

EXCHANGE



LGMA

EXCHANGE is a quarterly magazine published by the Local Government Management Association (LGMA) of British Columbia. It's about sharing information, exchanging ideas on best practices, enhancing professional development and building networks. Reach us at lgma.ca.

Fall 2023

ACCESSIBILITY COLLABORATIONS P18

ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS P22

IN MEMORIAM P26



Decoding Accessibility for Local Governments

P8



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Update

In this Issue	4
President's Report	5
Executive Director's Report	6
Case of Interest	7
Members Page	25

Professional Development

Tips & Tactics: Resources for Accessibility Planning and Engagement	24
Programs and Events	25

7

Case of Interest

Get a legal perspective on the new *Accessible BC Act* requirements, including enforcement provisions and accountability for local governments.



EXCHANGE

Exchange is the magazine for members of the Local Government Management Association of British Columbia. *Exchange* is distributed quarterly to about 1,000 local government professionals and affiliates.

Exchange is printed on Sappi Opus Dull, with 10% recycled fibre and an FSC Mix Credit CoC claim (FSC-C014955), at Royal Printers.

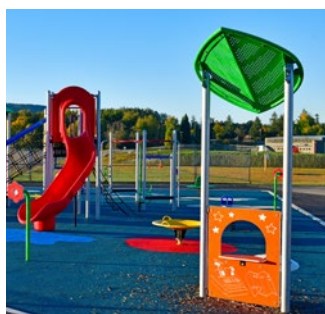


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Jon Healy

Surrey Accessibility Leadership Team members (from left): Sylvain Formo, Janice Huber and Kim Egger.



18

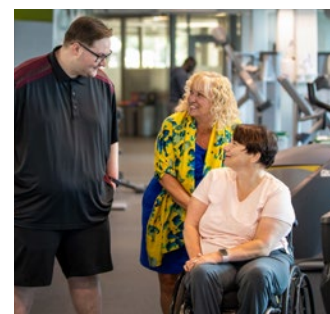
Collaborating to Better Meet Community Needs

Learn about how B.C. local governments are working together to address the new accessibility requirements in a meaningful and cost-effective way.

8

Decoding Accessibility for Local Governments

Read about the challenges and opportunities related to the new *Accessible BC Act* requirements, and how local governments can approach accessibility in a holistic manner with limited resources.



22

Accessible Communications Q&As

Get valuable tips from an accessible communications consultant on making your communications more inclusive and accessible.

IN THIS ISSUE



I'm excited by the work being done across the province to recognize the barriers that people living with disabilities experience every day, and to find ways to support them in living with dignity and equity in our communities.

As a communications consultant with over 20 years of experience working in issues management, strategy and writing, I am embarrassed that I never considered accessibility in any communication plan that I've developed for a community or business. It never really came up when I worked at the municipal level or with non-profits, and reflecting back, it's a glaring omission if we're talking about supporting inclusive and diverse communities. After researching and interviewing people working in accessibility and those living with disability, I can see that my lack of understanding of disabilities prevented me from considering those experiences in my work.

I've also been trained to adhere to specific language and grammar rules, and style guides provide a framework for how we should write and communicate. So imagine my surprise when an accessibility consultant was hired to review a survey and report that I worked on, and their comments noted that some of my grammar was inaccessible. Things that I took for granted as someone without visual and physical disabilities were highlighted as problematic. For example, providing a numbered or bulleted list without periods after each point creates issues for digital screen readers used by those who are visually impaired. Without the periods, the software reads each bullet together as one long, run-on sentence with no division between each line.

A small detail like punctuation can change a person's ability to participate and understand critical details. I've learned it's important to be open to adapting as technologies change and that it's also important to adapt style guides and personal preferences to ensure my writing is more inclusive and accessible. As I'm learning everyday, accessibility work is an ongoing process that will take years to listen, plan, implement, review and improve.

In this issue, we highlight local governments using creative partnerships and networks to meaningfully address gaps in accessibility in their communities while meeting the requirements of the *Accessible BC Act*.

There are also strategies on recruiting and managing accessible committees, plus tips on holding accessible meetings and how to make your marketing and communications more accessible when you have limited capacity and resources.

I'm excited by the work being done across the province to recognize the barriers that people living with disabilities experience every day, and to find ways to support them in living with dignity and equity in our communities. And most importantly, including those with lived experiences of disability in the process.

Our designer Karin Mark and I have taken up the challenge to consider accessibility in the writing, layout and design of this issue. It's not perfect, but being more inclusive in design is something that we're all thinking about, and like any new plan, will involve many iterations, feedback and re-design. For this issue, we have used Noto fonts and considered issues such as colour contrast and the use of screen readers for added accessibility in layout. You can find a more accessible PDF version of this issue of *Exchange* at lgma.ca/exchange-magazine.

If you have any feedback on this issue or ideas you would like to share, please contact me at editor@lgma.ca.

Manjot Bains
Editor

I write on the traditional and unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) nations, and am committed to solidarity with First Nations and actively pushing for change through my work and art.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



I commend the local governments that have navigated thus far with the intention to enhance accessibility in their community. Like much of what we do, we know that this will be a work in progress and that we work better when we share with each other.

Greetings from Burns Lake. I acknowledge that the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako conducts its work on the traditional territories of the Dakelh, Nedut'en and Wet'suwet'en peoples.

It has been an extremely busy year for the LGMA, as I am sure it has been for many of you. The LGMA is looking towards 2024 with a number of strategic efforts. Our Education Needs Survey will shape the LGMA's programs and services for the next few years and inform our upcoming strategic planning process. Please be sure to provide your input so we can ensure that the association's work ahead is responsive to your needs. I am curious to see what membership has to say given all that has changed in the last four years.

It feels like 2020 was so long ago, and this is likely due to all that has happened in such a short amount of time. We know that the local government sector is changing, and we are adapting and working to continue to do our best as we learn and grow. One of the ways local governments have been adapting over the past few years is around accessibility.

Like many of my colleagues, we have been working to adapt to the requirements set forth in the *Accessible BC Act* which came into law in June of 2021. Many of you will remember when the Government of B.C. launched the "Accessibility 2024" initiative in 2014, which sought to mirror the efforts of Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia to work towards the introduction and enactment of disability legislation.

As one of the prescribed organizations set out in the Act, local governments worked over the past year to comply with the September 1, 2023 deadline to establish an accessibility committee, an accessibility plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility.

Though several have established a committee by the Sept. 1 deadline, we know many local governments are struggling to comply with the Act requirements amidst labour market challenges, a summer fraught with wildfires, fiscal constraints and other legislative changes impacting local governments. This is not intended to be an excuse, but what I know of my local government colleagues is that when we engage in such important work, we want to do it well. I have yet to meet a fellow peer in local government who would be satisfied with simply doing the bare minimum to just tick a box; when local governments engage their communities, they strive to do it well.

I know many local governments have built out their accessibility committee, either independently or in partnership with other prescribed organizations whilst navigating geographic distance, capacity challenges, volunteer engagement and financial constraints. I know many are also just getting started. I commend the local governments that have navigated thus far with the intention to enhance accessibility in their community. Like much of what we do, we know that this will be a work in progress and that we work better when we share with each other. I hope this edition of *Exchange* helps you as you engage in this important work.

Curtis Helgesen
President

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



This fall, we are launching several new initiatives that we hope will help the local government community build strong peer support networks and foster further learning amidst busy schedules.

Hello! I am honoured to write this column from the traditional territories of the *ləkʷəŋən* (Lekwungen) Peoples, also known as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. Fall has been off to a busy start for the LGMA team, as I am sure it has been for many of you as well.

The LGMA team recently completed an Indigenous Cultural Awareness workshop where we learned about honouring Indigenous ways of knowing in learning spaces, how history and present-day colonialism impacts Indigenous peoples, and some of the ways we can work towards truth, healing and reconciliation in the work that we do. I am proud of the ways LGMA staff continue to look for opportunities to foster learning and strong relations between local and First Nations governments.

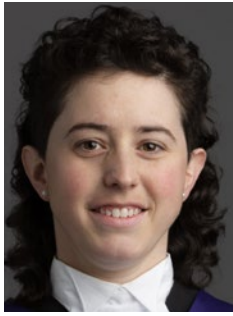
I write this shortly after the LGMA team engaged in planning for 2024 and looking towards 2025. We first engaged in a reflective process about our workplace culture to think about what our organizational goals are looking forward, and to identify what challenges might arise. It was truly humbling to see the team note that some of the most valuable aspects of our workplace culture relate to fostering a safe space for creativity and collaboration, being able to 'bring your whole self to work,' and (no surprise) taking time together to laugh and share good food. We noted some of the barriers we face are also impacting the sector; namely time, capacity and economic challenges.

These reflections set the foundation for discussing what is feasible for the years ahead and helped us come up with ideas on how to navigate time, capacity and financial barriers, both for our organizational work but also to ensure our programs and services remain accessible to the people we serve.

This fall, we are launching several new initiatives that we hope will help the local government community build strong peer support networks and foster further learning amidst busy schedules. Modelled off the success of the CAO and CO Connect Lunch Series, we are launching the HR Connect Lunch and Equity Connect Lunch. The HR Advisory Committee recommended the launch of this series that will be a space for local government leaders responsible for human resources to tap into peer learning and build a community of practice. The Equity Connect Lunch Series, a new initiative driven by our Advancing Equity Working Group, will be a space for individuals in local government from equity-deserving groups to draw on peer support and build their professional networks. Additionally, we've asked our friends at Civic Info BC to create an HR Discussion Forum to further peer learning opportunities.

Finally, I am extremely sad to note the passing of Kevin Taylor, who was the Director of Corporate and Development Services at the District of Lillooet. In addition to the In Memoriam tribute on page 26 of this edition, we have created a memorial webpage to honour Kevin, whose loss was felt by the local government community this summer. Please take a moment to review Kevin's memorial page at lgma.ca/remembering-kevin-taylor and leave a comment if you wish.

Candace Witkowsky
Executive Director



By Peter Johnson
and Mel van Fram
Stewart McDannold Stuart



Enforcement of New ABCA Requirements

The *Accessible British Columbia Act* (ABCA) was enacted in 2021 with the objective of removing barriers that hinder people with disabilities from full and equal participation in society. As of September 2023, local governments must comply with Part 3 of the ABCA, which requires them (and other prescribed organizations) to:

- Establish an accessibility committee,
- In consultation with the accessibility committee, develop an accessibility plan, which must be periodically reviewed and updated, and
- Implement a process to collect public feedback on the organization’s accessibility plan, and on barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.

Statutory protections for persons with disabilities have been in place in B.C. since at least the mid-1980s, when the Province amended the Human Rights Code to include protection against discrimination on the grounds of physical or mental disability. Today, the Code continues to prohibit discrimination based on physical or mental disability in various areas of public life, including the provision of services or facilities customarily available to the public.

The BC Human Rights Tribunal’s role in adjudicating claims under the Code is not displaced by the ABCA. Persons with disabilities continue to have the benefit of other legal protections as well, including the guarantee of equality rights under Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. One key difference is that the protections provided by the Charter and the Code largely depend on the ability and willingness of affected persons to commence proceedings, and to prove their claim in an adversarial process. In contrast, the ABCA is proactive in nature in that it requires the Province and prescribed organizations to develop plans to identify and reduce barriers that are faced by persons with disabilities within their organization.

However, the ABCA is not without enforcement provisions. The legislation includes an administrative enforcement scheme (to come into force by regulation) which includes provisions for the appointment of a director and the appointment of inspectors with broad investigative powers.

The director will have authority to impose fines of up to \$250,000 for contraventions of certain ABCA provisions, including the three requirements noted above. The director will also have the authority to enter into compliance agreements, under which penalties may be reduced or cancelled if compliance is achieved by a specified date.

Additional enforcement details, including minimum and maximum penalties, will likely be prescribed by regulation.

Are there other mechanisms for holding local governments accountable for the content of their accessibility plan or for achieving the plan’s objectives? The ABCA requires regular review and updating of accessibility plans but does not require an organization to implement their plan within a specific time frame. It is possible – although this remains to be seen – that a court might be prepared to consider the reasonableness of an accessibility plan in proceedings under the *Judicial Review Procedure Act* when reviewing local government decisions that affect persons with disabilities. Accessibility plans might also be relevant in proceedings under the Human Rights Code if, for example, a local government asserted a bona fide and reasonable justification for discrimination under section 8 of the Code.

Another potential source of accountability for local governments flows from a key provincial role under the ABCA. The ABCA provides that the minister responsible may direct the provincial accessibility committee to develop accessibility standards. Once developed and submitted by the provincial accessibility committee, the minister must publish the proposed standard, and may also recommend to Provincial Cabinet that a regulation be enacted based on that standard.

The provincial accessibility committee, along with two technical committees, have been working for the last year on developing accessibility standards for employment and for accessible service delivery. Depending on the form of regulation that emerges from those standards, local governments may be required to take steps to prevent and remove barriers in relation to employment and service delivery.

Decoding Accessibility for Local Governments

By Manjot Bains



Surrey Accessibility Leadership Team members (from left): Sylvain Formo, Janice Huber and Kim Egger.

A Quarterly Publication of the LGMA
Exchange - Fall 2023

New provincial requirements have put accessibility in the spotlight for B.C. local governments.

As of Sept. 1, local governments across the province were required to meet new public sector requirements in the *Accessible British Columbia Act* (ABCA), including the establishment of an accessibility committee, development of an accessibility plan and creation of a public feedback tool.

The act is intended to be a key step in creating more inclusive communities and removing barriers for people living with disabilities.

As many local governments juggle this critical work with managing existing responsibilities, how are they responding to the opportunities and challenges presented by this legislation? How can local governments approach accessibility in a holistic manner with limited resources?

“Quite often when I have conversations with various departments about accessibility and inclusion, they ask about budgets,” notes Erin Balmer, Accessibility and Inclusion Coordinator with the City of Surrey. “The province has put in all this work to have the act, but what sort of funding is available to support the work?”

Budgets are always a key concern for local governments, and meeting the new accessibility requirements without additional funding or staff means communities have to be even more creative and innovative in their approaches.

Resources are available to support local governments in their accessibility work, and there is some flexibility in how the requirements are implemented. Across B.C., communities are tapping into existing networks and developing partnerships to support the development of inclusive accessibility committees and plans.

“Quite often when I have conversations with various departments about accessibility and inclusion, they ask about budgets.”

A SIGNIFICANT POPULATION

Twenty-five per cent of British Columbians identify as living with a disability, but the real number is likely much higher. Research from Return on Disability Group, a Canadian disability market research firm, notes that more than 75 per cent of people with disabilities will never disclose them to their employer. They may fear repercussions from employers or they may not consider their situation as a disability.

But even at 25 per cent of the province, that’s a significant portion of the population.

Later this fall, Statistics Canada will release results from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, which was last conducted in 2017 when 22 per cent of Canadians identified as having a disability. The results will provide detailed insights on the labour market experiences of persons with disabilities, including unmet needs related to workplace accommodations – something local governments will want to keep an eye out for. Comprehensive findings from this survey will include breakdowns based on province, gender and age, and important statistics for the work of accessibility committees and programs across the province.

Continued on page 10

While many communities have considered some aspects of accessibility in their planning over the years, B.C. and Canada are lagging behind other countries on this work. The U.S. passed the *Americans with Disabilities Act* in 1990, meaning they've had 30 more years of consulting, planning, implementing and revising than Canada.

The federal *Accessible Canada Act* came into effect in 2019, with a goal of making the country barrier-free by 2040. A guiding principle for the act is "Nothing Without Us," which means consulting people living with disabilities on programs and policies that impact them.

B.C. is taking a similar approach with the *Accessible BC Act*. The accessibility committee must have at least 50 per cent representation of people with lived experiences of disability or represent a disability-serving organization, and at least one Indigenous member.

"If you're thinking about accessibility in your community, the committee is really important because you want people with disabilities to be part of the co-creation and design of the plan," notes Helaine Boyd, Executive Director of Disability Alliance BC. "It requires effort to have participation throughout the process, but it aligns with the spirit of the disability rights movement: nothing about us, without us."



Helaine Boyd

THE LANGUAGE OF ACCESSIBILITY

What is a disability? Presidents Group, a network of B.C. business leaders focused on workplace accessibility, provides this plain language definition: "A disability is a condition that affects your mind or body. It can always be present or it can come and go. A disability may stop you from doing the things you want to do. Barriers that get in your way can be physical such as a curb or a heavy door, other people's attitudes about you and the expected ways of doing things that are not easy for you."

A disability can be physical, sensory, mental health, learning, cognitive and a functional limitation. Understanding what disability and accessibility mean is a key part of better supporting and serving the diverse communities in your region.

This includes using specific, legal language. Trish Kelly, Managing Director with Untapped Accessibility, a consultancy that has supported close to 120 public sector organizations including local governments in meeting the requirements of the ABCA, notes the problems with inconsistency around disability language.

"We've seen plans where instead of using the word disability, they're saying 'diversability' or other euphemisms, which is probably well intentioned but we advise against it because it's not a legally defensible term."

"We've seen plans where instead of using the word disability, they're saying 'diversability' or 'differently abled' or other euphemisms for disability, which is probably well intentioned but we advise against it because it's not a legally defensible term," Kelly says.



Trish Kelly

This criticism may feel like a values judgement, but Kelly notes that because the term disability is embedded in the legislation, it's important to use that specific language and suggests not giving into the stigma that is associated with the term in society.

Within the *Accessible BC Act*, accessibility is defined as removing barriers that hinder equal and full participation in society for a person with a disability.

"Barriers can be wide ranging," says Boyd, who worked closely with the province on the development of the act and on the Accessible Organizations Project, which created the BC Accessibility Hub where local governments can find resources, a toolkit, sample plans and terms of reference. "Barriers can be in your environment, they can be attitudes, practices, policies and procedures – this is connected to systemic ableism."

Ableism is the discrimination of people with disabilities and is often embedded into our systems. For example, designing a building without accommodations for wheelchairs or organizing a meeting room so the aisles between tables or chairs are too narrow for a wheelchair to move through.

Other forms of systemic ableism can show up as failing to include captions in Zoom meetings for people who have hearing impairments or not including people with disabilities in planning processes, particularly those that impact them.

Continued on page 12



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“I’d like to assure local government leaders that they shouldn’t try to get anything perfect in the first round... it’s a continuous process and it will probably never be perfect.”



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“An accessible community allows for equal and full participation by people with disabilities,” adds Boyd. “It’s where the community at large is mindful of various types of abilities and considers this while building policies, programs and services. It’s where a person with a mobility impairment has the ability to use public transit that is physically accessible, and when they access a community centre or neighbourhood home, universal design or adaptability for people with various types of disabilities has been considered.”

Accessible design can include quiet spaces for people on the autism spectrum, putting braille on signage so someone can use touch to navigate their way through a space, and tactile markers on crosswalks to support free movement of people with a variety of disabilities.

MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE ACT

All local governments must have an accessibility plan, public feedback mechanism and accessibility committee that will provide advice on their plan.

“At first glance, the requirements may seem really difficult, and it can be especially for smaller communities where people with disabilities may not want to participate or may have moved away because their community isn’t accessible,” notes Boyd.

“We chatted at length with the Accessibility Directorate under the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction about the sub-requirements, and their clarification is that communities should make an effort to try to meet those sub-requirements, but it’s not a must, it’s a should.”

Working toward meeting these requirements is the first step in an ongoing journey to make all communities in B.C. barrier-free and accessible.

“I’d like to assure local government leaders that they shouldn’t try to get anything perfect in the first round,” says Boyd. “They shouldn’t think of it as once they do their plan, they’re fine. It’s about understanding that it’s a continuous process and it will probably never be perfect.”

Continued on page 13

An important part of this process is listening to people with disabilities, and identifying and prioritizing their needs. Boyd also emphasizes the need to be honest with the community about what's possible to implement with consideration to funding and capacity, and work toward long-term goals.

“We’re very well behind in North America in implementing accessibility legislation. There have been some communities out there that have implemented accessibility because of the grassroots need and now it’s a government requirement, but the need was always there. It’s something to take as an ethical and moral duty, rather than a government requirement,” says Boyd.

Boyd recommends communities band together with others in the same region to share the workload, fund and develop the accessibility plan, committee and public feedback mechanism. For example, the City of Dawson Creek joined the Peace River Regional District (PRRD) member municipalities and the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality to collaborate on their ABCA requirements.

“Having alignment and continuity throughout the region made the most sense,” shares Bill Darnbrough, Development Services Manager at Dawson Creek. “Collectively we’ll have a unified strategy that speaks to our region’s diverse yet specific needs. With a regional approach we are able to draw from an energetic and diverse group of people with a wide range of perspectives, which will result in a strong accessibility strategy.”

Details on how to build a regional collaboration and recommendations for success can be found in the Case Study on page 18.

Networking is another great way to learn, collaborate and ask for advice. The Municipal Accessibility Network was established in 2019 to connect with other folks whose work included accessibility.

When Balmer first began working as Accessibility and Inclusion Coordinator with the City of Surrey, they couldn’t find resources for best practices within municipalities.

“I would reach out to various people in similar roles and eventually I thought why don’t we just get together every now and then and talk about best practices,” shares Balmer. “There’s no decision making, no project-based work. It’s just sharing best practices around specific topics like how to get financial support, how to work with partners and how to provide one-on-one support during COVID. It’s very supportive.”

The group has grown significantly since its creation and includes representation from small and large local governments across the province.



Erin Balmer

“If something comes up we send a quick email out to this group and they’ll respond, ‘Yeah I’ve seen that recently,’” adds Balmer. “And with this accessibility legislation it’s been a huge support to realize that we’re all in the same place, we’re all here at the same time and we’re all in different places in terms of the process. But it’s okay to be in those different places and not know what’s going to happen next. That’s been a really great support for everybody.”

See *Tips & Tactics* on page 24 for more details on joining the Municipal Accessibility Network.

BUILDING YOUR ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

For many communities, recruiting for the accessibility committee has been a challenge.

Organizations are expected to make a reasonable attempt to have Indigenous representation, people with disabilities and disability-serving organizations on their committee. Should the provincial government inquire about the makeup of the committee, local governments would need to show the extent of effort they made to try and reach these groups.

Continued on page 14

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The requirement exists because engaging with people with lived experiences is necessary to best understand what people living with disability need and want.

People with lived experiences are valuable additions to committees because they live and breathe these issues and bring their own unique perspectives.

Kelly recommends starting small and then building up the committee.

“Some communities really struggle with finding Indigenous representation for their committee because they haven’t necessarily built enough relationships or the people in their community who they often go to for committees are overtaxed with requests. Some are also unsure about how to invite people with lived experiences to be part of the conversation. Here’s where a staged approach could work well. Start small and identify what gaps exist from an equity perspective and then recruit to expand the committee to ensure there is a diversity of viewpoints at the table.”

Like any equity deserving group, however, the disability committee is not a monolith.

“Just because one person with a disability told you something doesn’t mean it can’t be different for another person with a disability,” says Boyd. “Good relationship building is key, especially with communities who have been historically marginalized like disabled people and have a lot of distrust of organizations like the government for a variety of reasons. Be transparent and honest about the way you will engage with the community, it helps build relationships.”

Many local governments have actively recruited people with disabilities to their accessibility committee, including Central Saanich, North Saanich and Sidney, who partnered together to build an accessibility committee that reflects their individual communities and shared region (learn more in the Case Study on page 18).

Continued on page 16

BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGING YOUR ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

Hybrid meetings or mixed in-person and video meetings provide flexibility for people with disabilities. Honorariums are an important part of recognizing and compensating people who share their lived experiences. This will be challenging for many communities, but try and budget for a small honorarium for members who are not representing an organization.

“You need those personal stories to identify barriers, so it’s respectful and will probably improve your recruitment if you’re able to offer some kind of honorarium or gift card,” says Kelly. “Encourage people to add the position to their resume or provide a letter of recommendation after their year of service. People with disabilities experience higher rates of food insecurity and lower income than the rest of the population, and may have barriers to getting work so it may be especially useful to lift them up in reciprocity for their time and efforts.”

For the first meeting, plan for extra time for committee members to connect and consider using a facilitator if feasible. “For people with lived experiences, this might be the first time that they feel that they have been heard by the organization or they may feel like their attempts to raise accessibility issues in the past have gone unheard,” says Kelly. “Be prepared to leave space for an opening that might get quite personal, that’s going to take time and if it’s a safe space, build relationships and trust with the organization.”

Consider bringing the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) to the first meeting and reviewing them as a group. Things that can be discussed and included are goals for the committee, expectations, conduct agreements and considerations for accessibility, such as providing materials 48 hours in advance and always having auto captions on for video meetings. Remember to ask committee members if they need any accommodations and be flexible with things like attendance. Many local governments are opting for two-year term limits, and the City of New Westminster has a mix of one-year and two-year terms included in their TOR.

There are several examples of good TOR on the BC Accessibility Hub, including the Saanich Peninsula Accessibility Advisory Committee and Whistler’s Accessibility and Inclusion Committee, which includes voting and non-voting members.

If you have capacity, provide a learning or training opportunity for your committee. The City of Surrey hosted an ABCA information session for committee members and is developing training to include with the new TOR.

If you are part of a regional partnership, include an internal working group. Have one representative from each partner organization join the working group to discuss feedback, barriers and what they will take back to their local governments to action.

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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES WITH IMPLEMENTATION

After local governments have met the current requirements of the ABCA, the next steps will include receiving and assessing feedback from the committee and public, revising the accessibility plan to reflect the feedback, and planning for implementation.

Disability Alliance BC has created a prioritization matrix to assist organizations in deciding which barriers should be addressed first (see *Tips & Tactics* on page 24).

“Built environment seems like an obvious choice and it’s also probably the most costly,” says Boyd. “I definitely want the public sector to know that these issues are not just about the built environment, people can experience barriers in multiple different ways.”

The biggest challenge for municipalities across B.C. is resources and capacity.

There is concern that the provincial government introduced the act requirements without providing sustainable funding for implementation, notes Balmer. “What kind of staffing supports are available to those smaller municipalities where they’re struggling to even come up with a plan? Funding is a big issue and it has to be sustainable, it can’t be one time funding. There are a number of grants to do projects, but that’s not sustainable and we need support throughout the years as we continue this work.”

Balmer adds that staff training is also a significant part of the implementation of the accessibility plan. Accessibility needs to be seen holistically across departments, programs, bylaws, codes, communications and public engagement.

“The foundational learning for all City of Surrey staff is a key piece because we need to have as many staff on board as we can. This helps build the capacity of our staff to plan ahead and ask all the important questions during the planning process instead of being reactive and asking afterwards.”

Surrey released their draft accessibility plan in early September, and will engage with their internal and external accessibility committees as well as the public before updating and finalizing the plan. Each department has a lead who sits on the internal committee and champions projects related to actions noted in the plan.

“One of the projects we’re doing right now is council chamber updates,” says Balmer. “We have an IT rep on the internal accessibility committee who knows what we can update to be more accessible, such as having closed captioning. He linked me to that project team and asked how they can provide support and ensure accessibility is considered before we do the upgrades and not afterwards.”

It may not be feasible for smaller local governments to have accessibility champions on staff. Instead, they may consider having a standing agenda item on accessibility at staff meetings so the team can check-in regularly.

Tracking, analysing and actioning on feedback is an important part of implementing the regulations of ABCA, and governments of all sizes will need to consider this. Who will take the lead on implementation, what timeframes are reasonable, where will the budget come from or is there grant funding available?

“Committees will ask these questions,” says Kelly. “How is their feedback being integrated into plans? You need to be able to report on progress or why you can’t make progress in an area right now.”

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Continued on page 17


In Surrey, the external accessibility committee has already provided feedback to staff, flagging that communication was an issue. “We were sharing information for meetings and they weren’t aware it was available and didn’t know where to find it,” says Balmer. “They didn’t know how to navigate through our website and find our accessibility page so we’re working a lot on that, the welcome messaging and on the feedback.”

Inspired by the District of Squamish’s Scroll About program addressing online accessibility, Balmer plans on engaging with the accessibility committee along with IT and Parks, Recreation and Culture staff to scroll through the Surrey website and identify barriers and improvements. Squamish also conducted a Roll About event, where members of the accessibility committee identified physical barriers in the community.

While local governments continue their journeys to be more inclusive, the Province is working on accessibility standards for employment, service delivery, communication, built environment, transportation, health, education and procurement. Local governments can expect more information on the expectations, timelines and rollout of these standards in one to two years.

Being collaborative and prioritizing the voices and needs of people living with disability will remain important parts of the continuing process of creating more inclusive communities.

See page 18 for examples of accessibility work taking place in B.C., page 22 for tips on accessible communications, and page 24 for *Tips & Tactics*.

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Collaborating to Better Meet Community Needs

Local governments in Northern B.C. and Vancouver Island share the benefits of partnering to address new accessibility requirements

By Manjot Bains

People living with disabilities have diverse experiences and face a range of barriers. Making communities more accessible is a big endeavour, but local governments across British Columbia are taking a variety of approaches to connect with their communities, make meaningful change and meet the requirements of the *Accessible BC Act* (ABCA).

Some communities have opted to collaborate with other local governments on a joint accessibility committee, plan and feedback tool. By sharing the work, these local governments are able to meet the needs of people living with disabilities while addressing capacity and budget restrictions.

Dawson Creek partnered with Peace River Regional District (PRRD), member municipalities and the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality on a shared accessibility strategy and committee. On Vancouver Island, a smaller group of municipalities – Central Saanich, North Saanich and Sidney – are working together on an accessibility committee that reflects their individual and collective communities.

In some places, the library, school district and local governments have collaborated on an accessibility committee. Typically regional districts have been an umbrella for local governments in their area, acting as a hub or host.

The Northeastern collaboration began when the PRRD invited member municipalities including Dawson Creek, as well as the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, to collaborate on a shared accessibility strategy and the establishment of the Northeastern BC Accessibility Committee.

“Working together has helped ensure that we meet the requirements of the *Accessible BC Act* in a timely manner that is both cost-effective and speaks to the needs of the people of the region.”

“Dawson Creek was challenged with finding staff time to create a well-developed accessibility plan, which is part of the reason why we chose to go with a regional approach,” says Bill Darnbrough, Development Services Manager, City of Dawson Creek.

“Working together has helped ensure that we meet the requirements of the *Accessible BC Act* in a timely manner that is both cost effective and speaks to the needs of the people of the region.”

Collaborating was also a natural fit for three Saanich Peninsula partners, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Sidney.

“We’ve had tri-municipal council meetings in the past, and we have some shared services like Sidney and North Saanich RCMP, so it’s not something new to us,” says Sandi Nelson, Corporate Officer with the Town of Sidney. “With something new requiring resources and funding, it’s nice that we can get together and share that as one. It helps us get it done.”



Bill Darnbrough

Continued on page 19

The idea to collaborate was sparked by three councillors representing their respective Saanich Peninsula governments. They were passionate champions for accessibility and brought that energy to their municipalities.

“The relationship between the interested elected officials and between the Corporate Officers was key,” says Emilie Gorman, Director of Corporate Services at District of Central Saanich. “The respect each group has with each other was important at the outset of this process.”

The corporate officers took on the role of coordination and revising the Terms of Reference.

According to Rachel Dumas, Director of Corporate Services at District of North Saanich, organization and structure are critical to making the relationship function well. “It’s quite tricky coordinating three municipalities to all be on the same page, so it’s really been a work in progress and it still is.”

Factors to consider include alignment of reporting timelines, synchronizing communications so all residents receive the same message, and how committees communicate with each council.

The three communities also decided to take turns hosting and resourcing the accessibility committee, with North Saanich hosting the first year in their newly adapted council chambers that include accessibility features.

Some lessons learned from the collaboration:

- When partnering with a neighbouring community, consider capacity.
- The more communities you include, the more coordination will have to take place.
- A Terms of Reference is key for setting up expectations for the relationship.
- This is an ongoing process; keep space for mistakes, learning and change.

GETTING HELP

Both the Saanich Peninsula and Northeastern communities retained consultants to support the work of developing plans and strategies that spoke to their specific strengths and needs.

“The best way to stay in sync was to have one consultant draft three plans,” says Dumas. “Even though we consider ourselves the Peninsula, we are very individual as municipalities. There’s more density in Sidney and we’re much more rural in North Saanich, but we still want people to go from one municipality to another and enjoy the parks, beach access, trails and facilities without having any barriers.”



(From left) Emilie Gorman of Central Saanich, Rachel Dumas of North Saanich and Sandi Nelson of Sidney have been tackling accessibility issues together as part a collaboration between the three local governments.

Each corporate officer went to their respective Councils to get budget approval. The money was pooled together to pay the consultant who did extensive community engagement as part of the planning process, including interviews and gathering feedback from different organizations.

For the Northeastern local governments, Urban Matters was brought in to facilitate and support the creation of the accessibility committee and a regional strategy that spoke to their diverse and specific needs. The consultants created marketing campaign materials that were used by member municipalities to recruit members to the committee. The campaign included a news release, posters, social media graphics and targeted invitations, in addition to updates for websites and e-newsletters.

“We wanted to ensure that the committee was balanced geographically with people with lived experience, individuals from organizations who serve people with disabilities, and representation of different disabilities,” says Darnbrough.

The committee received 33 applications from seven communities, and they selected 11 people to join the member municipalities on the committee.

Like many local governments, Nelson notes that they were challenged by fulfilling the membership requirements. “By combining the municipalities we got more interested members with diverse disabilities.”

Continued on page 20

Each municipality recruited their own members, and each council decided who was appointed to the committee. Including local disability-serving organizations, like SHOAL Centre for Seniors, proved to be a valuable asset to the group in terms of their network and expertise on several issues.

Gorman adds, “The regular advertising and community word of mouth helped us with the appointments to the committee, and we were very fortunate for an engaged group. I think there is still work to do as we move into the next phase post-adoption of the Accessibility Plan, as well as getting representation from the local First Nations.”

Bringing together different personalities and working styles can prove challenging for even the most calm, collaborative person. The key to successful partnerships and managing conflicts between municipalities of different sizes is open communication.

“Effective communication through honesty and humility, as well as a willingness to learn and gain perspective from others’ experience is important to this process,” says Darnbrough. “Historically we’ve had a great rapport with the PRRD and our neighbouring communities, which has helped us identify our similarities and unique challenges. From there we can begin to understand what the problems are and ways to collectively solve them.”

A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The work of the committees will be ongoing as accessibility is considered and integrated more into all facets of municipal government work.

For Dumas, attending the accessibility meetings has been an eye-opening experience.

Continued on page 21



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NORTH SAANICH PHOTO

Public realm accessibility upgrades – including accessible playgrounds like this one at North Saanich’s Jubilee Park – are one indicator of the accessibility work being undertaken by B.C. local governments.

“Disability impacts all members in different ways. They’re not just the individual that has the disability, they are carers of people with disabilities, they are the people who work with people with disabilities in our respective communities. The actual committee is so valuable because there are so many different lenses providing input at the table,” says Dumas.

Other learnings for the Saanich Peninsula team include adapting how agendas are presented, especially for the visually impaired member.

“We put our agendas in PDF because that’s better and we’ve had to consider the microphones we use for one of our members that doesn’t have fingers,” adds Dumas. “Something like that, we didn’t even think about until presented with that situation. Now it makes you think outside the box for other things as well and how to be more inclusive. We did our dais or podium so that if you are in a wheelchair, you can wheel up to it. These things were very eye-opening and we’ve learned from these experiences.”

For Darnbrough, looking at the big picture when considering accessibility is important. “How we work, live and play in the community and equity for all stakeholders is paramount to healthy, vibrant communities. Our infrastructure in roads, sidewalks, parks, buildings and our programs need to be accessible to everyone.”

Accessibility will need to be considered across departments in the planning stages of projects, says Darnbrough.

At Central Saanich, the accessibility plan has been included in the district’s overall strategic plan and four-year implementation plan, something all municipalities can begin to think about as they look to the future.

“We set aside a small budget each year in anticipation of needing to incorporate the implementation,” adds Gorman. “We are trying to ensure that all major projects – for example our upcoming Parks Master Plan or new engineering standards – incorporate principles and considerations for accessibility for the entire project.”

As local governments continue on with their work towards meeting the needs of their communities and the ABCA, Dumas has this advice, “You need to approach this as a phased approach. It’s not all going to get fixed, but our job was to establish it and monitor it, and now we have planners involved as staff liaisons as well as the members themselves. They bring valuable input to the table with an understanding that they are going to continue to evolve. Things aren’t going to be done overnight but they can see changes, and that’s something that wasn’t on the table a year and a half ago. That progress has been made.”



Accessible Communications Q&As

By Manjot Bains

Part of being accessible and inclusive means thinking about how we communicate with each other, with staff and with residents.

There are aspects of writing, reading, listening and watching that we take for granted when we don't face access barriers. The use of punctuation, bullet points or spaces between paragraphs can help make a story more interesting or ensure that a long list of ideas aren't jumbled together as one never-ending run-on sentence.

But for people living with certain disabilities, a lack of punctuation at the end of each line of a list or no captioning on a video can mean they won't understand what's being shared with them.

Accessible communications consultant Micaela Evans shares her valuable tips on how to make your local government's communications more inclusive and accessible for people living with disabilities.

Why is it important for us to think about accessibility when writing and communicating with staff internally and when connecting with community members?

Over 22 per cent of our communities are folks with disabilities, and this number grows each year. When you can't visibly see that someone has a disability, you may not see the different ways they interact with material.

You may not know that if someone has ADHD (Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder) or dyslexia, they may not be able to read a huge block of text. Or maybe they can't hear the video you've created to promote programs.

The way I approach things is, what are the different ways that people can potentially interact with your content? If they don't have certain senses, have limited movement or process things in a way you're unfamiliar with, what different ways can we communicate the same material?



Micaela Evans

Where should local governments start with understanding disability and communication?

This is all new to many of us. Even as a physically disabled person myself, I didn't used to think about this until a few years ago. Everyone's at their own place in this journey to learning how to be more accessible, and building an awareness of disability can develop your understanding of how to improve communication and be more inclusive. A lot of people may have only ever seen one person in a wheelchair or one person with Down Syndrome, and they don't understand the variety there is across the same disabilities and the community more broadly. That's okay! We're all learning.

Where do we begin implementing accessibility in communications?

Approach it as a communications objective of wanting everyone in your community to access your material and then ask yourself, how can I make this possible? Review and build accessibility into your existing process documents or checklists. If you have a communication plan, review it from an accessibility lens and update your strategy.

Do one piece at a time and educate yourself on how to do that certain thing. There are tons of how-to articles, LinkedIn posts and experts who have disabilities sharing how to do things and how to do it well.

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Continued on page 23

A lot of smaller local governments don't have a large marketing budget or even staff to work on communications. Do you have suggestions that could help communities who want to be more inclusive, but are strapped for resources?

I think it's doable for really small staff if they put certain processes into their workflows. For social media, build accessibility into your existing structures or checklists so it doesn't feel like a huge overwhelming add-on at the end of the project. People often try to piece it together after the fact and then it feels like extra work that you're not used to doing.

Implementing image descriptions in all your photo content can be a good first step, and is helpful for those using screen readers. For your municipal website and social media posts, write one to two sentences that describe the image used in the post. If it's a poster or image with text, copy and paste the text from the poster into the post itself.

Once you build that into your workflow or checklist, consider making your website more accessible or using plain language when writing documents.

How can local governments make meetings more accessible?

Include captions on videos when possible. When running online meetings using Zoom or similar programs, turn on automatic captioning to assist those who may have challenges with hearing. If you're hosting an event online or in person, ask what peoples' accessibility needs may be in the registration and offer accommodations. It might be as simple as ensuring there is an accessible entrance or parking, providing an agenda ahead of time or looking for funding to include sign language (ASL).

Why is it important to make a document accessible?

Have you ever opened a PDF and not been able to copy and paste from it? That's because the PDF is acting as an image. When you format a document correctly, screen readers have the ability to peruse a page like someone's eyes or finger would across a physical piece of paper. If you want to jump through the document with assistive tech, you can by header, chapter, image or notes across the page.

How do we make a document more accessible?

Use headings. When you are in Microsoft Word or a similar program, use a header 1 or H1 for the title. Use header 2 or H2 for section or chapter titles. This allows a screen reader to skip from one section to another. Think of the page as a hierarchy. For an agenda, chapters and sub chapters are incredibly easy to navigate. The same thing applies to websites, use the same formatting or structural elements.

If your document includes images, include image descriptions like you would for social media or your website. Once you create a template, you can use that for all your documents moving forward.

There are a lot of other nuances to making PDFs accessible. They can be difficult at first but there are many free resources and paid training programs out there.

What are additional things we can consider when writing accessible documents or marketing materials?

Having punctuation at the end of bullet points is helpful for screen readers because if they're reading a list they'll just pop from one bullet point to the next, and it'll sound like one run-on sentence of five points.

Use more plain language. We often write content that isn't accessible because we use terminology, idioms and lengthy sentences that are complex and full of barriers to many readers. When I'm writing, I have to consciously stop and reflect, how can I make this more simple and less convoluted? I love sentences with four different ideas if I can get away with that, but how can I actually scale that back and make it into four separate sentences?

Consider having shorter paragraphs with two to three sentences and try to make ideas less complex to understand. Have a peek into your newsletter and website writing. If you're using complex terminology because you're a municipality or community that has specific lingo, include a definition when you use it. Things like that will make a big difference.

Lastly, don't be afraid to make mistakes. People see when you make an effort to try to make things more inclusive. Be open about trying to do so. Google topics that are new to you and your staff and learn from people with lived experience. Ask your community for feedback. Hire accessibility consultants when you can to provide strategic or project-specific insights.



tips & tactics

Resources for Accessibility Planning and Engagement

BUILDING YOUR COMMITTEE AND PLAN

- *Developing your First Accessibility Plan* guide from Disability Alliance of BC: bit.ly/accessibleplan.
- Step-by-step prioritization tool to help accessibility committees identify barriers and focus on actions: bit.ly/prioritizationtool.
- Templates and Sample Terms of Reference from BC Accessibility Hub: bit.ly/accessibilityhubtemplates.
- *Creating an Accessibility Committee* guide: bit.ly/committeeguide.
- UBCM guide for meeting requirements of the act: bit.ly/UBCMguide.
- BC Government Accessibility and Inclusion Toolkit, including guides for meetings and technology: bit.ly/ABCAtoolkit.

NETWORKING

- The Municipal Accessibility Network connects local government staff whose work includes accessibility. The group meets quarterly for an hour to 90 minutes online. Members are welcome to send questions to the distribution list and a specific topic is discussed at the meeting. To join the group, contact Erin Balmer at EMBalmer@surrey.ca.

GRANTS

- Local Community Accessibility Grant Program: bit.ly/SPARCgrants.
- BC Accessibility Hub compilation of funding opportunities: bcaccessibilityhub.ca/funding.

SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Free courses for developing and supporting an accessible workplace: accessibleemployers.ca/courses.
- Accessible Social is a free resource and education hub that shares best practices for creating accessible and inclusive social media content: accessible-social.com.
- Publishing accessible content: bit.ly/publishaccessible.
- Accessible events checklist from City of Vancouver: bit.ly/accessibleeventsguide.
- Plain language guide from Province of BC: bit.ly/guideplainlanguage.
- On demand training and courses for making documents, templates and websites more inclusive: bit.ly/ABCAsupport.
- Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) measures and certifies the level of meaningful access for buildings and sites, and helps better understand how to improve and identify barriers for your community or employees: rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification.

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Wayne Anderson, Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Oliver (Formerly Chief Financial Officer, Town of Oliver)

Keri-Ann Austin, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Coldstream (Formerly Deputy Chief Administrative Officer/Director of Corporate Administration, District of Coldstream)

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Ross Blackwell, Chief Administrative Officer, Village of Lions Bay (Formerly Director of Corporate Services, District of Port Hardy)

Joanne Caldecott, Deputy Corporate Officer, Peace River Regional District (Formerly Deputy Corporate Officer, City of Dawson Creek)

Deanna Campbell, Chief Administrative Officer, Sun Peaks Mountain Resort Municipality (Formerly General Manager of Corporate and Legislative Services, Thompson Nicola Regional District)

Maureen Connelly, General Manager of Legislative and Corporate Services, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (Formerly Manager of Legislative Services/Corporate Officer, City of Prince George)

Nicole Cressman, Director of Corporate Administration, District of Coldstream (Formerly Corporate Officer, City of Armstrong)

Cammy Dallamore, Corporate Coordinator, Town of Comox (formerly Legislative Services Coordinator, City of Courtenay)

Eric Depenau, Manager, Intergovernmental Relations, City of Prince George (Formerly Chief Administrative Officer & Corporate Officer, Village of Valemount)

Donny van Dyk, City Manager, City of Delta (Formerly City Manager, City of Penticton)

Kiona Enders, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, District of Kitimat (Formerly Corporate Officer, District of Kitimat)

Tanya Garost, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Martensville, Saskatchewan (Formerly Chief Administrative Officer, District of Lake Country)

Will George, Director of Community Services, Town of Smithers (Formerly Economic Development Officer, Town of Smithers)

Sally Ginter, Chief Administrative Officer, Regional District of Central Okanagan (Formerly Chief Executive Officer, South Okanagan Similkameen Medical Foundation)

Michael Gomm, Senior Manager, Strategic Initiatives, City of Vancouver (Formerly Manager, Strategic Initiatives, City of Delta)

Greg Lewis, General Manager, Corporate and Legislative Services, Thompson Nicola Regional District (Formerly Corporate Officer and Interim CAO, City of Merritt)

Samantha Piper, Manager of Communications, Fraser Valley Regional District (Formerly Public Safety Specialist/Safer City Coordinator, City of Chilliwack)

Ange Qualizza, Chief Administrative Officer, Village of Salmo (Formerly Director of Government Relations and Governance, Tr'ondek Hwech'in Government, Yukon)

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Sandy Stokes, Chief Administrative Officer, Village of Pouce Coupe (Formerly Corporate Officer, Village of Pouce Coupe)

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2023-2024 LGMA EVENTS & PROGRAMS

November 14, 21, 28
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November 16, 23, 30
Change Management
Online Course

November 17
CAO Lunch Connect Series
Online

November 26 - December 1
MATI® Community Planning
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November 27
HR Lunch Connect Series
Online

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February 20-22
2024 CAO Forum
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2023-2024 PARTNER EVENTS & PROGRAMS

November 14-16
Economic Development
Leadership Learning Exchange
Richmond

November 21-23
First Nations Public Secretariat
Conference
Pan Pacific Hotel, Vancouver

November 21-22
Fall PD Workshop, Government
Finance Officers Association
of BC
Vancouver

November 27-28
Municipal IDEA Conference
Kamloops

January 8 - April 30
UVIC Indigenous Community
Development and Governance
Programs Re-Launch
Online Course

January 31 - February 2
LGLA Annual Forum
Radisson Hotel Vancouver
Airport, Richmond

March 25-26
Regional District Chairs and
CAO Forum 2024
Victoria

Dates may change. Confirm at lgma.ca/programs-training.

IN MEMORIAM

REMEMBERING KEVIN TAYLOR

It is with heavy hearts that we share the news of the passing of our B.C. local government colleague, Kevin Taylor.

Kevin was most recently the Director of Corporate and Development Services at the District of Lillooet. Originally from North Vancouver, he held a political science degree from the University of Victoria, and his career through B.C. local government included being a development planner for the District of Summerland, a planning technician for the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen, and a planning and economic development technician for the District of Peachland.

Kevin was witty, inspiring, smart and hardworking, and someone who cared deeply about doing the very best he could for the communities he served.



Kevin Taylor (right) and his husband Jeremy Denegar.

Our hearts go out to Kevin's family, including his husband Jeremy Denegar.

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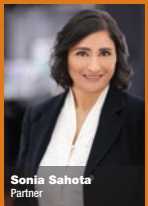
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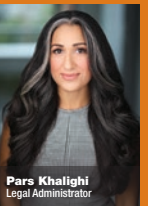
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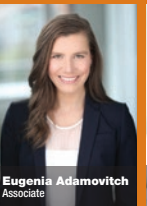
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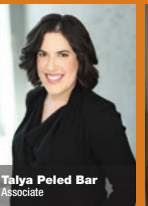
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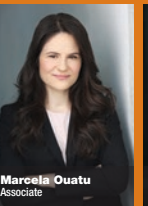
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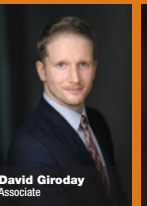
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