

Remarks for the Standing Policy Committee on Community and Protective Services

My name is Jeff Dyer and I am the Executive Director of Accessible Housing and a Ward 1 resident. I invite you to imagine a Calgary where everyone has a home and belongs in community. Everyone – men, women and children. The disabled and the able-bodied. The rich and the poor. The healthy and the sick. Because a home is so much more than a place to sleep at night. Home is a place to rest, heal, celebrate and grow.

But the reality is that many Calgarians do not have a home at all. At Accessible Housing we get phone calls every day from people desperate to find a home for themselves or a loved one.

People like Stewart who had a traumatic accident while paragliding and in an instant was transformed from an active engineer to a homeless quadriplegic stuck in a Calgary hospital. Imagine that one day – like Stewart - you are at the top of your profession, traveling the world, cycling and skiing the most magnificent places, and the next day you are setting out on a bewildering journey to rebuild a life without the ability to move your body.

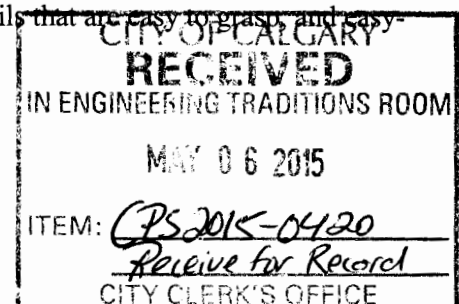
Imagine your life has spiraled out of control like Abdi's. You become unemployed, completely isolated, begin self-medicating yourself and soon you are without a place to live. In the middle of winter, you navigate snow-covered sidewalks in your wheelchair, only to arrive at an emergency shelter and lower yourself onto a mat on the concrete floor every night.

Imagine you are excitedly awaiting the birth of your first child. When the anticipated day arrives, you are told your child has suffered oxygen deprivation and that she'll be wheelchair bound. You bring her home, learn to cope with the new challenges but quickly realize that your tiny home isn't equipped to support a growing child in a wheelchair. You're desperate to remove the barriers in your home. This is the reality for Colleen and her parents.

Stewart, Abdi, Colleen and her family – they are all fellow Calgarians. They are our neighbours. We live in one of the most privileged cities in the country, in one of the most privileged provinces in the world, in one of the most privileged countries on Earth.

Accessible Housing imagines a future where everyone has a home and belongs in community. To achieve this, we open doors to homes that are accessible and affordable for people with limited mobility.

Accessible house design is design that will accommodate everyone, including people with disabilities. As a starting point, homes have to have features that allow most people to visit, including level entry, wider doors throughout the entrance level and a washroom on the main floor. As a goal, homes have to include open turning spaces within rooms, wheel-in shower stalls, kitchen work surfaces with knee space below, lever door handles that everyone can use, stairways that feature handrails that are easy to grasp, and easy-to-use appliances.



CMHC has estimated integrating accessibility into a residential build involves an increased building cost of 5% or roughly an additional \$8,000. Renovating an already-built house for accessibility and adaptability had a price-tag of almost \$75,000 – 52% of the total cost of construction. These cost estimates date to 2002 – nevertheless, building it right the first time pays off.

Accessibility is relevant to conversations about aging demographics and ensuring citizens can age in place, accommodating the needs of persons with mobility challenges and accounting for their affordability needs, and responding to larger economic and social trends.

Accessible Housing also has a very real sense of who needs our help. By 2019, almost 199,000 persons in Calgary over the age of 15 will be living with a disability in Calgary – and persons with disabilities earn lower incomes, are likelier to use subsidized housing, and express significant concern about housing affordability and safety. Based on census data, we know that disabilities impacting physical agility are the most prominent in Alberta, representing 8.0% of the population, or almost 92,000 Calgarians.

As a city, we're continuing to invest in opening doors, and we're making great strides – Accessible Housing is actively collaborating to open 180 new doors of housing. 45 of our own through the RESOLVE Campaign and 135 more through collaborations within both the private and not for profit sector.

But we need help, and we believe bricks and mortar isn't the entire answer to this challenge. Policy changes at the municipal level, increased cooperation and collaboration, and strategic planning will all contribute to solving the challenge before us.

In advancing the goals of a more accessible Calgary, we request that Council consider undertaking the following two actions:

1. Commit City Council to advancing the issue of accessible, affordable housing to other levels of government, in partnership with the community and persons with lived experience. (i.e. 15% of all units granted provincially must be accessible)
2. Direct Administration to conduct a review of the resource requirements associated with achieving the Advisory Committee on Accessibility goals as outlined in our Strategic Plan and to prepare a business case and recommendations to be considered as part of the 2016 Action Plan Adjustment process.

In closing, thank you for opening doors to me today. Please do so as you lead Calgary to be open to all.

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