

## MANAGEMENT REPORT

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Meeting Date: June 26, 2024

TO: Library Board  
FROM: Tim Bottomer, Chair, SFHR Committee  
**SUBJECT: Accessible BC Act 2024 Update**

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### **SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on VPL's progress towards compliance with the *Accessible BC Act* and provides an overview on work completed between October 2023 and June 2024.

### **PURPOSE**

This report is for information.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Board receive this report for information.

### **POLICY**

Relevant legislation includes the *Accessible BC Act* and the *BC Human Rights Code*.

### **INDIGENOUS CONSIDERATIONS**

To ensure that organizations embed Indigenous considerations in their planning for improved accessibility, Indigenous representation is a requirement of the accessibility committee mandated under the *Accessible BC Regulation*. One of the four community members in the InterLINK Accessibility Advisory Committee identifies as Indigenous.

## **STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS**

This work aligns with Strategic Pillar 2: Shared Spaces and Experiences, Goal 2.2: Develop welcoming, accessible, and sustainable facilities that meet current and future needs and expectations; and Pillar 3: Belonging and Connection, Goal 3.1 Reduce social isolation and provide affordable access.

## **BACKGROUND**

An overview of VPL's history of ensuring accessible access to our services and a detailed description of the three requirements of the *Act* can be found in the November 23, 2022 report [Accessible BC Update](#). The October 18, 2023 [Accessible BC Act Update](#) report updated the 2022 report.

### **Accessible BC Act**

In June 2021, the *Accessible BC Act* received royal assent from the Government of British Columbia. The legislation reinforces the need to identify, remove, and pre-empt barriers that prevent full participation of individuals with disabilities in the province. Under the legislation, public bodies are required to take certain actions towards this goal. The steps that VPL is required to take were outlined in the *Accessible BC Regulation*, which came into effect September 1, 2022.

1. An accessibility committee;
2. An accessibility plan; and
3. A feedback mechanism.

### **Public Library Accessibility Work Group**

The Public Library Accessibility Work Group was formed in 2022 by BC libraries, to support the sector in the implementation of the *Accessible BC Act*. The Public Library Accessibility Work Group includes representatives from the Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD), the BC Library Association, Public Library InterLINK, and the BC Libraries Cooperative, and is working closely with Disability Alliance BC and liaising with the provincial government. The Public Library Accessibility Work Group is providing advice and resources to assist in the development of the required deliverables under the Act on behalf of all the public libraries in BC.

### **InterLINK Accessibility Steering Committee**

In June 2023, InterLINK established a steering committee to facilitate an InterLINK approach to compliance with the *Accessible BC Act* and other related accessibility-focused initiatives among interested member libraries. While many InterLINK libraries chose to engage with their own municipalities on compliance requirements, certain libraries, including VPL, identified value in collaboration across libraries in the region for a library-specific consideration of accessibility.

Member libraries participating in the InterLINK Accessibility Steering Committee and the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee include Fraser Valley Regional Library, Coquitlam Public Library, Port Moody Public Library, Lillooet Area Library Association, and Vancouver Public Library. VPL's Director, Central Library & Public Service sits on the InterLINK Accessibility Steering Committee.

## **Accessibility for Staff**

In 2017, VPL created a dedicated role to address disability-related accessibility through accommodation. In 2018, an occupational health and safety role was created to address barriers in the workplace including ergonomic reviews of staff workstations, workflows, identifying and addressing high risk factors for injury, and developing training and support for supervisors to better support staff needing modified duties. Through the consultation undertaken for VPL's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion project in 2023 and 2024, staff identified further opportunities to improve understanding and experiences with accommodations and specific actions are being considered through the action planning process.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **InterLINK Initiatives**

#### *Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee*

The Accessibility Advisory Committee, consisting of four library representatives and currently three community members, is now established. Participating libraries are working to identify a fourth community member for the committee. Committee members may have lived experience, or be individuals from organizations that support individuals who self identify as having a disability. The committee will create an accessibility plan and make recommendations on feedback mechanisms for participating libraries. VPL's Associate Director, Central Library & Public Service, Alicia Cheng, chairs this committee.

#### *Accessibility Audits*

InterLINK is in discussion with SPARC BC on an accessibility audit contract for its members. InterLINK has confirmed that it will fund a program and services audit and an attitudinal audit, which will sample among libraries in the region. In addition, InterLINK has coordinated a number of opt-in audits for libraries, including built environment, technological accessibility, and human resources policy and recruitment audits. VPL plans to participate in the technological and the human resources policy and recruitment audits. VPL will not participate in additional built environment audits through InterLINK as our branches have undergone Rick Hansen Foundation audits.<sup>1</sup> Audits will commence in summer 2024 and will be complete by spring 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> 18 branches were audited and 17 were certified as accessible by the Rick Hansen Foundation in 2018/19. Collingwood was not certified due to lack of accessible access to some staff spaces. Marpole and Oakridge

## **VPL Enhancements**

### *Facilities upgrades*

VPL accessibility enhancements are introduced where feasible as part of ongoing operations. Since the last Board update in October 2023, small upgrades at a number of locations were completed. Examples include accessible washroom upgrades at select branches, automatic door openers on two Inspiration Lab sound booths, automatic hand sanitizers in branches, accessible height phone charging lockers at select branches, adjustable height chairs for accessible desks at select branches, and a lift for the stage in Central's Alice MacKay room.

### *Branch Equipment*

In January 2024, the Library completed upgrades to VPL's accessible adaptive equipment throughout branches, using \$50,000 from the 2023-2026 IT capital budget. Technology additions included screen reading software in 54 languages, a sound amplification system for branch programming, and new audiobook devices designed for patrons who have vision loss. The identification and installation of accessible adaptive equipment began as a priority under the previous VPL strategic plan, and the equipment was recommended by SPARC BC.

### *VPL Website*

In November 2022, the VPL website was compliant with World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 at Level AA, and was working towards full WCAG 2.1 compliance and AAA standards. In July 2023, VPL completed a two-year website migration, which was an essential precursor for several long-awaited accessibility improvements. In 2024, following the migration, the Library has been able to add descriptive alternate text to all images and ensure that all pages could be reliably navigated using screen readers. The Library has also added closed captions to all embedded videos, and is currently working to improve the accessibility of all PDF documents linked to the website.

VPL is now compliant at WCAG 2.2 Level A, and staff expect that VPL's website will conform to the Level AA standard by the end of 2024. At present, VPL has reached 75% compliance with the AA standard.

### *Accessible Services Department*

The Accessible Services department continues to work towards improving library access and collections for patrons with disabilities. The department is currently expanding the Cognitive

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branches were not evaluated due to redevelopment plans, and Carnegie branch was evaluated and certified in a subsequent process. The new Oakridge branch will follow accessibility standards, and the new West Point Grey branch was certified as accessible at opening in 2023.

Friendly Collection, which supports patrons living with dementia, and planning for programming opportunities in the fall with the BC Alzheimer Society. Accessible Services staff are also building an online training module for all VPL staff to provide baseline knowledge of the many accessible equipment and software options available at VPL. This includes training on the hearing loops at service desks, Windows accessibility features on all public stations, large print keyboards, touchpad mice, dictation software, and more

### *Programming*

Children's and Teen Services (CTS) has sought to build upon and strengthen several key services and programs that enhance accessibility and inclusivity for Vancouver children, families and teens. For the first time in the fall of 2023, staff were able to expand the number of small group storytime programs—"Sensory Storytime"—offered across the system. In partnership with the Learning Disabilities Society, CTS was able to deliver caregiver workshops that support families with the tools and knowledge they need to be able to advocate for diverse children's learning needs. The Middle Years team launched "Sensory Kits" in January 2024, an exciting new collection of interactive and calming items that can support children with a variety of sensory needs, and the team has developed new partnerships with organizations like Panda AAC Camp in order to better connect with children with disabilities.

Programming and Learning is working to enhancing accessibility and inclusivity across adult programs by collaborating with community partners and implementing various accessibility tools and initiatives. An example of programs that support inclusivity is *Disability Tax Credit and Other Related Benefits*, which educates attendees about the Disability Tax Credit and other benefits in partnership with Disability Alliance BC and The Disabled Voices and Advocacy Showcase. This event held in May 2024, and was an accessible online event featuring individuals from the disability community reading their own works, organized with the help of Accessible Services and community partners.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

InterLINK is funding the costs associated with work of the InterLINK Accessibility Steering Committee and for the first year of the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Accessible equipment, furniture and building improvements are typically funded through capital budgets, as well as through individual grants and donations from external organizations when available, while staff time on facilities improvements, programs and service delivery is funded through the operating budget.

On September 22, 2023, the Board approved allocating funds from the Provincial Enhancement Grant for implementing the action plan for the Accessible BC Act as necessary.