

An Accessibility Audit

for the Township of Esquimalt

Final Report

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Submitted to:

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I Executive Summary

In June 2009 the Township of Esquimalt retained the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) to undertake an Accessibility Audit for the Township of Esquimalt. The accessibility audit assessed the level of accessibility in a variety of community amenities including:

- Municipal buildings
- Parks and recreation complexes
- Pedestrian walkways and crosswalks
- Retail stores
- Restaurants
- Places of worship
- Bed and Breakfasts

Following the accessibility audit, the audit findings were presented to the Accessibility Advisory Committee to review during a prioritization workshop. This report presents the recommendations that resulted from the audit and the workshop for the Township of Esquimalt's consideration.

Study Objectives

The purpose of the accessibility audit is to present a strategy to make the Township of Esquimalt accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. In particular, this study:

- Inventories the existing conditions in the Township of Esquimalt as they relate to accessibility and inclusion;
- Identifies issues and opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion within Esquimalt;
- Presents an implementation strategy for making the Township of Esquimalt a model community for accessibility and inclusiveness; and
- Increases the awareness and knowledge of accessibility issues faced by people with disabilities.

Key Findings

In general, the Township of Esquimalt does a good job of accessibility and inclusion. The Township has provided leadership in community accessibility through supporting the Access Advisory Committee,

conducting an accessibility survey, and improving the accessibility of municipal facilities over time.

Despite all that is going well at the Township of Esquimalt, there is always room for improvement. Several minor and not so minor improvements are recommended for municipal facilities to demonstrate the Township's ongoing commitment to accessibility.

This report also presents a proposed Township of Esquimalt Strategy for Accessibility and Inclusion. The proposed activities include:

- Continue to support the Access Advisory Committee;
- Focus on physical accessibility in municipal facilities starting with high priority and low cost recommendations;
- Obtain funding for accessibility projects;
- Focus on physical accessibility in non municipal facilities through sponsoring a Gold Star Program for accessible businesses and offering accessibility grants to community organizations;
- Prevent the creation of future accessibility barriers through consulting accessibility guidelines and persons with disabilities during the design process; and
- Continue to increase awareness of issues of accessibility and inclusion within the community.

II Acknowledgements

SPARC BC is please to submit the following Accessibility Audit report for the Township of Esquimalt.

As part of this study, SPARC BC engaged key stakeholders during the process of issue identification and developing solutions. In particular, we would like to thank various individuals who joined SPARC BC on the physical audits, Lorne Argyle, Larry Braes, and Mike Reed. Their knowledge of the community assisted the auditors in doing a thorough community accessibility assessment. We would also like to thank the Access Advisory Committee for providing invaluable input during the Prioritization Workshop.

We would also like to thank the Township of Esquimalt for this opportunity to work with the municipality to further their accessibility goals. In particular, we would like to thank Andy Katschor, Manager of Parks Services at the Township of Esquimalt for his guidance and support during this project.

III Introduction

The purpose of this project is to present recommendations for the Township of Esquimalt to become a model community for accessibility and inclusiveness for people with disabilities. In particular this project:

- Inventories the existing conditions in the Township of Esquimalt as they relate to accessibility and inclusion;
- Identifies issues and opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion in the Township;
- Presents an implementation strategy for making the Township of Esquimalt a model community for accessibility and inclusiveness; and
- Increases the awareness and knowledge of accessibility issues faced by people with disabilities.

IV The Context of the Project

Whether we are born with a disability, ... acquire a disability later in life, ... or are simply encountering the realities of old age, we are all only temporarily able-bodied.¹

The 2010 Legacies Now program is providing support to communities throughout BC to become more accessible and inclusive.² The Township of Esquimalt has seized on this opportunity and has hired SPARC BC to evaluate the current level accessibility and inclusion and to develop recommendations to enhance community accessibility.

Through these actions, the Township can position itself as a model community for accessibility and inclusiveness. The Township's vision recognizes the potential of people with disabilities to contribute to their communities as active citizens and the importance of supporting an

¹ Patrice Pratt and Jonathan Ross/TDH Strategies (2005) *The Accessible/Inclusive Cities and Communities Project (Draft Report)*, p. 2.

² Distinguishing between 'accessibility' and inclusion' serves to draw out two dimensions of active participation in a community. Accessibility is about removing physical or structural barriers to participation—it's what gets you in the room. Inclusion goes further—it's knowing that once you are in the room, your presence, participation and contributions are recognized.

aging³ population by creating a more inclusive community where everyone is able to live life more independently and participate more fully. This vision also recognizes that creating an accessible community benefits all community members, including a mother pushing a baby stroller, a teenager who is temporarily using crutches, or a person using a wheelchair.

V Project Methodology

1. The Accessibility Inventory Sites/Audit

The accessibility audit sites included locations that were identified to have accessibility barriers during the Township of Esquimalt's past accessibility surveys in 2008 and 2009, locations that were recommended by municipal staff, and important community amenities that most residents would visit at one point or another.

Because the Township wanted the audit to have a community focus and did not want the audit to be limited to sites owned by Township, many non-municipal sites were audited, such as community amenities, restaurants and shopping areas. The intent of auditing non municipal sites was to create awareness of issues of accessibility and inclusion in the community.

The audit was divided into 7 major theme areas:

- Municipal buildings/facilities
- Parks and recreation facilities
- Pedestrian walkways
- Restaurants
- Retail stores
- Places of worship
- Bed & Breakfasts

Standard procedures were used for conducting, photographing and recording the audit of the physical and built environment. A literature review has revealed that very few comprehensive (city-wide) audits have been conducted and most previous audits (at least in the US and Canada) have focused on one building or street at a time. However, there were some good checklists and methodological templates

³ In Canada, by the year 2011, the age group of 44-64 year olds will number 10.2 million, up from 6.4 million today. Significant potential during the next decade will be with the 75+ age group.

available.⁴ For the purposes of accessibility and inclusion audits, SPARC BC developed our own checklist, which allowed us to quickly and efficiently review a number of facilities over a relatively short period of time (See Checklist, Attachment 1). This tool can be used by the Township of Esquimalt if they wish to audit additional facilities.

The audit tool was not used to undertake a full access audit of each building but was designed to assess the major barriers to access. It concentrated on the following elements:

- Designated accessible parking
- Accessible entrances
- Circulation (corridor width, obstructions, flooring material, width of doorways, thresholds)
- Service counters
- Accessible washrooms
- Access to all facilities and amenities
- Signage
- Seating
- Accessible elevators

In addition to the checklists, audit tools included a digital camera and a tape measure.

The commercial area was assessed through a technique that can be compared to “window shopping”: the consultants walked through the area and noted whether or not the shop entrances were accessible, and evaluated whether the aisles were sufficiently wide (and free of obstructions) to allow for easy wheelchair passage. Special visits were made to “key services” such as financial institutions and pharmacies. Stores and restaurants with public washrooms were subject to a more thorough review. When a manager was available and time permitted, the audit team also assessed staff areas to determine their accessibility for employees with disabilities.

User involvement:

For the vast majority of sites, at least one person with a wheelchair participated in the audit. Based on the audit, the Consultants developed a list of recommendations for the Township. While

⁴ We adapted our checklists primarily from the following sources: Canadian Abilities Foundation Access Guide Canada (www.abilities.ca/agc), and Mobility International USA

businesses were audited as part of the study, the findings were shared with the businesses during the audit process.

2. Prioritization Workshop

A prioritization workshop was held on July 22nd, 2009 to: present the findings of the audit to Esquimalt's Access Advisory Committee; identify any accessibility challenges that had been overlooked during the audit process; and to engage the Committee members in identifying accessibility priorities for the Township's implementation strategy. The workshop was attended by six members of the Access Advisory committee and one Council representative. For a complete participant's list, see Attachment 5.

During the workshop, participants identified a few new issues that had not been documented by the consultants. These issues were added to the list of recommendations. All the recommendations were posted on walls in the meeting room, and the participants were invited to select their priority recommendations through a technique known as "dotmocracy." Each participant was given a strip of 24 red dots, which they were asked to place on their top priority items. Participants were permitted to place more than one dot on a recommendation, but were asked to place no more than 3 dots on one item. These results were tallied to identify accessibility priorities.

VI Study Findings

1. Audit Findings – Municipal Sites

The Township of Esquimalt is on its way to becoming an accessible community. Generally, the consultants found that the newer buildings are relatively accessible for people with disabilities, and the older buildings needed to be retrofitted. Efforts have been made to make the major parks accessible, but there are varying degrees of accessibility in the smaller community parks. There are some steps that need to be undertaken to make the community fully accessible for people of all abilities.

Granted, the consultants recognize that municipalities can never be truly accessible as people have a wide variety of needs and abilities. However, the Township of Esquimalt is making a concerted effort to

meet the basic level of inclusion and accessibility through this study and beyond. Outlined below are some highlights of the audit findings for municipal facilities, parks and recreation sites, and pedestrian pathways. For more detailed audit results for municipal sites, please refer to Attachment 3.

Municipal Facilities

The accessibility of municipal buildings ranged from newer, relatively accessible facilities to older facilities with substantial accessibility barriers. Thus, the audit recommendations for the newer facilities are largely focused on small details which enhance accessibility, such as the height of coat hangers in the washroom, and whether the doormat is easy to walk, wheel over. Conversely, the audit recommendations for the older buildings which were constructed before the building code took into consideration accessibility needs, are centred on key accessibility features such as the availability of accessible washrooms or an accessible elevator.

The audit team visited a number of municipal buildings including Municipal Hall, the Greater Victoria Public Library – Esquimalt Branch, Public Safety Building, the Teen Centre, and the Health Unit.

Municipal Hall and Library

The Municipal Hall and adjacent Library were built recently and had many accessibility features such as accessible entrances, elevators and washrooms. The main entrance to Municipal Hall is designed to integrate (as opposed to segregate) the stairs and ramp which sends the message that everyone in the community is included and welcome. The audit team was also impressed that the Township installed an automatic door opener for the first set of doors leading to the washrooms within a week of the accessibility audit.

Some recommendations that would enhance accessibility for residents who are visiting Municipal Hall are:

- Install a call button for assistance at the back beside the sliding doors;
- Provide seats in the reception foyer area for those who are waiting for service; and
- Extend the glass window at reception so that a person seated in a wheelchair has a clear line of sight to the person on the other side.

A number of recommendations to improve accessibility for individuals with visual or auditory disabilities in Municipal Hall were also identified including:

- Install a hearing loop in Council Chambers;
- Install an auditory signal system in the elevator which indicates when the elevator arrives at a new floor; and
- Incorporate raised lettering or Braille on all signage.

Some recommendations to enhance accessibility in the library are to:

- Provide a lowered check out counter for people using wheelchairs, and people of short stature;
- Lower the book shelves as the top shelves are not reachable by someone in a wheelchair; and
- Offer some Braille and talking books within the local Esquimalt branch.

Esquimalt Health Unit

The Esquimalt Health Unit had many accessible features such as an automatic door, designated parking, and an accessible staircase with easy to grasp handrails and tactile markings for persons with visual impairments. A good example for other communities to follow is the directional signs that were installed on the handrails letting people know which way is up or down.

The accessibility of the Esquimalt Health Unit could be improved by:

- Retrofitting the washroom for accessibility (i.e. relocating signage, coat hangers, and the mirror to improve access for wheelchair users and people with visual impairments); and
- Obtaining an accessible exam table for patients with disabilities.

Esquimalt Teen Centre and Public Safety Building

Both the Esquimalt Teen Centre and the Public Safety Building are housed in older buildings so they have relatively few accessibility features. However, accessible features have been added to the buildings over time. For instance, the Teen Centre added a ramp and handrails to the main entrance, and the Public Safety Building has a level, accessible entrance and a lowered front counter which is accessible for people with disabilities.

The washrooms in both buildings need to be retrofitted with accessibility in mind. Some accessible features that should be incorporated are: grab bars, a raised toilet; lever style handles which are easier to grasp onto for those with limited hand dexterity or strength. In addition, the rectangular handrail in the Public Safety

Building should be replaced with a more accessible, round handrail that is easy to grasp, and designated parking should be provided at the Teen Centre.

Parks and Recreation Sites

The audit team also assessed the accessibility of Esquimalt's recreation centres and some of the smaller community parks.

Esquimalt Recreation Centre

The Esquimalt Recreation Centre is generally accessible and has many accessible features such as automatic doors, accessible staircases with round handrails and tactile markings, and a front reception area with a lower counter.

In particular, the swimming pool is an exemplary model of accessibility and inclusion. An accessible ramp provides access to both a hydrotherapy pool (a pool of a warmer temperature) and the main pool, which provides people with disabilities choice. In addition, the washroom/change room facilities include many accessible features. The main change room has a water bench, handheld showers and grab bar, and the accessible change room/washroom has a hoist system, grab bars, change tables and a wheel-in shower.

Some recommendations which would enhance the overall accessibility of the Esquimalt Recreation Centre include:

- Replace the current elevator which requires a key with an accessible elevator that provides access to the administration level;
- Incorporate raised lettering and/or Braille on building signage to assist persons with visual impairments; and
- Provide a lower counter in the café.

Archie Browning Sports Complex

The Archie Browning Sports Complex is an older building with significant accessibility challenges, but through the years, there have been efforts to increase its accessibility. For instance:

- The arena walls have been painted to contrast with the curling rink to improve visibility for people with visual disabilities; and
- The municipality has applied for funding to improve the accessibility of the first level viewing area.

Some recommendations to improve accessibility in the Archie Browning Sports Complex are to:

- Provide an accessible viewing area that is free from obstructions;

- Provide inclusive, accessible seating options that are close to staircases with handrails;
- Install handrails alongside the bleacher steps and incorporate tactile markings into the steps;
- Install a new fully accessible elevator that does not require individuals to hold down a button; and
- Provide a level landing pad at the top of the ramp with sufficient space for someone to rest briefly, and safely open the door without the risk of rolling back down the ramp.

Municipal Parks

The accessibility level of the municipal parks is varied, but most parks have at least some accessible features. Some common accessible features are:

- A smooth, paved walkway connecting the parking lots to the park;
- Spacious parking lots; and
- Accessible picnic tables with extended table tops that are easy for someone using a wheelchair to roll underneath.

Some overall accessibility recommendations for municipal parks include:

- Designate accessible parking spaces in all municipal parks;
- Install an accessible pathway connecting playgrounds and the surrounding area that is not obstructed by a 2" height difference;
- Repair bumps, gaps, cracks in the accessible pathway;
- Provide closed step bleachers that prevent individuals from stepping too far forward and tripping and/or falling;
- Provide handrails alongside all bleacher steps;
- Retrofit washrooms with accessibility in mind; and
- Consider replacing the woodchip surfaces in play areas with a smooth surface such as cushion play

Pedestrian Walkways

During last year's accessibility workshop, some intersections and crosswalks were identified to be accessibility challenges. These intersections and crosswalks were visited during the accessibility audit. Some resulting recommendations are to:

- Install auditory signals to guide persons with visual disabilities at all major intersections;
- Provide a level landing pad by the crosswalk which provides sufficient space for people to comfortably rest while waiting to cross the street (i.e. Esquimalt Road, Lampson & Head Street) –

- this allows people to wait comfortably without struggling to keep their balance and avoid rolling backwards or forwards;
- Ensure that the accessible paths of travel adjacent to curb cuts are kept clear of street furniture such as mail boxes or stop signs.

2. Audit Findings – Non Municipal Sites

The accessibility audit also included a number of non municipal sites in an effort to assess overall community accessibility and to increase awareness of accessibility issues among business owners and community groups. Most of the sites visited were along Esquimalt Road and included 9 restaurants, 4 churches/ mosques, 2 Bed & Breakfasts, 1 medical clinic, and 2 community plazas which includes drug stores, coffee shops, grocery stores, video stores, commercial banks, and a liquor store. The following section discusses some highlights of the findings. For more detailed audit findings, please refer to Attachment 4.

Restaurants

Some newer restaurants are completely accessible and were designed with mobility needs in mind. Some of the accessible features identified included:

- Wide aisles and accessible pathways; and
- Menus that are easy to read because they are in accessible font, and there is a high colour contrast between the text and background colour.

Some common accessibility recommendations that were identified during the audit of local restaurants include:

- Provide moveable chairs and tables that are easy for someone using a wheelchair to roll underneath;
- Provide an accessible pathway to the washroom that is sufficiently wide to allow a person using a mobility device to comfortably pass through;
- Do not use accessible washrooms as “storage” space because it blocks the transfer space alongside the toilet and space that is needed to maneuver in and out of the washroom;
- Install the stall/bathroom door so that it swings outwards and allows more space to maneuver; and
- Install accessible features such as grab bars, lever handles, and a raised toilet.

Retail Stores

Two shopping complexes along Esquimalt road were visited. Some accessibility features that were noted are:

- Wide and clear aisles;
- Automatic doors;
- Smooth, paved cement; and
- An AM/FM induction loop built into an ATM bank machine for individuals with auditory/visual impairments.

Some accessibility recommendations that were identified include:

- Provide a minimum of one designated accessibility parking space for each 20 parking stalls in large parking lots, and provide at least one designated parking space in each small parking lot with less than 20 stalls;
- Ensure that the curb ramp connecting the designated parking space to the sidewalk is not easily blocked by a parked car (this can be done by locating the curb cut by the side of the accessible parking space, instead of at the top of the parking stall); and
- Keep accessible washrooms unlocked during business hours, or install a sign indicating where a person with a disability can access the key.

Places of Worship

The auditors visited three churches and one mosque. While the mosque and two churches were closed during the time we visited, some accessibility features were visible from the outside. Some accessibility features that were noted include:

- Accessible signage indicating the location of the elevator and ramp; and
- Automatic door openers.

The church that was open was audited in more detail. The church had made positive efforts to retrofit the building to provide access to older members of the congregation, including installing an elevator, and providing spaces for persons using wheelchairs to sit beside the pews.

Some recommendations to further enhance accessibility of local religious institutions are to:

- Provide assistive hearing devices for people with auditory impairments to listen to the service; and
- Create designated, accessible parking spaces that are clearly identified with signage.

Bed and Breakfasts

Three Bed and Breakfasts were visited during the course of the audit. None of these were accessible for individuals with mobility impairments.

Some recommendations to improve the accessibility of the Bed and Breakfasts are to:

- Replace the front steps with an accessible ramp with handrails;
- Renovate the washroom with accessibility in mind (install grab bars, raised toilet, handheld shower, wheel-in shower, lever handles, lowered coat hooks and mirror, etc.)
- Provide accessible bedrooms (i.e. provide space to maneuver, and a high level bed for easy transfer, and place amenities at lower heights so that they are easily reached).

3. Prioritization Workshop

During the prioritization workshop, the Access Advisory Committee members had an opportunity to suggest additional recommendations that were not identified during the audit and identify their top priority recommendations (the recommendations that they thought should be implemented first). For complete prioritization workshop results refer to Attachment 6.

New recommendations raised in the workshop

Some new recommendations were identified during the workshop including:

- Provide computers with screen readers in the Library;
- Paint curb cuts with high colour contrasts;
- Install an automatic door opener at the Public Safety Building;
- Retrofit the height of the picnic table at the Esquimalt Town Square;
- Lower the membership card reader at the Esquimalt Recreation Centre so that it is easily reached by someone using a wheelchair;
- Provide more accessible equipment in the Recreation Centre's Weight Room;
- Replace the loose gravel and peat chips in Lampion Little League Park with a more accessible surface; and
- Provide Council materials in Braille and easy to read font.

Accessibility Priorities

During the prioritization workshop, some specific barrier removal recommendations were identified by the Advisory Committee to be relatively high priority. The top priority recommendations for municipal buildings, parks and recreation facilities, pathways, and non municipal buildings will be briefly outlined.

The recommendations for municipal buildings that were considered relatively high priority were:

- Provide chairs in the lobby/reception area of Municipal Hall; and
- Retrofit washrooms for accessibility (i.e. Public Safety Building).

The recommendations for parks and recreation facilities that were considered to be a relatively high priority were:

- Extend paved areas surrounding park benches and picnic tables;
- Ensure that ramps leading up to lookout sections of parks have a gradual incline (1:12);
- Obtain an accessible portable washroom;
- Modify washrooms to incorporate accessibility features; and
- Lower the membership card reader in the reception area of the Esquimalt Recreation Complex to allow people using wheelchairs to scan their card independently.

The recommendations for accessible pathways that were considered high priority were:

- Install auditory signals at intersections; and
- Paint curb cuts with high contrast colors to assist people with visual impairments.

In terms of the non-municipal sites, the high priority recommendations were to:

- Install movable chairs and tables in restaurants; and
- Provide access to the accessible washroom in shopping complexes.

VII Township of Esquimalt Strategy for Accessibility and Inclusion

In all, 120 recommendations for improving accessibility in the Township of Esquimalt were identified as a result of the Audit and the prioritization workshop. While some of the recommendations can be implemented at little or no cost, some do have cost and resource

implications, and the reality of municipal budgets and work loads means that these initiatives will need to be phased. Even when all proposed improvements are made, advances in technology and building techniques and standards are likely to mean accessibility is never “done”, but is a process of ongoing improvement.

A draft Township of Esquimalt Strategy for Accessibility and Inclusiveness is presented here for the municipality’s consideration. Now that the accessibility audit and draft strategies are complete, an annual review of progress and development of an annual implementation plan will ensure that the Township of Esquimalt stays on track and becomes a model community for accessibility and inclusiveness.

1. Continue to Support the Accessibility Advisory Committee

A review of best practices in accessibility planning has identified that it is important to provide ongoing opportunities for community involvement and to seek consumer advice⁵ as the Township moves ahead with its accessibility strategies. The Township could achieve this goal by continuing to support the Accessibility Advisory Committee as it works towards its accessibility goals. At a minimum, the Committee could assist the municipality in monitoring the implementation of accessibility strategies and provide guidance on policy development. The advisory committee could also review development applications for accessibility and audit new facilities for accessibility.

2. Focus on physical accessibility in municipal facilities

120 recommendations to improve physical accessibility in the community of Esquimalt were identified during the study. It is recommended that the Municipality “start at home” by undertaking several improvements to municipal facilities.

Start with High Priority Recommendations

Because of the large number of barrier removal recommendations identified during the accessibility assessment and the costs associated with barrier removal, it is necessary for the Township of Esquimalt to

⁵ People with disabilities are generally referred to as ‘consumers’ when a support services for people with disabilities is being planned, and it is customary for people with a wide range of disabilities to be consulted during the planning phase to ensure that the service meets their various needs.

prioritize recommendations. The Access Advisory Committee has identified some of the recommendations to be higher priority, recommendations that should be implemented first. The following recommendations for municipal facilities were considered to be high priority during the July workshop:

- Provide chairs in the lobby/reception area of Municipal Hall;
- Retrofit washrooms in municipal buildings and parks with accessibility in mind (i.e. Public Safety Building, Esquimalt Gorge Park, and Macaulay Point);
- Extend the paved areas surrounding park benches and picnic tables in Esquimalt Town Square and Esquimalt Gorge Park;
- Lower the membership card reader at the Esquimalt Recreation Centre so it is easy to reach for someone in a wheelchair;
- Ensure that ramps leading up to lookout sections of parks have a gradual incline (1:12);
- Obtain an accessible portable washroom;
- Install audible signals at all major intersections to assist people with visual impairments; and
- Paint curb cuts with high contrast colours to guide persons with visual impairments.

Start with low cost modifications

It was also noted that many of the accessibility modifications can be implemented at minimal cost. Some examples are replacing round door knobs with lever style handles, or lowering the height of a coat hook or mirror. It is recommended that the municipality start with the low cost projects first as these do not have substantial resource implications.

Obtain funding for other accessibility modifications

Some of the other recommended accessibility modifications do have substantial cost implications. It is recommended that the Township create a line item in its annual budget for implementation of accessibility projects, which would allow the municipality to work towards its accessibility goals as resources permit. It is also recommended that the municipality seek out external grants and funding opportunities for accessibility improvements. A comprehensive list of funding opportunities is provided in Attachment 7.

3. Focus on Physical Accessibility of Non Municipal Buildings

The Accessibility Advisory Committee has identified increasing the physical accessibility of businesses as a high priority. Municipalities are limited in their ability to demand accessibility improvements from private operators and landowners, but can encourage businesses to become more accessible in a number of ways.

Implement a "Gold Star" program for accessible businesses

As part of the accessibility audit, the consultants have conducted audits of restaurants, retail stores, and B&Bs in the community. The Township of Esquimalt can encourage businesses to take measures to address the accessibility issues that were identified by creating a "Gold Star Program" that recognizes accessible businesses (refer to Attachment 1).

Those facilities that already meet accessibility requirements and those that follow the suggestions arising out of the audit can be recognized by the municipality with a "Gold Star" accessibility designation. The municipality can recognize Gold Star businesses publicly at a Council meeting, and publicize the accessible businesses on their website, in other publications and can also add them to the Canadian Abilities Foundation *Access Guide* web site (see <http://www.abilities.ca/agc/index3.php?pid=2&cid=287>), which provides detailed information on accessibility features. The Township could also partner with the Esquimalt Chamber of Commerce to introduce a most accessible business award, which would also increase awareness of accessibility within the business community.

During the audit process the consultants assured the businesses that the audit results would be kept confidential and that inaccessible businesses would not be punished for having accessibility barriers. The intent was to connect with as many businesses as possible in an effort to increase awareness of issues of accessibility and to make the accessibility assessment process a positive experience for all business owners involved.

A full confidential list of complete audit findings from the businesses will be provided to the Township to assist with the implementation of a proposed Gold Star program. However, the consultants ask the Township to keep the complete audit results completely confidential unless individual business owners contact the Township and ask for detailed audit results on their business, or to learn how they could qualify for a Gold Star designation. It is hoped that the positive

publicity for running an accessible business will provide an incentive for inaccessible businesses to enhance their accessibility.

All the businesses audited have been rated on a scale that ranges from not accessible to exemplary; the criteria for different levels of accessibility are as follows:

- Not accessible: Facilities that have made no efforts to become accessible
- Bronze (Somewhat Accessible): Facilities that meet current building code requirements for access but have not gone beyond minimal requirements; older facilities that are not required to be up to current code but have made efforts to upgrade to code, as long as entrances, washrooms, and customer areas are reasonably accessible for most people with disabilities
- Silver (Reasonably Accessible): Meets all the requirements of the bronze status, plus most people with disabilities can access all areas of the facilities and use all amenities generally available to the public
- Gold (Fully Accessible): Meets all the requirements of the silver rating, plus entrances, washrooms, seating and circulation meet ideal accessibility standards as identified in the check lists and all work areas are fully accessible
- Platinum (Exemplary): Goes beyond the standards in the check lists by providing a high level of accessibility, comfort and convenience for people with disabilities. These facilities can be considered "models of accessibility"

Some businesses that the consultants would like to commend for meeting the GOLD or PLATINUM criteria for accessibility are Esquimalt Optical, Our Lady of Peace, Royal Bank of Canada, Shoppers Drug Mart, and the Vietnam Garden Restaurant.

Create Grant Program for Community Organizations

There are some important amenities in the community that are not owned by the municipality or are private businesses but are visited by almost everyone in the community. Because of the integral role that these facilities play in community life, they were included in the accessibility audit.

Retrofitting existing facilities can be relatively expensive for non-profit groups; as such, it is recommended that the Township of Esquimalt establish an "accessibility fund" for the community. Community organizations can apply for this fund to enhance their facility's

accessibility. This symbolizes the municipality's commitment to ensure that all people are included in the community.

4. Limit the creation of Future Accessibility Barriers

As was previously discussed, removing accessibility barriers can be expensive. However, the research has suggested that if accessibility is taken into consideration during the initial design phase of a building or space that constructing accessible facilities is not necessarily more expensive than constructing an inaccessible facility.

Consult Consumers with Disabilities and Accessibility Checklists During the Design Phase

It is recommended that the Township consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and other persons knowledgeable of issues of accessibility during the design phase of a new Municipal projects. Attachment 1 – Accessibility Checklists can also be used as a guide when designing new spaces.

Consider Implementing Accessibility Bylaws

It is also recommended that the City consider implementing accessibility bylaws that would prevent the creation of new accessibility barriers and enhance community accessibility over time. The Township should consider implementing bylaws in the areas of:

- Accessible parking
- Accessible public facilities
- Accessible streets
- Adaptable housing
- Accessible taxis
- Accessible gasoline stations

For a detailed discussion of municipal authority in the area of accessibility and accessibility bylaws and model accessibility bylaws, see SPARC BC's *Model Municipal Bylaws for Accessibility* (forthcoming)⁶.

5. Increase Awareness of Accessibility Issues

The Township of Esquimalt has already played a leadership role in regards to increasing awareness of accessibility issues through initiating this comprehensive community accessibility audit, which has

⁶ This Report will be made available to the Township of Esquimalt upon completion.

increased awareness of local businesses and municipal staff of accessibility issues. The Township has also increased awareness through supporting the Accessibility Advisory Committee and conducting an accessibility survey.

Another way that the Township of Esquimalt can enhance awareness of issues of accessibility and inclusion is to plan a disability simulation event.

For example, the District of Sooke hosted an “Accessibility Challenge” where Municipal Council and municipal staff had an opportunity to travel around the District by wheelchair for a few hours and do everyday activities. Everyone who participated reported that they had a new understanding of what daily life might be like for someone with a physical impairment, and since the event received coverage on the local news station and in the local paper, it raised community awareness of what sorts of accessibility challenges currently exist in the community.

VIII Conclusion

The Township of Esquimalt is one of the first municipalities to undertake a comprehensive accessibility audit. This report presents the study findings along with a proposed implementation strategy. Developing and implementing an annual action plan for implementing the Strategy will ensure that the Township of Esquimalt remains a leader in accessibility and inclusion.