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## REPORT TO GOVERNANCE AND FIRST NATIONS RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2025

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**SUBJECT**     Improving Meeting Accessibility: Introduction of Hearing Assistive Technology

### **ISSUE SUMMARY**

To introduce new hearing assistive technology installed in the Capital Regional District (CRD) Boardroom, which will be broadened to other CRD meeting and workspaces.

### **BACKGROUND**

In September 2024, with the assistance and support of the CRD's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), the CRD implemented its Accessibility Plan (Appendix A). This Plan, which focuses on the priority areas of built environment improvements, resourcing, awareness and training, and increased access, includes actions around improved technology and making our meetings and meeting spaces more accessible. As part of these initiatives, the CRD has now implemented hearing assistive technology in our Boardroom. This technology, which is a Hearing Loop system called Auracast™, is a next-generation wireless audio broadcasting solution that uses Bluetooth to transmit high-quality, synchronized audio directly to hearing aids and devices, cochlear implants, and earbuds, and makes it easier for those with hearing challenges to better participate in meetings.

Nearly twenty percent (20%) of the population has some form of hearing challenge. As we look to enhance inclusivity and accessibility for our employees and our public in our CRD workplaces, Auracast™ will aid those who have difficulty in hearing. Initially installed for use in our CRD Boardroom, this technology enables a direct wireless audio stream from the Boardroom sound system to individual devices or receivers, allowing participants to hear clearly and comfortably, whether in the room or tuning in remotely. This supports a wide range of accessibility needs, including for individuals with hearing differences, sensory sensitivities, or auditory processing barriers.

Staff, elected officials, and the public who attend meetings in the CRD Boardroom can all use this technology, and CRD staff from the Technology and Digital Transformation and People, Safety and Culture Divisions can provide a tutorial on its use for those interested in using it.

As the technology continues to be tested, more CRD meeting spaces and facilities will be equipped with this technology for broader use.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### *Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies*

Ensuring increased access to CRD services and facilities is a foundational priority of the CRD's Accessibility Plan. Technology, such as Hearing Loop technology, will greatly assist those who may have hearing challenges to more fully participate in meetings, making meeting spaces and our CRD facilities more accessible.

*Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Implications*

By ensuring all staff and the public can participate in CRD meetings increases equitable access by removing barriers experienced by people with hearing challenges. The Auracast™ technology can be available to any person who would benefit from it, regardless of whether or not they have a formally identified or diagnosed hearing impairment. This helps reduce stigma for people with disabilities and people who are experiencing age-related hearing loss and normalizes the use of assistive technology. The Auracast technology was tested with members of the CRD's Accessibility Advisory Committee who provided positive feedback about their experience.

*Financial Implications*

The cost to implement the Hearing Loop assistive technology in the CRD Boardroom was \$7,923 and was within the requisition.

**CONCLUSION**

Improving access to meetings and CRD spaces is a key initiative of the CRD's Accessibility Plan. To better ensure a more accessible work environment for our staff, elected officials and public, the CRD has installed hearing assistive technology in our CRD Boardroom, and will be broadening this to other meetings and work spaces within our facilities.

**RECOMMENDATION**

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

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**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Appendix A: Capital Regional District Accessibility Plan, September 2024