

## **COUNCIL REPORT**

**To:** Mayor and Council

**From:** Administration

**Date:** January 27, 2025

**Subject:** Resolution of Support – Municipal Website

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **Resolution #1 – NDIIT Grant**

THAT Council supports the District of Mackenzie’s application to the Northern Development Initiative Trust’s Marketing Initiatives grant program for up to \$20,000 in funding towards the redevelopment of our municipal website.

#### **Resolution #2 – SparcBC Grant**

THAT Council supports the District of Mackenzie’s application to SparcBC’s Local Communities Accessibility Grant program for up to \$25,000 in funding towards redevelopment of our municipal website.

#### **Resolution #3 – South Peace Mackenzie Trust Grant**

THAT Council supports the District’s application to South Peace Mackenzie Trust grant program for up to \$60,000 in funding towards redevelopment of our municipal website.

#### **Resolution #4 – Outdoor Recreation Fund**

THAT Council supports the District’s application to the Outdoor Recreation Fund grant program for up to \$10,000 towards website content and accessibility updates as they relate to outdoor parks, trails, and amenities.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee took the lead in conducting a web review of the District of Mackenzie’s website and communication tools as outlined in the Mackenzie Age-Friendly Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan. The review assessed the website and identified significant barriers that limit usability for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and other residents. The committee recommended to Mayor and Council at the January 8, 2024, Regular

meeting that a full redesign and rebuild of the municipal website is necessary to meet accessibility standards, align with the Accessible B.C. Act, and ensure equitable access to information and services for all users. Improving accessibility improves the user experience for all, not just those who face barriers to access.

Some of the new accessible features that are recommended include, but are not limited to:

- Ability for the user to customize and adjust to their needs - the contrast, text size, spacing, language, etc. (tools like [Userway](#) are an example of this);
- Adding alternate text on photos for those using screen readers;
- Re-writing amenity descriptions (ie. parks, trails, events, facilities) to be more detailed and allow the user to decide whether the space is deemed accessible or not (this is now the best practice – rather than deeming something accessible, that may not be for everyone). Information created could be used in other communication materials in the future – such as brochures, signage, new resident information guides.
- Adding alternative notification methods – ie. email notification for news posts; opportunities for subscription.
- Updating transcriptions / closed captioning of previously made District videos;
- Updating the website navigation to be more streamlined, connected, less dead links; and
- Provide an updated manual and new templates to help ensure there is standardization with the look, feel, navigation, and accessible features on each page and as the website and social media is used going forward.

At their meeting held on January 16, 2024, the Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee provided a letter of support towards the project.

## **Moving Forward**

In general, launching in 2018, the current municipal website no longer meets the evolving needs of our community, residents, and stakeholders. With outdated functionality and limited accessibility features, the website falls short of compliance with modern Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and the Accessible B.C. Act. Additionally, its design and navigation are not optimized for user experience, making it difficult for individuals to find critical information or access services efficiently. As digital engagement continues to grow in importance, we recognize the need for a modern, user-friendly platform that prioritizes inclusivity, accessibility, and seamless navigation across all devices. By redesigning the website, we aim to create a digital space that reflects our commitment to serving the diverse needs of our community while fostering greater engagement, transparency, and efficiency in municipal services.

The improved functionality will make it easier for the District to attract new residents and businesses by offering more than just basic service information. It will continue to include everything from community highlights and service updates to showcasing investment

opportunities, economic development updates, and tourism information. By showcasing what makes Mackenzie a great place to live, work, and play, this update will give people all the tools they need to see why this is the right place for them to call home or start their next venture.

If successful in all four applications, the initial build and first-year costs of the redesigned municipal website will be fully covered by grant funding, resulting in no immediate financial impact on the District's budget. However, beginning in the second year, the District will likely see an increase in ongoing maintenance and servicing costs. This amount will cover website hosting, support and maintenance services, and the new applications to ensure continued functionality, accessibility compliance, and user support. These recurring expenses will be incorporated into the District's operational budget moving forward.

### **BUDGETARY IMPACT:**

Funding to support the yearly maintenance and servicing costs will be allocated from the General Government Operating Budget.

### **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.

#### **Economic Vitality**

- The District is a leader on efforts aimed at diversifying the community's economy, supporting local businesses, and attracting new investment to the community. Diversification, a strong business sector and new investment are key to our economic vitality.

### **RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**

Rachelle Richman, Economic Development Coordinator

**Reviewed By:** Corporate and Financial Services

**Approved By:** Chief Administrative Officer