

COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

From: Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Date: October 18, 2024

Subject: 2024 – 3rd Quarter Activity Report

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receives this report for information.

BACKGROUND:

The Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee (AIAC) is a Select Committee of Council established to provide advice and recommendations to Council on matters relating to citizens with disabilities, seniors and other citizens with access issues that may impede participation in everyday aspects of community living.

The AIAC mandate is as follows:

- a) To inform all citizens of the Committee's purpose and to identify existing social and physical barriers.
- b) To provide advice and information regarding future planning of municipal services, programs, and facilities.
- c) To work with the Council to increase public awareness of the issues of accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities, seniors, and all citizens.

3rd Quarterly Activity Report

Committee members continue to be present in the community being cognizant of barriers that can or may impede access or inclusion navigating community facilities and spaces. As we learn more about access and inclusion, we are more and more conscientious of what exists and what changes could still evolve to increase the quality of life for some community members.

We continue to offer our "walk and roll" site visits where we create a more in-depth inspection of the business, outside facilities, and event venues providing information and/or recommendations to consider. We actively recommend the Façade Improvement and

Accessibility Grant programs. The biggest hurdle expressed by businesses is the cost of making the changes. Grant and other funding are not always sufficient and with the lean economy and rising costs business owners/operators are hesitant to invest in changes and question whether the changes will be reflected by increased sales, visits, and/or use of premises.

Recently, we have been advocating for accessible washroom facilities in the community and at events hosted by the community or community organizations. We were excited to see the installation of an accessible port-a-potty at the park. The park has become a hub for summer activities and being able to take care of personal needs while attending events is another step forward towards accessibility and inclusion.

It would be ideal for all outdoor washroom facilities to be equipped with a water station.

We have recently completed a “walk and roll” inspection of all the districts outdoor washroom facilities. We visited Morfee campsite, first and second beach, and the ball diamonds. Our report will be submitted upon completion. We reached out to BC Hydro but there was no response to our email so it was great news when we heard that Council members met with BC Hydro at UBCM BC Hydro stated that they will be looking at accessible facilities at 22 Mile.

One area of concern has been the access to medical care outside of the community. Evergreen Shuttle service has been a blessing as is the Northern Health Bus. The shuttle service is a benefit to all for community members needing to attend appointments in Prince George. However, sometimes it is difficult to coordinate travel with available appointment times. Additionally, there are still transportation gaps in town i.e. taxi services. The taxi saver program is/was helpful, but funding is not sufficient to sustain client needs. Additionally, the rising cost of living negatively impacts an individual’s ability to pay for transportation. With cooler weather and winter fast approaching transportation may become more of an issue. We will continue to work with community organizations to search for funding or volunteers to support the transportation concerns.

Members of the Access and Inclusion Committee attended several Mackenzie Senior Week activities including the Connection Fair. We hosted a table and a demo area. We answered lots of questions, shared information about various disabilities – visible and invisible. Our demo area, hosted by Kimberly, was very well received and utilized by young and old alike. The demo area included an obstacle course and ramp that was navigated by a wheelchair. She also mimicked fatigue using a walker and weights (hand, ankle, neck...). A few people suggested that this demonstration be shared in the workplace and at schools as a professional development activity creating more awareness and understanding people with a mobility disability. Further discussion and follow-up required by the committee.

Committee members also attended the Seniors Week Conversation Café and were instrumental in identifying the need for wider, clear aisles when hosting an event. The aisles were wide enough but often people, in an effort to be more sociable, would move chairs into the aisle

space blocking access. The Seniors were also contacted by MSS asking if they could enter a student team into the Family Feud Game. However, the request was declined at this time. However, it was suggested that perhaps the seniors could host an inclusive intergenerational game challenge at another event, i.e. pep rally at MSS. Mackenzie Secondary School vs Mackenzie Seniors Society MSS – MSS vs MSS!

Also, during Seniors Week all ages and abilities participated in guided walks and several community members tried the Trail Rider and/or were Sherpas! I believe even a couple of new sherpas were recruited. Access and Inclusion – ability to try new things with friends and family.

Two members of the committee participated in the Northern Root Symposium and hosted a table designed to increase awareness of the committee – what we have to offer and how we can support other community members and ventures. Great ideas were exchanged, and contacts made. They even learned about a couple of garden tools/supports that would benefit people with compromised abilities i.e. stand to sit hardware for convenient support when harvesting or planting, sit side scooters, and different planter box designs.

Access and Inclusion Committee members are represented through organizations such as the Arts Council, Mackenzie Autumn Lodge Society (New Horizon, Friends Helping Friends and Aging Well at home projects), Williston Lake Elders Society, Better at Home, MORATA, Rural Health and a newly formed Rural Health Seniors Group (this group represents Valemount, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Burns Lake, and McBride). Our membership allows us to share and receive information that may impact or duplicate community projects. We are always looking for ways to create awareness and understanding of what access and inclusion means for not just people with a disability but for everyone to participate in active living and enjoy life in Mackenzie.

During the provincial election two members of the committee were named supervisors at the local voting venue in part due to knowledge of accessibility and inclusion. Government has instituted new aspects to voting taking into consideration people with mobility and access needs. Examples include express lanes for those with mobility needs, large font ballots, braille ballots, curb side voting for those in need, and sending officials to the hospital to support voters, well-lit voting stations.

The approved Age-Friendly Access and Inclusion Action Plan has been shared with the committee and together we will begin or continue working with the other named groups/organizations to address the recommendations (action items) noted in this report.

The Access and Inclusion Committee would like to thank the District of Mackenzie for sponsoring Kimberly to complete the 20-hour Rick Hansen Fundamentals Training Course (September 9-21/24 which included one virtual session). Key takeaways included:

- Barrier free access is key for all mobility challenges, people with low vision, people with hearing impairment (walking with a signing interpreter), people with invisible disabilities (fatigue, pain, autoimmune disorders, neurological disorders). Everyone benefits!
- Hearing loop systems can be installed in a room or surround a building. Some small systems cost as little as a couple hundred dollars. They allow someone with a hearing device to more clearly hear announcements or important information.
- Kimberly's new focus is now "meaningful accessibility" which combines the minimum accessibility requirements provided by building code with a broader assessment of all users being able to use the space as intended with dignity and in an equitable way. All users should be offered the same experience.

As a committee we have already started to reap the benefits of this training. We too will now embark on a learning journey with Kimberly. For this we thank you.

Moving forward the committee will continue to address physical barriers but have also decided to spend a little more time looking at some of the invisible barriers. Our plan is to schedule information sessions for ourselves to learn more about neurodivergent disabilities and technology and how businesses can make their websites and marketing material more user friendly for more people. Current members of the committee have experience that they will be sharing. Once we have more knowledge about marketing materials, we too will be updating our brochures.

We continue to strengthen our relationship with service groups and organizations that have a similar vision or cause i.e. Mackenzie Seniors, Better at Home, Mackenzie Community Service and the Age Well at home projects, designed for seniors and other vulnerable populations.

A complete list of activities for this quarter is attached for Council's consideration.

Committee Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the committee meetings held on July 17, 2024, have been attached.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

Community and Social Development

- Our investment in the municipality's services and infrastructure, our commitment to principles of social equity and well-being, and our belief in the value of resident engagement, creates a healthy community in which everyone feels valued and enjoys a high quality of life.



RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Elizabeth Blackburn, Committee Chair

Reviewed by: Councillor McMeeken, Committee Liaison; Corporate and Financial Services

Approved by: Chief Administrative Officer

3rd Quarter Committee Activities:

2024	Activity:
July 5	Volunteer Hub Testing Group meeting
July 8	2 nd Quarter Report submitted
July 16	Recreation Dept. and Public Works Dept. – site visit to Trail and Bike Park – discussion over the use of millings, tree planting, additional benches/tables – recommendations and discussions
July 16	Informal discussion with Recreation Dept. staff regarding upgrades to pool change rooms i.e. benches and upcoming washroom upgrades
July 17	Committee meeting
July 22	Assist with the seniors move from Ernie Bodin Centre (loading & unloading trailer)
July 30	Assist with the seniors move from Ernie Bodin Centre (final clean out)
August 15	Accessible park trail informal visit (Kimberly) report submitted to District
August 15	Music in the Park – check out access and facilities – washroom/stage access
August 17	Scramble participation (Kimberly and Cassandra) feedback provided to Morata
August 17	Recommendations shared with Morata and Kimta i.e. regarding training for the use of lift and for the driver to test before each trip
August 21	Liz and Emily meeting to discuss sharing of information to other district depts/ employees – creating awareness between all affected by findings or recommendations
August 27	New Horizon/Morata funding application regarding the accessibility of the Nordique washroom by the golf course – Walk and Roll inspection, report submitted
Sept. 9	Better at Homes/Seniors meeting – services discussion
Sept. 9	Committee planning/strategy meeting
Sept. 9 -21	Kimberly completed the district sponsored 20-hour Rick Hansen Fundamental Training Course
Sept. 10	Williston Lake Elders Committee meeting
Sept. 12	Williston Lake Elders Committee representatives meeting with Northern Health
Sept. 15	Full committee Walk and Roll inspection of District outdoor washrooms report to follow
Sept. 23	Seniors Week – Mall table promoting seniors access and inclusion, guided trail walks and the availability of the Trail Rider
Sept. 23	Seniors Week Connection Fair – info table and interactive obstacle course & fatigue demo
Sept. 24	Seniors Week Conversation Café
Sept. 24	Coalition Meeting -made up of New Horizon Stakeholders – sustainability support
Sept. 28	New Horizon final Stakeholder meeting
Oct. 2	Access and Inclusion Committee meeting with District Staff
Oct. 5	Northern Roots Symposium – 2 committee participated and hosted a table
Oct. 13	Early Election polls – 2 committee members are working as supervisors at the local voting venue and they would like to acknowledge the government initiatives to support access and inclusion
Oct. 17	Williston Lake Elders Society meeting
Oct. 18	Quarterly Report due
Oct. 22	New Horizon Stakeholder Celebration end of a 5-year contract related to access and inclusion – committee thanks Raye McMeeken for her effort and financial supports