

IMPROVING CALGARY'S ACCESSIBILITY, PLANNING INITIATIVES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At its 2015 July 27 meeting, Council passed a motion directing Administration to address accessibility matters. The motion's direction to Administration had two main parts. The first part directed Administration to review the accessibility of the Municipal Complex and other civic facilities. The second part directed Administration to commit to integrating the provision of accessibility design into current and future planning, public realm, and development initiatives. This report provides an update on the progress of Administration's investigation into this second part. Administration from the Facilities Management Business Unit will present a report to the Land and Asset Strategy Committee on 2016 September 29 to report on their assessment of civic facilities.

To address the second part of the motion, Administration engaged with other departments, non-profit organizations, industry, and community stakeholders (see Attachment 1). A review of current initiatives, planning policies and guidelines was completed to better understand how accessibility is currently being addressed, to identify the most effective opportunities for improvement, and to outline next steps.

In Alberta, the regulation of the accessibility of buildings is under The Alberta Building Code. Therefore, The City cannot require private development to exceed the code. However, encouraging further enhancement of accessible design in private development can be achieved through collaboration with industry and sharing of information.

The work undertaken demonstrates a cross-corporate commitment to improving accessibility for civic buildings and the public realm, in order to promote an environment in which all persons can participate. However, a key learning was that better coordination and sharing of information cross-corporately would enhance the impact of these initiatives. As a result, a strategy for achieving better coordination will be developed and implemented in 2017. As well, continued collaboration with various external partners will also be a focus of next steps.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That The Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development receive this report for information.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE SPC ON PLANNING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, DATED 2016 SEPTEMBER 14:

That Council receive the Administration Recommendation contained in Report PUD2016-0721 for information.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

Council has provided previous direction on accessibility for people with disabilities. Most recently, Council adopted NM2015-16 on 2015 July 27, moved by Councillor Farrell, as follows:

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NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

- a) City Council direct Administration, in conjunction with the Advisory Committee on Accessibility, to review and assess the accessibility of the Municipal Complex and report back to Council no later than 2016 October through the Land and Asset Strategy Committee with a report outlining the actions and costs to ensure that the Municipal Complex meets current City accessibility standards;

AND THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT City Council direct Administration to commit to the integration of accessibility and universal design considerations to current initiatives related to planning, public realm and development, and into future planning initiatives, and report back to Council on their progress no later than 2016 Q3 through the Planning and Urban Development Committee;

AND THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT City Council commit to advancing the issues of accessibility and accessible housing supply to other orders of government, in partnership with the community and persons with lived experiences.

At the same meeting, Council adopted part b) of NM2015-16 as follows:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

- b) City Council direct Administration to assess the accessibility of the remainder of The City of Calgary civic facilities and report back to Council no later than 2016 Q3 through the Land Asset Strategy Committee;

This report addresses the portion of Council's 2015 July 27 direction displayed in bold font, above. The Facilities Management Business Unit will present a report to the Land and Asset Strategy Committee on 2016 September 29 to report on their assessment of civic facilities, or items "a" and "b", above. The Intergovernmental and Corporate Strategy team is working with Council to advance issues associated with accessibility and housing supply through the City Charter process and other Provincial and Federal consultations.

BACKGROUND

The City of Calgary is committed to improving accessibility, in order to enrich and enhance our society, and in order to promote an environment in which all persons can participate and contribute to the cultural, social, economic and political life of Calgary. Universally accessible design refers to the design and composition of environments so that they are easily accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent by all people regardless of ability. Improving accessibility takes a coordinated approach, where The City, our industry partners and our community stakeholders come together to find sustainable solutions. As such, Council directed Administration to commit to the integration of accessibility and universal design into current and future initiatives related to planning, public realm and development.

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Administration currently focuses on universal design in the following ways (see Attachment 2 for more examples):

- All new buildings in the Province are subject to Section 3.8, accessibility standards, in Alberta Building Code (ABC). The City, in the administration of the ABC, is limited to requiring those accessibility standards. The objectives of Section 3.8 are to ensure that buildings and facilities are designed and constructed so that persons with physical or sensory limitations are able to access, use and circulate within them.
- The Advisory Committee on Accessibility (ACA) provides access recommendations and advice to Calgary City Council and Administration on the rights and service needs of persons with disabilities. Administration has the opportunity to present public projects, such as new civic buildings and public realm improvements, to the Access Design Sub-Committee for recommendations to make a project more accessible.
- Civic facilities, surrounding grounds, and City owned land are subject to improved accessibility standards through the Access Design Standards (ADS). The ADS provides accessibility standards above the Building Code requirements. Private developments can utilize this document on a voluntary basis to improve a development. An updated ADS is scheduled to be considered by Council on 2016 September 12.
- The Transportation Planning, Roads, Urban Strategy, and Planning and Development Departments are working together to improve accessibility within the public realm (roads and sidewalks). For example, the Kensington Improvements Project has incorporated universal design through the implementation of accessible roads and street standards.
- Private developments are subject to the planning review process, which includes Outline Plans and Subdivisions, Development Permits, and Building Permits. Accessibility is addressed within Outline Plans and Subdivisions through the implementation of sidewalk and roads standards. Development Permit reviews can take into account accessibility for the building's exterior (e.g., illumination), the site plan, and public realm frontage. Currently, accessibility guidelines supporting Development Permit reviews are found in the Centre City Urban Design Guidelines. Larger applications are circulated to the Urban Design Team, where universal design is part of the overall design review context.
- The Pedestrian Strategy was approved by Council in 2016 May. This Transportation Planning initiative provides a series of action items encouraging pedestrian activity in a safer and more comfortable environment. One of the actions is to improve the pedestrian network by identifying sidewalk deficiencies in order to provide better connections. This will improve overall accessibility and safety. The project is currently developing a Tactical Urbanism Program, which is an opportunity for communities to learn about street improvement options, which includes designing pedestrian environments that are inclusive to all levels of ability.

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- The Roads Business Unit has incorporated accessibility improvements to standard design guidelines to improve walkability and safety. The Roads Business Unit makes significant investments annually to incorporate accessibility as part of its programs. Some examples include investments into accessible pedestrian signals, new refinements to wheelchair ramp designs to improve visibility and safety, and the installation of new barrier free parking stalls.
- The Seniors Age Friendly Strategy and Implementation Plan was approved by Council in 2015 June. This strategy seeks to create a more age friendly and thus accessible city, through accommodating an aging population. The work being completed for this report is aligned with the Implementation Plan as it addresses accessible housing, participation and inclusion through universally designed spaces, and increased access and mobility within the City.
- Accessible housing in Calgary is currently developed by Calgary Housing business unit and by local non-profit organizations. Calgary Housing implements additional accessibility requirements on Provincially funded housing developments.

While this list does not capture all City initiatives, it demonstrates that a wide range of work related to accessibility is already integrated into City projects, initiatives and processes. However, closer coordination within Administration would achieve improvements both in processes and in creating more accessible spaces.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

To respond to the Council direction, Administration investigated planning, public realm and development initiatives. Administration first reviewed initiatives that are already in place or are underway and then identified those that are planned as next steps. As part of this review, Administration held a number of internal meetings, and consulted with accessibility experts and stakeholders.

The following is a summary of the work completed or underway in response to the Council direction:

Planning

- A planning policy and guideline document review was conducted to identify existing policy and opportunities to further enhance accessibility through policy and guidelines. The findings are that there is limited planning policy and guideline direction on accessible housing and universal design for the public realm and buildings. The Municipal Development Plan does not provide specific policy on accessible housing. Outside of the Centre City, there are no universal design guidelines aiding in the review of planning applications and the public realm. There is also limited reference to the ADS and other reference materials providing guidance on how to build a more accessible building.

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- A strategic, city-wide, planning policy and guideline framework would encourage consideration of accessible design early in the planning process and would support collaborative solutions with partners and stakeholders.
- To address some of the policy and guideline gaps identified above, The MDP Guidebooks and urban design guidelines provide the most comprehensive opportunity to encourage increased awareness and consideration of accessibility city-wide. (See Attachment 3)
- Draft policy has been formulated for the MDP Guidebooks (New Communities Planning Guidebook, the Draft Developed Areas Guidebook and the Draft Centre City Guidebook). The purpose of the policy is to promote accessible housing solutions, identify reference documents to help design a more accessible building, and to provide universal design policies guiding development for the public realm. The Developed Areas and Centre City Guidebooks are anticipated to be presented to Council in Q1 2017.

Ensuring that policy addresses issues of accessibility and universal design creates a strategic, longer-term direction.

Public Realm

For the purposes of accessibility, public realm refers to the spaces from one building face to another, including front setback areas, public sidewalks and streets.

- Draft policies on public realm universal design have been proposed within the most recent drafts of the Developed Areas and Centre City Guidebooks.
- The Centre City Urban Design Guidelines have been developed to guide public realm improvements and development in the Centre City
- In preparation for the formulation of City Wide Urban Design Guidelines, scoping has begun for the accessible design section, to determine content matter.
- Transportation Planning, Roads, Transit, Facility Management and Parks have continued to undertake reviews of accessibility and are implementing programs to address improvements.
- Administration reviewed how Departments and Business Units involve the Advisory Committee on Accessibility (ACA) for public realm improvements. The findings are that each City Department has its own engagement practices and there are opportunities for The City to be more consistent in its approach with the ACA.

These initiatives will lead to a more consistent approach to universal design in the public realm on private and public properties, resulting in spaces that have fewer obstructions, are easier to navigate, and are more accessible.

Development

- Updated Access Design Standards were presented at the 2016 July 22 Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development. These are scheduled for the 2016 September 12 Combined Public Hearing of Council. These updates provide additional accessibility standards for civic buildings and can be used as a voluntary tool for private developments that endeavour to develop a more accessible building.

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- Beyond the requirements of the ABC, a further review of submissions for civic facilities is now routinely conducted by Calgary Building Services.
- Administration initiated investigations on further incorporating universal design into the planning application review process, through involvement with the Urban Design Review Framework initiative. The drafting of the City Wide Urban Design Guidelines will support planners reviewing applications.
- Discussions were held with the development industry to consider ways to share information early in the planning process to increase awareness and seek opportunities for enhancing accessibility voluntarily, using resources like the ADS.
- Administration reviewed planning application approval processes to understand how accessibility and universal design are currently addressed.

Initiatives related to development processes aim to increase accessibility within civic facilities, enhance awareness about accessibility, and provide support for planning application reviews.

Other findings from the review of current accessibility practices and results achieved to date, include:

- Although there is a commitment to accessibility in many departments and a number of initiatives are currently underway, there is an opportunity to improve cross-corporate coordination and sharing of information. Better coordination and improved communication with the ACA would lead to enhanced accessibility practices.
- The development industry is open to collaborating with Administration on accessible design and sharing of information on initiatives already being undertaken by developers and builders.

Current initiatives and results demonstrate there has been progress and advancement in Administration's accessibility practices. Administration's ongoing commitment, in respect of planning, public realm and development, should include integrating accessibility and universal design goals into all work, aiming to fulfill the related ACA strategic plan, and continually seeking improvement in practices and results for those with accessibility needs.

Based on this review, the following next steps were identified in each of the areas of Council direction:

Planning

- Complete the drafting of policy for accessible design in guidebooks that are either being developed or will be amended in the near future. This will include the Developed Areas Guidebook, Centre City Guidebook, which will both be presented to Council in Q1 2017, and New Communities Guidebook.

Public Realm

- Incorporate accessibility provisions specific to the public realm and development in City Wide Urban Design Guidelines, to be developed in 2017.

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Development

- Continue to meet with industry stakeholders to discuss ways to collaborate and share information that would assist with achieving increased accessible design on a voluntary basis. This could include using The City's new Access Design Standards (scheduled for the 2016 September 12 Council meeting) and other accessibility reference materials, as a resource tool with the development industry to support efforts to design more accessible buildings.
- Promote partnerships amongst The City, development industry, organizations and those experiencing disabilities to work collaboratively to find accessible housing solutions.
- Continue to improve how accessibility is assessed through the planning application review process. This will be achieved by participating in the Urban Design Review Framework and by drafting planning policies and guidelines supporting accessibility.

In addition to the ongoing work and improvement plans in each of the areas of planning, public realm and development, Administration is also committed to continuing to improve its practices associated with accessibility. Leading toward the goal of a corporately coordinated Administration accessibility plan and approach, over the next few months Administration will develop an inventory of individual business unit practices and resources, determine other jurisdictions whose accessibility practices can be helpful in guiding City of Calgary Administration practices, and establish a corporate Administration accessibility network with improved communication and feedback mechanisms with the ACA. Over the next year the ACA will work across business units to update the Calgary Corporate Accessibility Policy to enable people with disabilities in Calgary to have equal opportunity for full participation in all aspects of municipal activity.

Summary

These actions demonstrate The City of Calgary's commitment to improving accessibility, in order to promote an accessible environment in which all persons can participate. The work undertaken to date indicates that improving accessible design in civic buildings, public realm and private development requires a collaborative approach both internally, and with various external partners. The next steps outlined above are focused on increasing coordination and collaboration, sharing information, and providing planning guidance, for improved accessibility.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

To understand accessibility issues better, engagement was undertaken with other City departments, people with user experience, non-profit organizations, and industry stakeholders. Engagement is ongoing and will continue through the next steps.

It is also important to note that the planning accessibility initiatives outlined in this report are components of larger planning projects, which will undergo additional separate stakeholder and public engagement associated with the specific project and will incorporate engagement on accessibility.

Attachment 4 contains letters of support from two of the stakeholders involved in the project to date.

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Strategic Alignment

Planning & Development's work to date, and future planning initiatives, are in alignment with The Facility Management Business Unit's response to NM2015-16 and to the recently updated Access Design Standards. Corporate collaboration continues with Calgary Neighbourhoods, Calgary Housing, Transportation, Roads and other departments.

Improving accessibility is also in alignment with:

- The City's 2020 Sustainability Direction: Initiatives and designs encouraging access are outlined, under the goals of community well-being, smart growth and mobility, and sustainable corporation.
- 2015-2018 Action Plan which states: "Increased inclusion leads to greater participation, which in turn contributes to a prosperous City. The diversity that comes from inclusion of all citizens is a key component of an inspiring neighbourhood."
- City of Calgary Corporate Accessibility Policy which states: "work towards the reduction and elimination of barriers to the physical access to City-owned and operated buildings, walkways pathways and parks; transportation access to all its services; and communication access..."

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

People with disabilities represent a significant proportion of Calgary's population, which is expected to increase over the next 20 years. Individuals with disabilities want to live in communities that provide accessible buildings, streets and public realm, accessible transportation, with a variety of housing options.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

There will be no impact to operating budgets

Current and Future Capital Budget:

There will be no impact to capital budgets.

Risk Assessment

None

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Council directed Administration to provide an update report on issues related to accessibility. This report informs Council about ongoing efforts to collaborate, coordinate and integrate accessible design into City planning processes and related initiatives.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Stakeholder Engagement
2. Examples of City of Calgary Initiatives Related to Accessibility
3. Timeline of Current and Future Planning Initiatives
4. Letter of Support – Level Playing Field
5. **REVISED** Letter of Support – Accessible Housing