

Accessibility Study Cost Estimate

BACKGROUND

On November 9, 2021 during Committee of the Whole's 2022-24 Corporate Plan deliberations, the following resolution was made by Committee:

THAT Committee recommends to Council that Administration provide a report to Council on the assessment of costs to review the accessibility of city assets for those with mobility challenges in first quarter 2022.

This report provides a high level estimate of the costs to conduct an accessibility study on city facilities, open spaces and transportation assets. Although mobility is a component of this, there are other accessibility needs that should also be considered when completing an accessibility study on city assets. With this in mind, the scope of the study went beyond an analysis on mobility challenges to include an analysis against Universal Design standards and the associated costs.

KEY TERMS

Accessibility: creating communities, workplaces and services that enable everyone to participate fully in society without barriers.

Universal Design: the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility certification (RHFAC): a national rating system that measures and certifies the level of meaningful access of buildings and sites. This rating system measures meaningful accessibility from the perspective of those with mobility, vision and hearing disabilities, and promotes increased access through the adoption of Universal Design principles.

CURRENT CITY OF SPRUCE GROVE PRACTICES AND STANDARDS

Infrastructure development (roads and servicing) within the City is guided by Municipal Development Standards, which at this time do not include any accessibility standards above those in the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) standards, other than minimal references to crosswalks and lights related to universal accessibility. Building construction currently meets the accessibility standards dictated through Alberta Building Code. For private development, the City does have the option to incentivize private development of buildings to incorporate universal design standards into their practices. For public spaces and buildings, the City has the option to incorporate universal design standards into City policies and design and construction criteria in order to guide future new developments, lifecycle replacement of existing assets and redevelopment of City areas. Incorporating universal design standards by future fitting new building design and lifecycle planning will provide a greater return on investment than retrofitting existing facilities and amenities.

ALBERTA MUNICIPALITIES

Other municipalities in Alberta have moved forward with creating their own policies that incorporate universal design standards into public spaces. Some have adopted policies specific to accessibility such

as inclusion and diversity policies, barrier-free policies and parking regulations. Some of these policies and plans include:

- **City of Edmonton**
 - o Policy C602: Accessibility for People with Disabilities: <https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=PoliciesDirectives/C602.pdf>
 - o Corporate Accessibility Plan: <https://engaged.edmonton.ca/corporate-accessibility-plan>
- **City of Calgary**
 - o Calgary Corporate Accessibility Policy: <https://www.calgary.ca/content/dam/www/ca/city-clerks/documents/council-policy-library/csps003-calgary-corporate-accessibility-policy.pdf>
 - o Accessible and Equitable Programs and Services: <https://www.calgary.ca/csps/cns/research-and-strategy/advisory-committee-on-accessibility/accessibility-and-disability.html>
- **Accessibility in Alberta survey**
 - o 2019 accessibility survey of 12 Alberta municipalities conducted by *Voice of Albertans with Disabilities*: <https://vadsociety.ca/pdf/report-final--2019-accessibility-in-municipalities-in-alberta-1558970390.pdf>

PROVINCIAL STANDARDS AND CODES

The only central principle in Alberta legislation around accessibility comes from the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, which includes physical and mental disability in its list of prohibited grounds for various types of discrimination and it does not establish an active duty to accommodate. The *Worker's Compensation Act* requires accessibility of employers when an injured employee returns to work, but legislation extending that expectation broadly is quickly becoming the norm in Alberta and across the Country. At this time there is work being done with advocacy groups to develop accessibility legislation for the province as a whole but there are no details available yet of what it would mean for municipalities.

NATIONAL PRACTICES AND CODES

Accessible Canada Act

The *Accessible Canada Act* was enacted in 2019 with the legislative mandate to make Canada barrier-free by January 1, 2040. It provides for the development of accessibility standards and gives the Government of Canada the authority to work with stakeholders and persons with disabilities to create new accessibility regulations that will apply to sectors within the federal jurisdiction, such as banking, telecommunications, transportation industries and the Government of Canada itself. These regulations will set out requirements for organizations to follow in order to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility. The *Accessible Canada Act* also includes compliance and enforcement measures, as well as an accessibility complaints mechanism.

Organizations under federal responsibility must follow the *Accessible Canada Act* including federal government entities (departments, crown corporations and other federal regulated organizations).

You can read an [accessible summary of the Accessible Canada Act](#) on Canada.ca.

University of Alberta Municipal Accessibility Policy Scan Summary

A policy scan was conducted by the University of Alberta that explores the Canadian municipal policy landscape, focusing specifically on policies related to one or more aspects of universal accessibility:

https://www.ualberta.ca/public-health/research/centres/centre-for-healthy-communities/what-we-do/acc_policyscan_rpt_2022.pdf

Nova Scotia Accessibility Act – Municipal Toolkit

The province of Nova Scotia passed the *Nova Scotia Accessibility Act* in 2017 that states that public sector bodies (such as a municipality) must establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee and develop an accessibility plan within one year. A toolkit was developed to support municipalities and can be found here: <https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/municipal-toolkit.asp>

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* aims to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. The AODA became law on June 13, 2005 and applies to all levels of government, non-profits, and private sector businesses in Ontario that have one or more employees (full-time, part-time, seasonal, or contract).

<https://accessibilitycanada.ca/aoda/>

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES

Countries such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom have established accessibility standards at the national level:

- [*The Americans with Disabilities Act \(1990\) United States*](#)
- [*The Disability Discrimination Act \(1992\) Australia*](#)
- [*The Disabilities Act and The Disabilities Discrimination Act \(2005\) United Kingdom*](#)

The United States has a very specific mandate within the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* that holds development to a higher standard when integrating accessibility into design. Although Canada does not have an equivalent, work is being done at the Federal level to incorporate these standards for consistency across the Country.

WORK DONE TO DATE

In 2021 an accessibility study was conducted on four city owned assets: Elks Hall, City Hall (public spaces), Jubilee Park and the Agrena. This work was funded through the three year Community Inclusion Initiative (approved in the 2021-23 Corporate Plan) and completed by the firm, Universal Access Design, who provided accessibility recommendations to the City on these four facilities to improve accessibility within each site. These four sites were chosen based on size and level of interaction with the public.

Each building was compared against the Rick Hanson Accessibility Foundation scorecard which is a national rating system that measures and certifies the level of meaningful access of buildings and sites (60% required for Accessible Certification and 80% required for Accessible Certification Gold). The study on the four city owned assets was \$65,000 to complete and identified just under \$450,000 in recommended upgrades to these facilities to make them more accessible.

ASSET CATEGORIES AND ESTIMATED COSTS

When looking at accessibility for City assets, there are many different types of assets that are used by residents. These assets include:

- **Facilities:** all City of Spruce Grove owned and occupied buildings.
- **Open Spaces:** all City of Spruce Grove owned outdoor land (hard or soft surface) that is publicly accessible, including parks, trails, and other public spaces.
- **Transportation:** the City's system for taking people from one place to another including streets, paths of travel (sidewalks, pathways, bike lanes), parking and transit.

For the purposes of this report, the cost estimate was provided for two categories: Facilities and Open Spaces/Transportation. The following breakdown provides a more detailed look at the scope within these two categories and the high level estimate in order to complete an accessibility study (against Universal Design standard) for each.

Facilities

There are 34 City of Spruce Grove facilities totaling 483,321 square feet of space within the City of Spruce Grove facilities portfolio, with 15 of these facilities having publically accessible areas. With four facilities already completed, conducting a public accessibility study on the remaining 11 public facilities against the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility certification would provide a roadmap for improvements recommended to improve accessibility. Conducting a study against the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility certification is more than just mobility access – it is an analysis based on Universal Design standard.

The estimated cost for facility accessibility studies on the remaining 11 publically accessible facilities is **\$180,000** (based on 2021 accessibility study procurement costs). The following sites are recommended for public accessibility studies:

- King Street Mall - Planning and Engineering
- Parkland RCMP
- Public Works Building
- Spruce Grove Playschool
- Public Library
- Log Cabin
- Horizon Stage Theatre
- Henry Singer Park
- Eco Centre
- Fuhr Sports Park
- Border Paving Recreation Centre

Open Spaces and Transportation

The estimated cost to do an accessibility report on City of Spruce Grove owned outdoor land (hard or soft surface) that is publicly accessible, including parks, trails, and other public spaces, as well as playgrounds, roads, sidewalks and public access to bus stops: **\$130,000**

This study would include the following assets:

- **Parks/Playgrounds:** Approximately fifty, two of which have accessible features: Rotary Playscape and Jubilee Park
- **Roads:** Centerline Length 235 km
- **Sidewalks:** 296 km
- **Pathways:** 75 km
- **Paved bus stops (pedestrian access):** 61
- **Unpaved bus stops (pedestrian access):** 74

RECOMMENDATIONS/NEXT STEPS

Although the resolution from Committee referred to physical accessibility to city assets, it is recommended that accessibility to city assets is considered within the context of Universal Design standards. One significant next step for Council to consider is administration to create and implement a Universal Design administrative policy. The City has access to a number of relevant tools and techniques to assist in implementing a Universal Design policy, from reinforcing the significance of accessibility through relevant policy documents including the Municipal Development Plan, Social Sustainability Plan, the Community Inclusion Initiative and local Area Structure Plans, to articulating detailed design guidelines through Land Use and Urban Design Standards.

Based on the information presented in this report, next steps could also include specific actions related to accessibility within Council's strategic plan that is currently under development to guide the organization and to ensure alignment/collaboration with other projects (MDP, Transportation Master Plan, EDI policies). Example actions could include:

- Incorporate the consideration of accessibility requirements into the City's policies, design and construction criteria in order to guide future new developments, lifecycle replacement of existing assets and redevelopment of City areas.
- Review recommendations from accessibility studies that have already been conducted on the four City facilities and, through the Corporate Planning process, move forward with the recommendations that make sense to do in the short term (ie: lips on sidewalks, more accessible parking, etc.).
- Engage with community groups to gather knowledge based on lived experiences that can be used to build future policy and practices around accessibility.
- Consider accessibility through a more inclusive lens (EDI) including wayfinding signs, reducing language barriers, etc.
- Create an incentive program for private development to incorporate accessibility standards into building practices.
- Target a certain percentage of playgrounds to incorporate accessible features into. Costs for this work could be incorporated into lifecycle plans so this work is budgeted for in the future.
- Incorporate accessibility standards into criteria used by Public Works staff as they conduct inspections on city assets (ie: inspection of sidewalks to incorporate accessibility standards). Staff would require training on this added level of inspection and Public Works would work with Engineering to determine what these standards would be.

- Ensure that key decision makers and influencers within the City's staff have at least a minimum level of introductory knowledge of Universal Design and accessibility.

Should Council wish to proceed with an accessibility study on specific or all City assets and amenities, or to proceed with specific next steps around creating policies or standards, Administration will ensure this direction is captured as part of strategic and the 2023 corporate planning processes.