

DATE OF MEETING MARCH 13, 2024

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SUBJECT UPDATE ON ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS TO CITY PARKS AND TRAILS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness (ACAI) an update on accessibility improvements being carried out in the park system as outlined in the Integrated Action and Capital Plans and to seek direction on future accessibility priorities and assessment locations.

Recommendation

That the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness recommend that Council direct Staff to conduct assessment audits on the following parks, trails and open spaces in 2024/2025:

- Westwood Lake Trail System
- Oliver Woods Park grounds
- Neck Point Park
- Stadium District
- Harewood Centennial Park
- Beaufort Park
- Bowen Park grounds adjacent to the Bowen complex
- Waterfront Walkway

BACKGROUND

The ACAI Committee 2023-2026 work plan goal adopted by City Council strives to reduce barriers and improve equity and access to City residents in alignment with corporate strategic planning documents and the terms of reference of the ACAI Committee.

The City Plan's Integrated Action Plans identify many priority (0-4 year) projects focussed on improving accessibility in our parks and trails system with some already in process at various stages. In addition to the ongoing projects, City Plan policies and the ACAI work plan speak to improving accessibility throughout the parks system and staff have identified likely priorities for additional assessments and improvements.

DISCUSSION

In accordance with Nanaimo's Integrated Action Plan, a number of projects are currently underway in Nanaimo parks to improve accessibility and meet the goals and policies outlined in the City Plan. These include:

- Westwood Lake Park (First beach focused)
- Inclusive and accessible washrooms/amenity buildings (Westwood Lake Park and Maffeo Sutton Park)
- Accessible beach accesses (for example, installation of beach access matting)
- Maffeo Sutton Park and the Queen Elizabeth Walkway
- Beban Park Campus
- Beaufort Park
- Accessibility information across the parks and trails network.

Some of these ongoing initiatives have been previously discussed with the ACAI. Some of the improvements will be completed in 2024 but others require longer-term capital investment and will be realized over a number of years.

In addition to the ongoing improvement projects, there is a need to carry out accessibility assessments throughout the Nanaimo parks and trails system. These assessments will help evaluate the current state of a number of parks and trails sites, help to identify barriers and accessibility issues, and help to inform future budgets on where to invest to improve outdoor open space accessibility. Nanaimo's parks and trails system extends over 1100 hectares of parkland and over 180 km of trails. A list of the sites is included in Attachment A.

To date, two staff members have received training in Rick Hansen certification, however, several more are hoping to complete certification in 2024 to help complete these assessments and better inform the design of future projects and park improvements.

Accessibility improvements are identified as a line item in our annual capital plan. In addition, specific accessibility improvements identified in future assessments can be budgeted for on a site by site basis and through specific project funding in future capital plans.

The recommended list of assessment sites for 2024/2025 is based on previous feedback provided by the ACAI and staff insights. Other priorities and sites can be considered through committee discussion and direction.

OPTIONS

1. That the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Inclusiveness recommend that Council direct Staff to conduct assessment audits on the following parks, trails and open spaces in 2024/2025:

- Westwood Lake Trail System
- Oliver Woods Park grounds
- Neck Point Park
- Stadium District
- Harewood Centennial Park
- Beaufort Park
- Bowen Park grounds adjacent to the Bowen complex
- Waterfront Walkway

- The advantages of this option: Seven park locations will receive accessibility assessment/audits to provide better long term accessibility to all users and enable staff to prepare financial planning to implement future improvements.
- The disadvantages of this option: Other sites may not receive audits or improvements until the improvements at these sites are in process or complete.
- Financial Implications: Most of the ongoing projects are already accounted for in capital budgets, and accessibility improvements will have limited or no costing change. New projects and new assessments will require funding to train assessors or hire external assessors. However, the assessment results will provide staff with valuable information needed to prepare financial plans for future accessibility upgrades to applicable parks and trails.

2. That the ACAI provide alternate direction.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The ACAI 2023-2026 Work Plan supports the Committee providing information on reducing barriers and improving equity and accessibility for City residents.
- The City Plan's Integrated Action Plans identify many ongoing and future initiatives to improve accessibility throughout the various facets of the City's parks and trails system.
- City staff have identified seven parks, trails and open space priority sites to do accessibility assessments/audits in 2024 with identified improvements being added to future budgets.
- City staff will return to ACAI for input into ongoing and future projects at appropriate stages and will share assessment outcomes for the 2024 identified sites.

ATTACHMENT:

ATTACHMENT A: List of Parks and Trails Sites

ATTACHMENT B: Parks and Trails Accessibility Improvements & Assessments Power Point

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