable.

Further, the CRHC adheres to a duty to accommodate under the *BC Human Rights Code*. This is to mean that where an accommodation is required and where the CRHC receives the specific request (which may include anything from changing the style of door handle, to the instillation of ceiling tracts, to working to rehome the tenant in a unit that is better suited to their specific requirements) the CRHC then works directly with the household on a case-by-case basis to determine the best approach to an accommodation that is determined collaboratively with the tenant and often with a Health Care Practitioner. There may be situations where an accommodation request is denied, and though rare, can include such reasons as the request was not supported by the Health Care Practitioner or the requested accommodation doesn't exist in a manner that is suited to the needs of the tenant. In these cases, the CRHC will work with the tenant to identify and suggest alternatives.

It should be noted that BC Housing, the CRHC's primary funder as well as the main funder for subsidized and supportive housing across the province, is a prescribed organization under the Accessible BC Act and as such is currently working on an Accessibility Plan that will consider the following five accessibility realms: built environment, employment, information and communications technologies, procurement of goods and services, and program and service delivery. Further to this, staff understand that BC Housing will also be working on accessible facility design guidelines for new or renovation projects, a building inventory and accessibility upgrade plan to assess existing housing stock, design components for redevelopment projects to establish new goals to improve accessibility in housing, and training for front line staff with a focus on trauma-informed service delivery to equity and rights-seeking groups. When completed, these undertakings will likely significantly shift the requirements of all housing entities accessing funding or financing through BC Housing, including the CRHC, and through the CRD's Accessibility Plan staff intend to work collaboratively with BC Housing to further enhance and resource accessibility initiatives in housing operations.

CONCLUSION

Regulations in the Province of British Columbia came into force which require local governments to establish an accessibility committee, an accessibility plan and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility. With guidance of its Accessibility Advisory Committee, the CRD has developed its Accessibility Plan inclusive of the specific principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.

RECOMMENDATION

The Governance Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Capital Regional District Accessibility Plan be approved.

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ATTACHMENT(S)

Appendix A: CRD Accessibility Plan