

CVAC Presentation

Introduction

Good afternoon. My name is Judy Norbury and I am here representing the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee. We are here today to offer our assistance in making Courtenay, and the Comox Valley as a whole, a more inclusive and accessible community.

Our committee was founded in 1998 and worked with the Regional District, including Cumberland, Comox and Courtenay, supported by the Courtenay Coordinator of Special Needs. It is comprised of both able bodied and disabled volunteers.

We would like to work more closely with both the City and the Regional District to assist with looking at issues and future decisions using an accessibility lens as part of the larger social structure to make the Comox Valley as barrier free, inclusive and as safe as possible for all residents and visitors. Accessibility issues affect people of all ages, income levels, and mobility levels, and is not just about wheelchair accessibility. A person with impaired sight or hearing, a parent with a baby stroller, a senior with a mobility scooter or a skier temporarily using crutches for a broken leg can all benefit from improved accessibility.

I will start with mentioning some of the current activities we are working on and hopes for the future.

We have been working with Courtenay Recreation to consult with and educate the public about accessibility challenges and solutions.

We are hoping to promote the recognition of Access Awareness Day, the first Saturday in June, and would like the City to recognize this with an official proclamation.

We are looking to improve accessible parking on 4th St. and restore the two excellent wheelchair parking spots between the Credit Union and the Museum that were removed without consulting our committee.

We are in consultation with both the Art Gallery and the Public Library to ensure that there is a properly accessible washroom in the downtown area. This means one that has an easily accessed door suitable for a larger scooter and any sized wheelchair. At the moment no such facility exists. In addition, an easily reachable push-button door at the entryway to the Art Gallery would facilitate entry and reduce the prospects of liability.

Many costly issues could have been prevented by consultation with our committee before changes were made.

We have an ongoing offer to conduct scooter tours around the City so those in official decision-making positions can experience first-hand the reality of moving through the world in a chair.

Our members also serve on other committees as accessibility advisors. Some of these are the Public Patient Advisory Committee at the new hospital, the Interregional Transportation Select Committee, the Social Planning Society and the Cumberland Accessibility Committee.

I shall list some of the many past accomplishments that our committee has worked for.

- Beach mats and accessible fire pit at Goose Spit
- Sid Williams theatre disabled seating platform
- Lewis Centre lift to upper level accessing change room and washrooms
- Lift chair for outdoor swimming pool at Lewis Park
- Life Kits for use in emergency
- Portable folding emergency ramp for Emergency Preparedness
- Adding asphalt ramps to ease bumps and rounded curbs, plus properly constructed let-downs

And now I shall continue with some ongoing issues that may not be evident unless you are facing them yourself or with a disabled companion.

- Curb letdowns with dangerous bumps
- No curb cuts at all in some places
- Snow removal piles blocking sidewalk letdowns and preventing access and confusion over whose responsibility it is to clear sidewalk letdowns to access bus stops, (i.e., city or private)
- Snow piled in disabled parking spots
- Automatic door buttons in awkward or unsafe places
- Barely or non-accessible sidewalks, due to unkempt bushes, seasonal maintenance or debris
- Inability for 2 wheelchairs or scooters or baby strollers to pass each other on some narrow sidewalks
- Lack of sidewalks in some areas
- Walk signals too short for many of those with mobility issues
- Pedestrian signal buttons too difficult to push or reach

Some of the projects we hope to see improvements in are under the jurisdiction of BC Parks, such as Miracle Beach access.

It would be useful if the city made an inventory to map and list available disabled parking spots plus an inventory of accessible sidewalks.

Making our community more accessible will open up possibilities for any person to become more fully involved in the community. Current building codes and regulations were created for smaller mobility aids such as manual wheelchairs and do not reflect the

current needs of many disabled persons, especially people using motorized mobility devices such as scooters and the larger electric wheelchairs.

Being able to move freely around the community reduces depression that can come from isolation. Removing barriers allows people to get out into the community and become more productive members of society, contributing to the overall health of the society and also the local economy. When the City says that “people matter”, it must include all people.

Making these changes is also an opportunity to increase tourism. We encourage the City & the Regional District, as a whole, to pursue excellence by looking toward the future, paving the way to a more accessible and inclusive Comox Valley.

In order to continue our important role as members of the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee, we need administrative support. Previously, the Special Needs Recreation program provided that service, together with a very small grant-in-aid from the Regional District, but that is no longer the case. We are asking the City of Courtenay together with the Regional District, to develop a regional strategy regarding accessibility as per the attached report from the City of Vancouver concerning their Accessibility Strategy Development. In addition, a staff person to assist with things such as agendas, minutes, and record keeping, would enable us to continue in our role.

Thank you for listening. We have a couple of minutes left if anyone has questions.

CV Accessibility Committee – History: 1998 – 2018 DRAFT

In 1998 – Comox Councillor Norm Reynolds approached the Coordinator of Special Needs Recreation to work with him to start an Accessibility Committee for the Comox Valley. The goals were to educate and raise awareness around accessibility issues, and to advocate for improved accessibility throughout the community.

Norm Reynolds looked to **Special Needs Recreation**, a program with the **Courtenay Recreational Association**, to be the sponsor because Special Needs Recreation was a program created especially to support people with disabilities, it was sponsored by a strong local community group, and as it was funded primarily through the CVRD, it had a Valley wide mandate.

This was a time when awareness was increasing about the accessibility needs for people with disabilities. In **1990** the US passed the American Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), which mandated sweeping improvements in disability access. Ontario passed the Ontarians with Disabilities Act in **2001** and the later Accessibility for Ontarians With Disability Act (AODA) in **2005**.

Over the next twenty years the CV Accessibility Committee, sponsored by Special Needs Recreation and with an active dedicated committee of community members, including Marg Misener, who remained Secretary for twenty years! developed a wide base of disability information particularly around the built environment, and also information around accessibility grants. The Committee worked hard to help make the Comox Valley a barrier-free community through work with local government Councils, local government staff, local businesses and organizations. The Committee made many presentations, developed displays and information and promotional material. It was consulted by many organizations.

This was very important work, for example: at that time the Building Code did not require visual as well as auditory fire alarms; it did not require that all exits be accessible, only the main exit; it did not consider medical scooters to be assistive devices for indoor locations. Sadly, the current BC Building Code still does not consider medical scooters in the design of indoor spaces.

Some examples of the work the Accessibility accomplished follow. Many many thanks go to the wonderful volunteer Committee members for their

expertise, hard work, and determination to help make the Comox Valley barrier-free for everyone.

Emergency planning for the disabled

Friday, September 22, 2017

Howie Siemens

Comox Valley coordinator for emergency preparations

hsiemens@comoxvalleyrd.ca

250-334-8890

provincial emergency project coordinator

karen@disabilityalliancebc.org

604-875-0188

5 people attended this consultation representing

Comox Valley accessibility committee (2)

Cumberland disability committee

L'Arche (2)

Both Howie and Karen are happy to receive additional comments or suggestions to enhance the emergency preparedness programs by phone or email

A number of years ago Howie Siemens accompanied Mike Fournier in attending a CVAC meeting..

At that time there was very little provision for or consideration of handicapped evacuations. Those were the days of the Fraser River flooding when the cows were provided with a program to evacuate them from Annacis Island but there were no provisions or even discussions relating to the safety of disabled people.

Topics:

shelters

making them accessible for people with mobility challenges

having washrooms and/or equipment that would enable the handicapped person to stay in the shelter

registry

creating a registry of people who need some assistance in the event of an emergency. This would enable first responders to locate people who need assistance.

Creating phone trees amongst disabled persons.

Communication systems for people who may have cognitive difficulties

There are guidance manuals that describe the important aspects of planning for specific conditions.

These include mobility, seeing, hearing, cognitive impairment, and others.

Another important link related to emergency planning is:

Prepared BC, Resources for People with Disabilities

www.gov.bc.ca/PreparedBC

CV Accessibility Committee – Coordinator: Job Description

- **Office Support**
 - Maintain contact list
 - Organize meetings
 - Assist writing & distributing minutes, agendas

- **Promotion and Education**
 - Update & assist in distribution of flyers and promotional material
 - Update display material & assist in organizing several displays annually
 - Promote awareness of the Committee & recruiting of new members
 - Assist in preparing material for local media
 - Assist in organizing and delivering special annual campaigns such as Annual Access Awareness Day, Annual International Day of the Disabled etc
 - Assist in maintaining a variety of social media platforms

- **Resource for Accessibility Information**
 - Assist in maintaining resources concerning Accessibility and the Building Code
 - Assist in maintaining information concerning financial grants for accessibility activities/work
 - Assist in maintaining information concerning disability rights.

- **Advocate for Improved Accessibility**
 - Assist in advocating for improved accessibility at the local level, and provincial and national levels.

Local agencies get pat on the back from BC Parks *Apr 18 2007*



Karin Kratz of the Comox Valley Access Committee providing some design suggestions for the Disabled Access Trail at Forbidden Plateau in Strathcona Provincial Park. A number of regional agencies were presented with an award from BC parks for the project.

Work on a disabled trail and an interpretive centre in Strathcona Park has earned a number of local organizations a Community Involvement Award from BC Parks.

BC Parks recently recognized several members of the public, partner groups and businesses for their contribution to program delivery, stewardship, and management of parks and protected areas, Environment Minister Barry Penner announced last week.

"We are pleased to acknowledge the efforts of these exceptional individuals and agencies," said Penner. "Through their work and dedication, they ensure our parks and protected areas benefit from sound stewardship and management practices for the enjoyment of all British Columbians."

The awards recognize the work of individuals and groups in two annual categories - Parks Facility Operator of the Year and Volunteer of the Year, and two biennial categories - the Partnership Award, and the Community Involvement Award.

The selection criteria included: parks stewardship, business and programming innovation, contributing to effective parks management, building/nurturing partnerships and educating the public, and protecting natural, cultural and recreation assets.

The Community Involvement Award was presented to the Campbell River Rotary, Vancouver Island Mountain Sports Society, Mount Washington Alpine Resort, Coast Sustainability Trust, Strathcona Wilderness Society, Courtenay Rotary, Pacific Sport, Disabled Access Committees and the Comox Strathcona Regional District, for their contributions to the Strathcona Park Disabled Access Trail and Outdoor Centre project.

The trail construction which took place over two seasons (2005 and 2006), cost approximately \$200,000 to complete and will be open this spring providing a new access trail into Paradise Meadows and the Forbidden Plateau area of Strathcona Provincial Park.

Funding for the Outdoor Centre (conceptual design By Rob Wood for Friends of Strathcona Park is attached) which is phase 2 of the overall project, is being pursued through private donations and grants and is hoped to be built over the next couple of years.

Other BC Parks awards were:

n Parks Facility Operator of the Year - Merlin Blackwell of Blackwell Park Operations, and Rob Seaton of Northwest Escapes Ltd., for their service delivery in Wells Gray Park and in the Skeena area, respectively.

n Volunteer of the Year - Syd Watts for his long-term contributions in Mt. Tzuhalem Ecological Reserve and Strathcona Park.

n Partnership Award - BC Nature and the Park Facility Operators Society for their Visitor Interpretation Programs in many parks in the province.

Proclamation

Whereas accessibility and inclusion is essential in ensuring that all community members have equal opportunities to fully participate in the life of the community; and

Whereas accessibility affects all aspects of community life – physical, social and economic; and

Whereas all citizens have a role to play to ensure that our communities are as accessible and inclusive as possible; and

Whereas accessibility relates to both the physical design of buildings and infrastructure as well as the access to appropriate services and supports including transportation, recreation, housing, employment and other activities that are an essential part of community life.

Whereas the citizens of Courtenay recognize the rights of all individuals with disabilities and the importance of ensuring that they have equal access to the opportunities that are important to them and that give their lives meaning.

Now therefore, the City of Courtenay declares the first Saturday in June of each year to be the Annual Access Awareness Day, beginning with June 1, 2019.

With thanks to the City of Colwood, BC.

Sidewalks Courtenay BC November 2017

Generally, the accessibility of sidewalks for scooters and wheelchairs in the city of Courtenay is very good. However, there are a number of sidewalks in Courtenay that challenge accessibility. I shall present a few examples below.

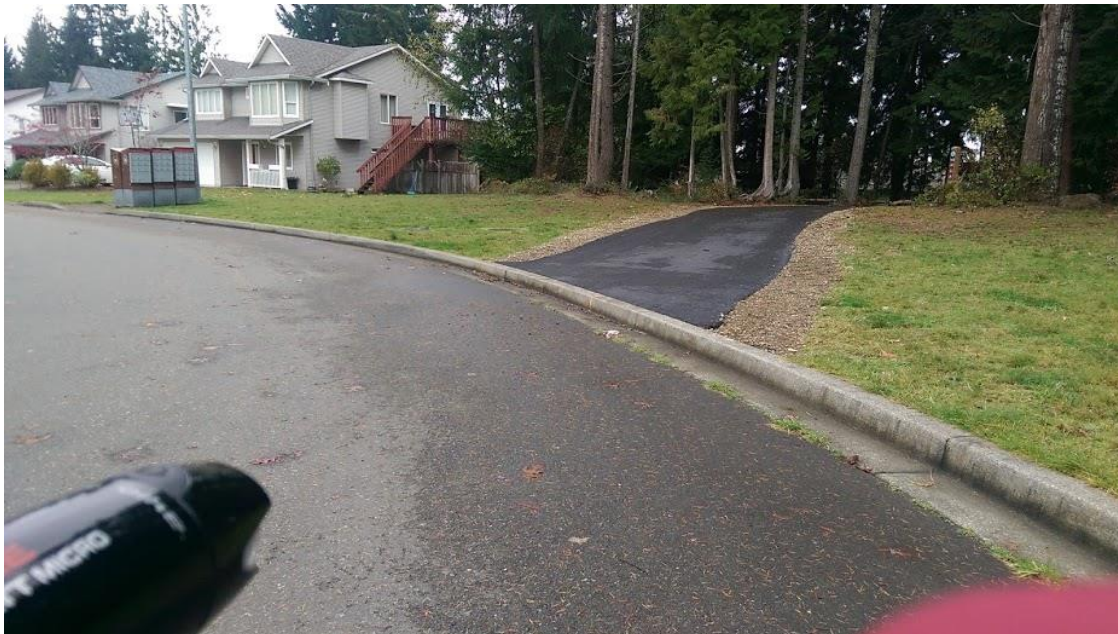
In the meantime, contrary to rumours, municipalities in British Columbia have the jurisdiction to require developers to comply with local standards for sidewalks within a municipality. Although the BC government in the BC building code restricts the ability of municipalities to require upgraded standards from developers in BC, it does not apply to sidewalks. The justification for such restriction is said to be for the purpose of standardizing and thus making predictable what is required for developers to proceed with the construction of buildings.

In the Costco area, there are some examples of inappropriate sidewalk with pathway construction.

On Elderberry Crescent

there is a pathway that connects with Elderberry Crescent that goes through trees in a green space that enters the back of a subdivision that faces Costco property.

Entering that pathway one is confronted by the following situation:



On the other end of the pathway we find the following circumstances:



Directly across the street and adjacent to the Costco property is the following sidewalk access ramp:



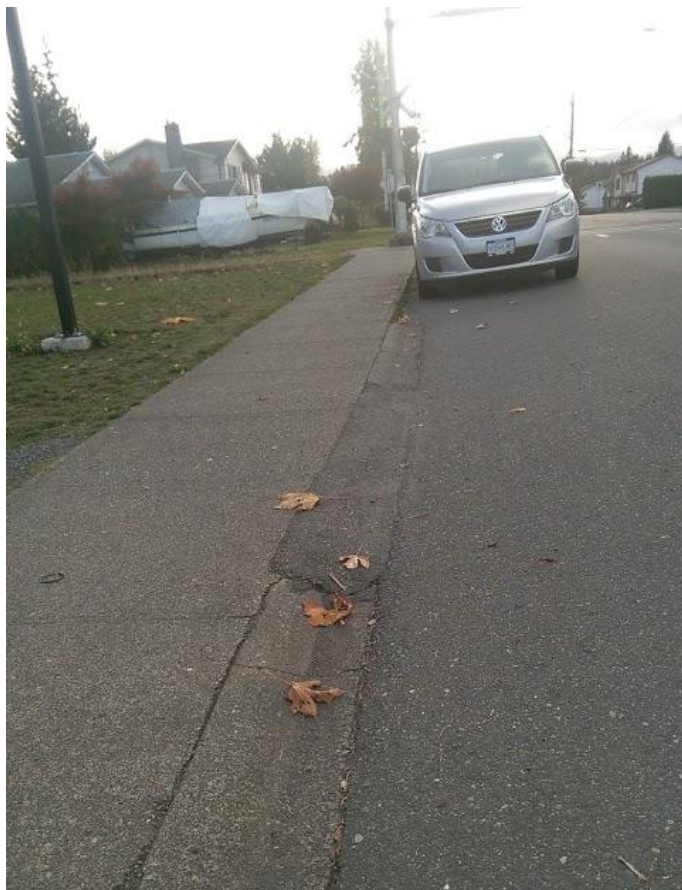
on the upper 2 pictures of sidewalk access ramps, there is a drop or bump of 1 inch to 1.5 inches. Although that does not seem much in the scheme of things, for a person on wheelchair or a scooter it is a significantly unpleasant experience. To put things in perspective, imagine, if you can, how you would feel if every time you turned a corner at an intersection, the vehicle dropped off the curb of even 3 inches?

Looking at the picture immediately above, it is easy to see that the sidewalk drop is unnecessary. The City of Courtenay has jurisdiction to mandate this standard and, in many areas of the city, the smooth transition has been adopted.

Sidewalk Transitions Where There Are No Letdowns.

There are a number of locations where the rounded curb from sidewalk to road can be eased with an asphalt ramp.

For example: where the Rotary trail process 26 Street, one observes the following solution:

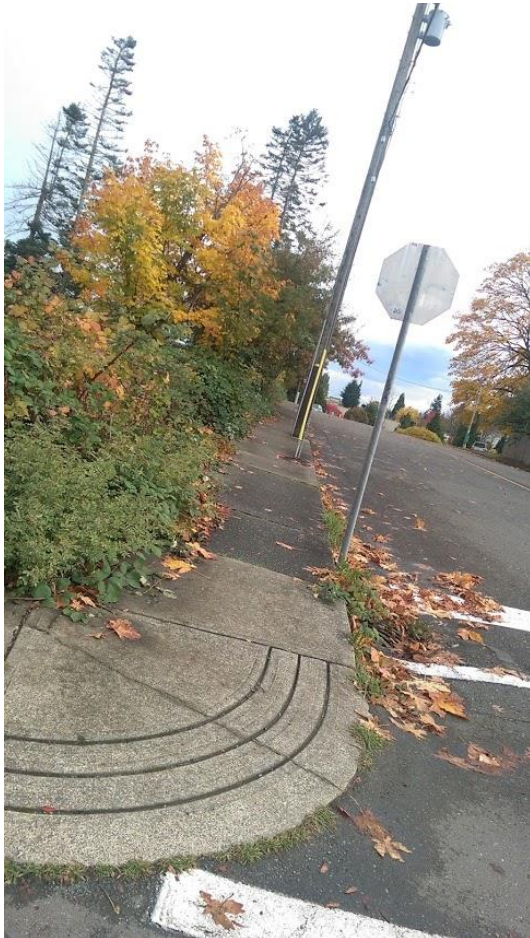


This could be adapted to square curbs as well as to rounded curbs.

See below.

England Avenue at Cooper Park

Where England Avenue dead-ends at the Thrifty's Foods' property, there is no access to that property except along one block of narrow sidewalk which is often overgrown with blackberry bushes.



Willmar St., South end

The pathway parallel to the Connector (29th St.) which ends at Willmar Street, has a dangerous transition onto the roadway. It necessitates a perpendicular access to the rounded curb which requires people using scooters, or wheelchairs or strollers to go onto the grass of a private residence to make the transition from Road to path.



The Riverway Walkway

The Riverway walkway behind A&W particularly as needed repairs for a couple of years.

It has deteriorated to such an extent that I and other people are walking or scooting in my case along the grassy verge of the walkway. Although it is very bumpy on the grass, the discomfort is less intense than many of the root bumps which are at an angle to the direction of travel and thus can cause an unpleasant twisting, up and down motion.



Acknowledgement of thanks to those who helped with the CVAC presentation

Heather Crites
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And to the City of Colwood for the model of Proclamation