



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

STAFF REPORT

To: Council
From: Manager of Legislative Services
Subject: Accessible BC Act

File No.: 0135
Date: April 26, 2023

PURPOSE: To provide an overview of the Accessible BC Act and request that Council consider options to complying with the Act.

BACKGROUND:

The Accessible BC Act was brought into law in September 2022. It requires that local governments establish an accessibility committee, develop an accessibility plan, and establish a process for receiving public feedback on accessibility. The deadline for compliance by local governments is September 1, 2023. The City of Courtenay currently does not have an accessibility plan nor an accessibility committee. Staff work with the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee (CVAC) when seeking feedback on accessibility and inclusivity aspects of City projects.

The CVAC, now part of the Comox Valley Social Planning Society, is a community advocacy group that has been committed to promoting “equity and social inclusion within the Comox Valley by making recommendations to ensure that the Comox Valley is inclusive and accommodating to community members of all ages, abilities and walks of life” since 1998.

DISCUSSION:

In order to meet requirements under the Accessible BC Act, staff have explored two options:

1. **Regional Approach:** Staff have discussed the possibility of collaboration with other Comox Valley local governments and CVAC. This would involve a joint agreement between the Social Planning Society and the City of Courtenay, Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD), Town of Comox, and Village of Cumberland. These organizations have indicated staff support for a collaborative approach and will be seeking elected official approval.

The Accessible BC Act allows that a committee may be a joint committee, and CVAC could act as a regional accessibility committee and meet the committee requirements of the Accessible BC Act. The CVRD has provided funding to CVAC in past years and is providing \$20 000 to CVAC in 2023. The CVAC has advised staff of their preference for the regional approach.

As part of the regional approach, the accessibility plan would be an overarching framework that would apply to all participating local governments. The framework would describe accessibility and inclusivity principles but not prescribe any standards. Each local government would then continue planning in a more detailed and organization-specific action plan.

2. **Individual Response:** The second option is an individual response to the Accessible BC Act. This would require the City to have its own accessibility committee and plan. This would be entirely tailored to the City of Courtenay, but would not benefit from shared regional resources. As the CVAC

prefers the regional approach, the individual response option would likely change the City's longstanding relationship with CVAC.

The Accessible BC Act has specific requirements for committee composition. Staff believe that it could be difficult to recruit a committee that meets the specific committee composition requirements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The CVRD has budgeted \$15 000 for the development of the Accessibility Plan, but has indicated that the plan will be mainly developed by staff. At this time, there are no direct financial implications for the City of Courtenay. Additional work required for the implementation of the Courtenay specific Accessibility Action Plan will be addressed in the 2024 Financial Plan.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

While the requirements of the Accessible BC Act are new, responding to new legislation is part of core duties for staff.

If Council chooses to join the regional approach, Legislative and Corporate Services staff will work with the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee, CVRD, Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland to establish the agreement and governance. Development Services, Public Works, and Recreation, Culture and Community Services will then continue with accessibility planning and implementation.

If Council prefers to proceed with a City-specific Accessibility Committee and Accessibility Plan, there would be greater demands on staff time, particularly in Development Services, which would likely have a large role in committee administration and the accessibility plan. It would also be challenging to meet the September 1 deadline. Activities would include:

- Committee recruitment
- Drafting committee terms of reference
- Committee administration
- Seeking a consultant to draft an accessibility plan
- Working with the consultant and committee on the accessibility plan

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public engagement is a mandated part of the Accessible BC Act. The City must establish a process for receiving comments from the public on the accessibility plan, and barriers to individuals in or interacting with the City. Input from the accessibility committee would be sought on engagement strategies.

OPTIONS:

1. THAT Council direct staff to meet its obligations under the Accessible BC Act by proceeding with the development of a Comox Valley Accessibility Framework in partnership with the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee, Comox Valley Regional District, Town of Comox and Village of Cumberland.

2. THAT Council direct staff to meet its obligations under the Accessible BC Act by establishing an Accessibility Committee and Accessibility Plan specific to the City of Courtenay.
3. THAT Council provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Agreement with Comox Valley Accessibility Committee

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