# Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo

Building Accessibility Audit Final Report

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In June 2018, the Government of Canada passed Bill C-81, known as the Accessible Canada Act, which aims to ensure that Canada is barrier-free by January 1, 2040. Several Canadian provinces have since passed similar legislation in their respective jurisdictions, but Alberta is one of the last provinces without an overarching accessibility legislation in place. In the absence of higher-level provincial legislation and guidance on accessibility, some local governments – including the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo – have undertaken projects and plans to remove barriers to accessibility in their respective communities.

## 1.1 PURPOSE

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) is committed to accessibility and inclusion for all residents and visitors in the region and has initiated work to better understand the community's accessibility needs from both a municipal and private property owner perspective. As a part of this pursuit, the RMWB has been working with Urban Systems Ltd. and Universal Access Design Inc. on an accessibility audit project, which began in April 2023.

## 1.2 SCOPE

The primary purpose of this project has been to physically review municipal and other properties across the RMWB to identify building deficiencies. Work also included reviewing RMWB plans and policies that directly intersect with accessibility, as part of the background.

The Accessibility Audits were based on universal design standards (Rick Hansen Certification Standards) and involved evaluating buildings or spaces based on these principles. Typically, the results of these assessments inform future changes to improve accessibility through retrofits or enhanced design standards for new buildings and sites. Each Accessibility Audit identified upgrades for each building and the results were presented in detail to property owners and/or facility operators, as well as other stakeholders. The report recommendations are listed in three categories: short, medium and long-term, as well as a summary of recommendations that could be prioritized to enhance accessibility in the building.

As part of the project, two user-friendly checklists were created and made publicly available to measure accessibility in public spaces and events. Additionally, a site plan review checklist was developed to support planners evaluating site plans from an accessibility perspective at the time of permit review.

In total, fourteen properties were audited, including both municipal facilities and private properties in Fort McMurray, Janvier, and Fort Chipewyan.  The private properties assessed provide services to the public and were identified during the public engagement as having accessibility challenges. The What We Heard Report is available here.

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## 1.3  PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The following project tasks have been completed as part of this work:

- **Background Review** – A background review of existing RMWB plans and policies was conducted for the accessibility audit project concurrent with the physical building audits. The objective was to understand the municipality's current approach to accessibility and to identify opportunities to incorporate accessibility best practices into municipal plans, policies, and decision-making.

- **Building Audits** – Onsite inspections were completed for the Accessibility Audit for each building and site using the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) program criteria, lived/living experience, and expertise/training. An Accessibility Audit Summary Report was prepared by Universal Access Design Inc. for each building evaluated. Each report contains photographs and information detailing the existing conditions, specifying any accessibility issues and recommendations, providing additional observations, and assigning a preliminary RHFAC rating.

- **Accessibility Simulation Event** – The Municipality in partnership with St. Aidan's Society and Universal Access Design Inc. (UADI), hosted a half-day accessibility simulation awareness event in December 2023. This event included an overview presentation on the Accessibility Audit project, the importance of accessibility, and a simulation of various disabilities and potential challenges encountered in the built and indoor environments at the Jubilee Centre in Fort McMurray.

## 1.4  PROJECT NEXT STEPS

Since completing audits of the initial fourteen properties, the scope of the project has been expanded to audit an additional ten properties over the course of summer 2024. Property owners and stakeholders engaged through audits and subsequent conversations have responded positively to this work and appreciate the RMWB's investment into understanding how to make spaces and places across the region accessible to all.

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# 2.0 IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility in a community is about ensuring that everyone can easily navigate and benefit from a space, services or programs, regardless of their physical abilities, age, or background. It's more than just having ramps and elevators; it's about creating an environment where everyone can participate fully in their community. When communities are accessible, they become more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient.

Imagine a community with public transportation for everyone to use, parks and cultural sites that welcome all visitors, and with economic opportunities available to everyone, including those with disabilities. Such a community doesn't just improve the quality of life for its residents; it also thrives economically and socially. This section highlights why accessibility is crucial from multiple perspectives, highlighting its impact on social inclusion, economic growth, environmental sustainability, technological innovation, and cultural engagement.

Findings from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD)[1] indicates that 27% of Canadians aged 15 years or older – or roughly 8 million people – had one ore more disabilities that impacted their daily activities. Important trends identified through this survey include:

- The percentage of youth with a disability increased by 7% between 2017 and 2022, with 20% of youth now reporting having a disability
- The rate of disability continues to be higher among women (30%) than men (24%), with women more likely to have a more severe disability (43% compared to 39%)
- While pain-related disabilities remain the most common disability type in 2022 (62%), mental health-related disabilities experienced the greatest increase in disability types reported by Canadians between 2017 – 2022 (39%, an increase of 6%)
- Persons with disabilities are more likely to be employed in 2022 than in 2017, with 62% of working aged adults (25-64) with disabilities indicating being employed, an increase of 3% from 2017.
- Seventy-two percent (72%) of persons with disabilities reported facing barriers to accessing indoor and outdoor public spaces because of their condition as of 2022.
    - Barriers related to inside or outside features, such as entrances and sidewalks, were most common, followed by communication, behavior, and misconception barriers related to disabilities.

**Social Importance**

Accessibility is key to creating inclusive and equitable municipalities. It ensures that everyone, regardless of physical abilities, age, gender, or socioeconomic status, can fully participate in community life. By providing accessible infrastructure and services, municipalities can reduce social isolation and marginalization, fostering a sense of community and belonging. According

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[1] Statistics Canada, 2023

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to a literature review by the Department of Canadian Heritage based on Statistic Canada's 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (2017 CSD), women are more likely to have one or more disabilities when compared to men (24% vs 20%) and experience lower incomes than men with similar abilities. The review emphasizes the importance of combining accessibility with gender-based analyses to better understand the challenges faced by women with disabilities.[2] Recognizing that women are more likely to be living with a disability – and a severe disability – than men, experiences with the built environment are likely to vary greatly by gender, as well as other socioeconomic and demographic considerations.

The social importance of accessibility cannot be understated: with more than one in four Canadians living with one or more disabilities impacting their daily activities. According to the 2021 municipal census, more than 105,000 individuals were residing in the RMWB.[3] From an accessibility perspective, applying the 2017 CSD insights, there may be more than 28,000 residents of the RMWB living with one or more disabilities that limits their daily activities. If individuals with disabilities are unable to participate in society due systemic and physical barriers, the risk of compounded negative consequences related to isolation, loneliness, inactivity and other impacts increases greatly. This means greater healthcare costs, more individuals struggling with mental health challenges, and lower levels of community engagement and social cohesion. Accessible communities ensure that essential services such as healthcare, education, public spaces, and recreational facilities are available to all residents, thereby enhancing their well-being and reducing social risks.

**Economic Importance**

The importance of accessibility to the Wood Buffalo community is multi-faceted. Due to the unique nature of the region's economy (i.e. oilsands), workers may be at greater risk of injury and disability. The Government of Alberta reports that there were a total of 2,328 workplace inquiries and illnesses within the mining and petroleum development sector in 2021, including 872 COVID-19 related illnesses. The most common injuries reported within the sector include sprains, strains, tears, wounds, and bruises; these injuries may leave employees with the need to use a mobility aid. Accessibility, then, is important for workers dealing with short, long, and permanent injuries / disabilities to be able to navigate around the community, access needed services and supports such as medical appointments and rehabilitation centres, as well as to transition back to employment during and after recovery.

Investing in accessibility can also create significant economic benefits, influencing employment, business growth, and overall economic development. Accessible municipalities enable more individuals, including those with disabilities and older adults, to join the workforce and contribute economically. The 2017 CSD identified a gender and disability wage gap, noting that women aged 25 to 64 with milder disabilities earned less than both men with milder

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[2] Department of Canadian Heritage, 2020
[3] RMWB, 2021

disabilities and women without disabilities. Accessibility investments may also attract more visitors, including tourists with disabilities and older travellers, boosting local businesses and the hospitality industry. Prioritizing accessibility can position municipalities as leaders in innovation, attracting investments in new technologies and infrastructure that cater to diverse populations, driving economic growth and job creation.

Research completed by the Institute for Work & Health estimates the potential economic value of investing in full accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities to be between $252.8 billion to $422.7 billion, or approximately 13-22% of Canada's GDP (2017).[4] The primary benefits are related to the quality of life and social engagement for individuals with disabilities, economic spillovers related to physical improvements to the built form, increases in productivity and employment due to greater accessibility of workplaces, increased consumer spending by individuals with disabilities due to being able to access more spaces and places, and reduced healthcare costs related to the reduction of inactivity or social/physical isolation.

According to RMWB's Census 2021, close to 9% of the population (8.9%) was over the age of 65.[5] As individuals age, risk of disability increases over time and more than 40% of Canadian seniors report living with one or more disabilities as of 2022 (CSD). Common disabilities encountered by seniors include hearing and vision loss, reduced mobility, and health issues including rheumatism and arthritis. Many disabilities faced by seniors can hinder their full engagement in the community, limiting employment, socialization, and other participation opportunities. Accessibility is a key element of age-friendly communities, enabling seniors residing in the RMWB to continue to live, work, and play in the community, along with all the economic benefits that are generated as a result.

Therefore, investing in accessibility, whether in the form of enhancing the built environment or in increasing awareness of accessibility more broadly, means making it easier for thousands of residents to live, work, and play in the RMWB.  Essentially, the more accessible buildings, services and businesses are, the greater the number of potential employees and customers.

**Environmental Importance**

Accessibility contributes to environmental sustainability by promoting well-designed public spaces and transportation systems that reduce reliance on private vehicles, lower carbon emissions, and improve air quality. Designing communities with accessible spaces and services in mind creates more livable environments. Efficient use of resources in building accessible infrastructure can lead to cost savings and more sustainable development practices.

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[4] Institute for Work & Health, 2021
[5] RMWB, 2021

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## Technological Importance

Technological advancements can greatly enhance regional accessibility, making communities more navigable and user-friendly. Innovations like smart traffic lights, real-time public transportation updates, and assistive technologies improve accessibility for all residents. Ensuring digital services and online information are accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities, is crucial in the digital age. This promotes equal access to information, services, and opportunities. Utilizing data to understand accessibility needs leads to better planning and resource allocation, ensuring that accessibility measures are effective and responsive to the population's needs.

## Cultural Importance

Accessibility enhances cultural participation and community engagement, enriching the regional cultural landscape. Accessible municipalities enable all residents to participate in culture, and cultural institutions, enriching the region's cultural fabric. Promoting accessibility encourages active community participation in civic activities, processes, and community cohesion.

Accessibility significantly impacts a regional municipality's social, economic, environmental, technological, and cultural dimensions. By prioritizing accessibility, municipalities can become more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable, ensuring that all residents and visitors can enjoy and contribute to regional life. Understanding and addressing the specific needs of different demographic groups, such as women and older adults with disabilities, is crucial in creating truly accessible environments. This holistic approach not only improves individual quality of life but also drives economic growth, fosters innovation, and promotes sustainable development.

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# 3.0 BACKGROUND REVIEW

Prior to undertaking the physical audits of buildings, a background policy review was conducted as part of the broader Accessibility Audit project. This review involved a thorough analysis of background information and a brief literature review. The purpose of this work was to:

- Collect and review background information to ensure best practices are followed;
- Communicate a basis/understanding of accessibility in the RMWB;
- Build a summary brief of the resulting research and findings; and
- Support the RMWB in identifying gaps in current documents and legislation related to accessibility.

A Summary Brief was finalized in late 2023 (**Appendix A**) to provide a summary of the information collected following the completion of this activity. It provides a high-level overview of how accessibility has evolved and identifies barriers to ensuring accessibility is a key component in inclusive communities. The memo also includes information on the Accessible Canada Act enacted in 2019 and its influence within Alberta provincial legislation related to accessibility such as the building code and accessibility standards. Additional resources for the RMWB to make public and private spaces more accessible were also reviewed.

The RMWB's approach to the accessibility audits was heavily influenced by community committees focused on advancing priorities related to accessibility, age-friendly communities, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The following Committees provided the RMWB with advice and direction around community priorities related to accessibility. The Committees included:

- Council Appointed Committees
  - Advisory Committee on Aging (ACoA)
  - Regional Advisory Committee on Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (RACIDE)
  - Wood Buffalo Downtown Revitalization Advisory Committee
- Community Committees
  - Regional Inclusive Committee (RIC)
  - Seniors' Resource Committee (SCR)

As part of this work, several RMWB planning documents were also reviewed from an accessibility perspective to provide a thorough understanding of the municipality's current approach and guiding actions related to accessibility are positioned within these documents. The following plans and documents were reviewed, summarized at a high level:

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**Municipal Development Plan** (2024)

The Municipal Development Plan is the highest-level planning document in the RMWB and is designed to guide short and long-term decision-making over the next 20 years. The Plan sets direction on several key priorities including growth management, environmental stewardship, culture, development, sustainability, community belonging, and economic resilience.

The MDP focuses on accessibility under Strategic Direction 1.2 Creating a Safe and Secure Region by including a policy (1.2.4) on Planning for an Accessible Community.
This action strengthens commitments to improving accessibility in the region by including:

- The creation of Design Guidelines that incorporate universal design principles (to be accomplished through consultation with members of the accessibility community, residents with lived experiences and committees as required)
- The prioritization of accessibility improvements to municipally owned assets in the Downtown
- The Age-Friendly Designation from the World Health Organization marked a phase for the community to continue the work on different initiatives
- Investigation of developing region-wide Universal Design Guidelines

**Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan** (2023)

The Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan replaced the City Centre Redevelopment Plan and provides a policy framework for development over the next ten years. This Plan improves on the 2012 version by incorporating universal design principles into overarching policies and including accessibility in the vision statement for the Downtown. This approach means accessibility will be considered when (re)developing the Downtown in terms of built form; parks and open spaces; and transportation and mobility.

**Area Structure Plans in the Region** (multiple dates)

There are several Area Structure Plans adopted in the Region. Some of these consider accessibility as part of the vision and policies. The Plans mentioned below have policies that refer to accessibility:

- The **Anzac Area Structure Plan** (2012) includes Accessibility from the transportation perspective. The other aspect where accessibility is considered in the Plan is under housing and services where the policies are proposing the future development of higher-density housing options as well as services in the Community Core and in New Neighbourhoods.
- The **Conklin Area Structure Plan** (2013) mentions accessibility only as part of making the community a better place to live, work and play. However, the Plan does not include specific policies on making the community, services or programs more accessible.

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- The **Fort Chipewyan Area Structure Plan** (2018) talks about accessibility indirectly in terms of housing by proposing the intensification of available land for development. The other set of policies talks about the fact that services and infrastructure need to be enhanced in this remote community to implement the vision of the Plan. However, there is no specific policy on improving accessibility for the built environment, but the focus is on the expansion of the trail system and transportation network.
- The **Fort McKay Area Structure Plan** (2017) The vision of this plan includes the concept of that the physical and social infrastructure supports a healthy community. The plan focuses on access to facilities and services in terms of recreation as well as other services within the hamlet.
- The **Janvier Area Structure Plan** (2017) vision considers the accessibility of a range of public transportation choices within the community and the region. In terms of development, accessible housing is a consideration and a priority in the future development of Janvier.  Accessibility of the built environment or pedestrian networks is not explicit in the Plan policies.
- The **Willow Lake Area Structure Plan** (2015) vision considers maintaining access to amenities near the community as well as ensuring transportation and connectivity. Some policies include a safe pedestrian environment but there is no reference on its design or the use of universal design.

**Regional Indoor Recreation & Community Facilities Master Plan** (2015)

The Regional Indoor Recreation & Community Facilities Master Plan is designed to guide the municipality until 2025 in the investment and dedication of resources related to the development and operation of indoor recreation, community facilities, and programming throughout the region.

- Access to recreational and community-oriented opportunities, programs, and services is a key goal in the Master Plan. Embedded within this goal are objectives to ensure facilities are accessible, and that programming is offered for people with a range of needs.
- Additional recommendations address the need to promote programming information in an accessible manner.

**Diversity & Inclusion Community Plan** (2017)

The 2017 Diversity Plan sets out six priorities derived from community consultation and public engagement. The associated workbook sets out possible partners, measurements, and actions to be taken between 2017 and 2022 that will support RMWB in being a welcoming, inclusive community that celebrates diversity.

Accessibility is closely interwoven with diversity and inclusion and emerges most clearly in Priority 6: Reduce Barriers to Resources & Services. The following goals are identified:

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- Increase physical accessibility of facilities
- Create inclusive spaces and services
- Conduct a physical accessibility scan
- Promote Universal Design standards
- Implement regular accessibility checks

**Parks Master Plan** (2019)

The Parks Master Plan (2019) guides investment and planning for RMWB's open spaces, ensuring strategic development and management of municipal parkland through to 2030. The Plan identifies gaps within the existing parks system, such as communities that require additional parkland, parks in need of upgrades, and additional park amenities. Key priorities outlined in the plan include:

- Enhancing urban parkland
- Expanding the quantity and enhancing the quality of rural parkland
- Implementing innovative practices for park operations and maintenance.

The Plan has a limited definition of accessibility and is mostly concerned with resident access to parkland (i.e., community members have parks within a 10-minute walk and have access to the waterfront). The Plan's general recommendations only include principles of accessible design in two areas:

- Recommendation to audit all playgrounds to ensure "Access for All" (different ages / abilities)
- Consider integrating Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) in park design

Several additional accessibility recommendations occur throughout the document but are only made for specific parks, and not as overarching recommendations. This document could benefit from high-level accessibility recommendations that address the development or retrofitting of trail networks, wayfinding, and the presence of universal washrooms.

**Wood Buffalo Age-Friendly Work Plan** (2021)

The Wood Buffalo Age-Friendly Work Plan is a living document that outlines goals through to 2024 that will make the RMWB more accessible to older adults. The Plan sets a vision of aging with dignity in Wood Buffalo and was developed by the Advisory Committee on Aging (ACoA) based on findings from a 2017 Age-Friendly Needs Assessment. Proposed actions are organized across 8 domains including housing, transportation, and outdoor spaces and buildings. A key component of this Work Plan is the development of universal design principles, and the inclusion of a comprehensive accessibility audit to identify building retrofit needs. Generally – the Work Plan's approach to accessibility is comprehensive and includes:

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- Access to information and accessible communication
- Accessible housing options that enable aging in place
- Improvements to public transportation options that improve the mobility of older adults
- A call for the inclusion of universal design principles into outdoor spaces including the development of public washrooms, rest spaces, and park pathways/trails.

**Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures** (2021)

This document creates a consistent construction standard for all work completed in the RMWB, extending to utilities, roads, and open spaces. The manual guides developers, consultants, contractors, and Municipal staff in the planning, preparation, and execution of public and private infrastructure projects.

The document specifically calls for accessible and barrier-free design to be considered in the construction of parking lots, parks, and playgrounds and directs users to refer to several accessibility standards:

- National Building Code of Canada
- Barrier-Free Design Guide (2008) – Government of Alberta Safety Codes Council
- CAN/CSA Z1614:20 Annex H – Playground equipment and surfacing

The background review included a scan of other municipalities to identify how they are approaching accessibility within their communities. The review looked at Edmonton, Victoria, and Whistler's accessibility action plans and policies. These cities were selected based on their alignment with federal priority areas.

As part of this work, several other accessibility-related documents and plans from other municipalities were reviewed, summarized on the following page.

**City of Edmonton – Accessibility for People with Disabilities** (2019)

City Council passed Edmonton's Accessibility for People with Disabilities policy in 2019 committing the City to pursuing objectives related to increasing the level of access for people with disabilities through a universal design approach.

Without overarching provincial legislation, the policy seeks alignment with principles presented in the Accessible Canada Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Edmonton's Accessibility for People with Disabilities policy and corresponding Corporate Accessibility Plan identifies six action areas that broadly align with the target areas identified in the Accessible Canada Act.

**City of Victoria – Accessibility & Inclusion Policy** (2020)

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Victoria's Accessibility and Inclusion Policy was passed by the City Council in 2020 and serves as a guiding policy to ensure City planning, design and improvements are committed to identifying and addressing systemic barriers to inclusion and equitable access for people with disabilities. Policy implementation is enabled through the creation of the Accessibility Framework which embeds a universal design approach in the creation of accessibility goals and targets. The Framework draws guidance from international and national accessibility legislation including the Accessible Canada Act and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Victoria's Accessibility Framework identifies three focus areas with associated goals and priorities to guide departmental action. These three focus areas broadly align with the target areas identified in the Accessible Canada Act

**Resort Municipality of Whistler – Accessibility Action Plan** (2022)
Whistler developed the Accessibility Action Plan (AAP) to remove barriers for residents and visitors within the Resort Municipality of Whistler. The AAP was endorsed by Council in 2022 and sets a high-level policy that embeds principles of universal design, inclusion, and diversity within the municipal framework. Crucially, Whistler's AAP links with other accessibility guidance; it:

- Identifies actions that advance accessibility policy directions of their Official Community Plan (BC's version of Municipal Development Plans)
- Addresses requirements of the Accessible British Columbia Act

Whistler's Accessibility Action Plan (AAP) identifies six action areas that broadly align with the target areas identified in the Accessible Canada Act.

**Key Takeaways of Background Policy Review**
Several next steps for the RMWB can be suggested based on the background policy review. The RMWB is demonstrating leadership and commitment to enhancing awareness of and addressing barriers faced by individuals with disabilities in the community. Accessibility of the built environment is paramount to everyone's full and meaningful participation in the community. The primary next step will be to begin renovating existing infrastructure and buildings to address accessibility barriers, as well as to integrate accessibility considerations into future buildings yet to be developed.

Other recommendations identified (please see Appendix 1) include exploring the creation of incentive programs to support accessibility renovation projects, applying for identified funding opportunities offered by other levels of government, as well as addressing prioritized recommendations identified through building audits (see the section that follows). For the development of future buildings, working with community members with lived or living

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experience of disabilities to understand impacts of design choices, adhering to all building codes, and reviewing design standards in other jurisdictions that exceed building code to determine what may be appropriate for Wood Buffalo is recommended.



*Figure 1 RMWB Councillor Wigle with Arthritis Simulation Apparatus*

# 4.0 BUILDING AUDITS

Between August 2023 and March 2024, fourteen (14) buildings in the RMWB were audited to identify building deficiencies that pose a barrier to accessibility. Universal design was the chosen standard for assessing buildings, using the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) tool. Audits were based on this certification reference standard. The results are intended to inform improvements to accessibility through retrofits or enhanced design standards for new buildings and sites.

## 4.1 PROCESS

### BUILDING SELECTION

A site visit plan and a building audit inventory were developed using information gathered from the background document review and engagement responses collected by the RMWB during

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the Accessibility Audit Survey. The Survey was completed in 2022, to help select buildings to be audited, the responses from the Audit public engagement period were compiled and categorized by uses: commercial buildings, municipal facilities, and institutional/residential buildings. Institutional and residential uses were determined to be outside of the project scope, and therefore they were not selected. However, feedback comments were sent to the building owners for consideration.

Seventeen (17) businesses or commercial areas were identified in the RMWB Survey on Accessibility, including generalized categories like 'grocery stores.' Of these businesses or commercial areas, four (4) were selected for the audit:

- Accel Physical Therapy
- Heritage Park (audited in two parts, the Shipyard and the Administration Building)
- Professional Building
- Peter Pond Mall

The survey on Accessibility identified a total of nine (9) municipal facilities in the urban service area, and five (5) were selected for the audit:

- Centerfire Place
- Frank LaCroix Arena
- Haxton Centre
- Jubilee Centre
- Vista Ridge Park

The remaining four (4) buildings were selected to ensure a wide geographic scope of review and to support the Nistawoyou Friendship Centre's ongoing renovation work.

- Archie Simpson Arena – Fort Chipewyan
- Fort Chipewyan RMWB Office
- Janvier Municipal Office
- Nistawoyou Friendship Centre

Not all buildings identified in the Accessibility Audit Survey were chosen for the accessibility audit project. Buildings and sites that had recently undergone separate accessibility assessments were not selected, while some building owners declined the invitation to participate. The fourteen (14) selected buildings and sites were finalized by working with the building owners to address concerns, audit schedules, and completing the physical site visits.

## THE RICK HANSEN FOUNDATION ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST (RHFAC)

In addition to the Universal Access Design Inc. auditors' lived/living experiences and accessibility training, Accessibility Audits were completed using the program criteria of the

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RHFAC, a national rating system used to measure and certify the level of meaningful access to buildings and sites. There are two levels of certification: RHF Accessibility Certified and RHF Accessibility Certified Gold. To be certified by the RHF, a site or building must meet the Certification Prerequisites or the Gold Certification Prerequisites and must achieve a minimum rating score on the RHFAC Rating Survey.

> *"Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) provides building owners and/or operators a holistic, practical and people-focused framework to measure meaningful access, create a roadmap for improvement, and celebrate their commitment to making their spaces accessible for all."* [6]

The RHF updates the RHFAC rating and standards at least once every 5 years, which ensures the rating stays current with innovation, legislation, and best practices. In January 2024, the RHFAC v4.0 was launched to replace v3.0. Changes to the rating and standards include the identification and explanation of conditions in the built environment that benefit hearing, vision, mobility, and neurodivergent communities, and adjustments to the framework to make it adaptable and flexible across international jurisdictions.

Sites are scored on a scale of 0-100%. To achieve Certification, sites must have at minimum an accessible public entrance and access to all key functional spaces, as well as achieve a rating of at least 60%. Properties can achieve a score greater than 60% based on existing accessibility features, but if the public entrance is not accessible or if some key functional areas are inaccessible, these sites cannot be Certified. To achieve Gold Certification, sites must score at minimum 80%, as well as have several accessibility features beyond standard Certification.[7]

## RMWB BUILDING EVALUATION AND AUDIT CRITERIA

Each building was evaluated to determine if it met the RHFAC Certification Prerequisites or the RHFAC Gold Certification Prerequisites. The purpose of the accessibility project is not to certify the selected buildings, and regardless of whether a building met the prerequisites, they gained valuable insight from the scores, standards, and recommendations they received.

The RHFAC Rating Survey was used to assign a Rating Score for each of the 8 key areas of the built environment identified by the RHF, as well as a total Rating Score for the building. The 8 key areas of the built environment:

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[6] https://www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible
[7] https://www.rickhansen.com/sites/default/files/2024-07/rhfacguidetocertificationv4220242r.pdf

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- Vehicular Access

- Exterior Approach and Entrance

- Interior Circulation

- Internal Services

- Sanitary Facilities

- Wayfinding, Signage, and Information

- Emergency Systems

- Additional Spaces

The Rating Scores for each building were included in finalized audit reports that were then shared with building owners / property managers.

## ON-SITE VISITS

Following the confirmation of buildings to be assessed and the finalization of the site visit schedule, onsite inspections for each building and site were conducted for the Accessibility Audit. The building audits were completed by Universal Access Design Incorporated (UADI), a company whose goal is access for everyone, everywhere, all the time, and UADI staff are experts in accessibility auditing. Urban Systems Limited (USL) supported UADI staff with the onsite audits by coordinating site visits and helping when needed.

## 4.2 OUTCOMES

## AUDIT REPORTS

**Report Format**

For each evaluated building, the audit results were compiled and presented in a 'Facility Assessment and Recommendations' report prepared by UADI. The reports provide a comprehensive account of the building audit findings, including:

- A description of existing conditions;

- Identified and relevant accessibility issues;

- Photographs that illustrate the key accessibility challenges and opportunities;

- Recommendations to improve the building accessibility, intended to create the highest impact for current and future users;

- Recommendations for additional changes that will reduce accessibility barriers in the building;

- Pathways to achieving building certification; and

- Observations and recommendations addressing neuro-disability accessibility challenges (as opposed to strictly physical accessibility challenges).

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**Recommendations**

Each report is tailored to a specific building and offers targeted recommendations based on the identified issue. Universal Access Design Inc. indicated that the recommendations were developed using a best-practice approach based on six disability groups:

- People who are deaf
- People who are hard of hearing
- People who have vision impairments
- People who are blind
- People with mobility impairments
- People with agility impairments

Recommendations are prioritized by safety or liability issues, building code requirements, and convenience issues and are assigned one of three 'timing' categories determined by their priority level:

- **Short Term** – indicates that a change is needed to rectify a safety or liability issue, to comply with current building code access, or to provide meaningful, basic access.
- **Medium Term** – indicates that a change is needed to address an important issue not covered by current code requirements, in addition to other cost-effective measures to improve access for everyone.
- **Long Term** – indicates that a recommendation is a 'best practice' approach specific to the location needs and facilities based on a combination of national and international standards, community preferences, and the practical application of universal design.

The recommendations in each audit report do not list every possible access feature or solution that could or should be implemented. The findings are part of an inclusive strategy specific to the facility and considers the age, function, and future use of the properties to develop realistic recommendations for long-term planning. All building reports are presented under separate covers and have been shared with respective property owners / building managers. Property owners / building managers were also provided with an opportunity to meet with the project team to discuss their audit reports.

**Building Audit Overview**

The following table displays the buildings that were assessed, the building location, the date of review, and the major findings noted in the building audit report:

PRIVATELY OWNED BUILDING AUDIT RESULTS

**URBAN**
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| Building | Location | Date of Review | Major Findings | Top 3 Major Issues |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Accel Physical Therapy | Fort McMurray | August 2023 | • Does not meet RHFAC Certification Prerequisites or Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>• Final Rating Score: 66%<br>• Area with the lowest Rating Score: Vehicular Access – 52.6%<br>• Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Circulation – 80.0% | • Create an accessible parking stall with direct access to the main public door<br>• Provide an accessible main entrance with power operated door<br>• Enhance washroom accessibility by adding additional design features |
| Professional Building | Fort McMurray | October 2023 | • Does not meet RHFAC Certification Prerequisites or Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>• Final Rating Score: 46%<br>• Area with the lowest Rating Score: Vehicular Access – 22.7%<br>• Area with the highest Rating Score: Exterior Approach and Entrance – 63.8% | • Create an accessible parking stall with direct access to the main public door<br>• Ensure main public entry is accessible by adding power operation and improving signage clarity<br>• Install an elevator to provide access to various floor levels |
| Heritage Administration Building | Fort McMurray | November 2023 | • Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>• Final Rating Score: 64%<br>• Area with the lowest Rating Score: Emergency Systems – 30.0%<br>• Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Circulation – 100.0% | • Expand size of designated parking stalls to accessible standards<br>• Address front entry issues, including upgrading the ramp and handrails to include accessibility features and that power operated doors are functional<br>• Address emergency exit issues, including adding exit signage, visible and audible alarm indicators, and that ramps are provided at emergency exits with stairs |

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| Heritage Shipyard | Fort McMurray | October 2023 | • Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>• Final Rating Score: 63%<br>• Area with the lowest Rating Score: Emergency Systems – 33.3%<br>• Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Circulation – 85.4% | • Enhance signage for accessible parking stalls and directional signage to direct visitors to accessible entrances<br>• Address ramp issues, including adding accessibility features such as slip resistant surfaces, handrails, and tactile indicators<br>• Eliminate or reduce thresholds at entry doors |
| Nistawoyou Friendship Centre | Fort McMurray | September 2023 | • Does not meet RHFAC Certification Prerequisites or Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>• Final Rating Score: 53%<br>• Area with the lowest Rating Score: Sanitary Facilities – 39.1%<br>• Area with the highest Rating Score: Exterior Approach and Entrance – 61.6% | • Replace access ramps to provide a consistent slope and ensure all requirements for accessibility ramps and front entry standards are met<br>• Repaint surface markings for accessible parking stalls, provide signage, and designate one stall for drop off/pick up or short-term parking<br>• Install an elevator between the ground and upper floors |
| Peter Pond Mall | Fort McMurray | October 2023 | • Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>• Final Rating Score: 67%<br>• Area with the lowest Rating Score: Emergency Systems – 44.4%<br>• Area with the highest Rating Score: Wayfinding and Signage – 83.1% | • Ensure accessible parking stalls meet width and depth requirements and have side accesses<br>• Provide an accessible drop off/pick up zone at one or more entrances<br>• Address washroom deficiencies, including adding power operation to doors, providing consistent accessibility signage, installing d-handles on doors and new locking mechanisms, and ensuring that accessories |

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| | | | | are mounted at appropriate heights |
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## RMWB OWNED BUILDING AUDIT RESULTS

| Building | Location | Date of Review | Major Findings | Top 3 Major Issues |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Archie Simpson Arena | Fort Chipewyan | March 2024 | · Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>· Final Rating Score: 63%<br>· Area with the lowest Rating Score: Emergency Systems – 48.3%<br>· Area with the highest Rating Score: Exterior Approach and Entrance – 73.8% | · Create a universal washroom with all features required for accessibility<br>· Install an evacuation chair and ensure staff are trained to use it<br>· Create accessible spectator seating spaces and address accessibility challenges related to stairs |
| Centerfire Place | Fort McMurray | October 2023 | · Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>· Final Rating Score: 62%<br>· Area with the lowest Rating Score: Sanitary Facilities – 44.4%<br>· Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Circulation – 73.8 % | · Address accessibility challenges related to parking and pedestrian circulation by repainting markings, ensuring consistent curb ramps, and widening the area in front of the main entry to create a drop off/pick up zone<br>· Ensure at least one entry door is power operated, with correct height for controls and timing<br>· Ensure designated accessible washrooms are always available, including providing an accessible washroom for the multipurpose room, and add accessibility features to washrooms including power operated doors, adding grab bars, creating roll in shower stalls, and ensuring that |

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| | | | | · washroom accessories are mounted at appropriate heights |
| Fort. Chipewyan RMWB Office | Fort Chipewyan | March 2024 | · Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>· Final Rating Score: 60%<br>· Area with the lowest Rating Score: Sanitary Facilities – 25.6%<br>· Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Services and Environment – 74.3% | · Ensure entries are accessible by addressing signage, proper power operated doors and that thresholds are level<br>· Provide a hearing loop or other communication enhancement technology in meeting rooms and public service areas<br>· Create an accessible washroom |
| Frank LaCroix Arena | Fort McMurray | September 2023 | · Does not meet RHFAC Certification Prerequisites or Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>· Final Rating Score: 58%<br>· Area with the lowest Rating Score: Sanitary Facilities – 42.9%<br>· Area with the highest Rating Score: Vehicular Access – 69.4% | · Address parking and circulation issues by installing pavement markings, upgrading curb ramps with tactile indicators, and creating a drop off/pick up zone<br>· Ensure public entries and interior doorways are accessible by adding power operation<br>· Create a universal accessible washroom with shower facilities |
| Haxton Centre | Fort McMurray | September 2023 | · Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>· Final Rating Score: 67%<br>· Area with the lowest Rating Score: Wayfinding and Signage – 47.4% | · Create three additional accessible parking stalls and ensure lines are painted and adequate signage is provided<br>· Reduce entry thresholds and replace entrance doors with ones having a minimum of 860mm of clear opening width, along with power operation |

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| | | | · Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Circulation – 84.1% | · Address accessibility deficiencies in washrooms (adjust height of counter/sink in women's washroom, replace toilet stall locking hardware, ensure washroom accessories are sensor operated and at appropriate heights) |
| Janvier Municipal Office | Janvier | March 2024 | · Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>· Final Rating Score: 72%<br>· Area with the lowest Rating Score: Wayfinding and Signage – 50.0%<br>· Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Circulation – 83.8% | · Add exterior signage to increase the visibility of the main entry and ensure objects are removed from the path of the power operated door<br>· Provide a hearing loop or other communication enhancement technologies at the service counter and meeting rooms<br>· Completely renovate existing washrooms to create one larger universal washroom with accessibility requirements met |
| Jubilee Centre | Fort McMurray | November 2023 | · Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold Certification Prerequisites<br>· Final Rating Score: 70%<br>· Area with the lowest Rating Score: Additional Use of Space – 55.3%<br>· Area with the highest Rating Score: Interior Circulation – 75.2% | · Add additional accessible parking stalls on MacDonald Ave and repaint all stalls<br>· Add directional signage to direct users to building entrances, ensuring all stairs and ramps have accessibility features such as tactile indicators, handrails, and slip resistant surfaces<br>· Provide a hearing loop or other communication enhancement technologies at the service counter and meeting rooms |
| Vista Ridge Park | Fort McMurray | November 2023 | · Meets RHFAC Certification Prerequisites but not Gold | · Install two accessible parking stalls near the main power operated |

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| Certification Prerequisites | entrance and repaint all accessible stalls |
| · Final Rating Score: 69% | · Lower one section of the service counter, with knee clearance, with clear directional signage |
| · Area with the lowest Rating Score: Vehicular Access – 45.5% | · Improve emergency exit and evacuation accessibility by ensuring emergency exits are clear of objects, replacing all emergency exit signs, providing an evacuation chair and ensuring staff are trained to use it, and ensuring emergency evacuation instructions are clear |
| · Area with the highest Rating Score: Additional Use of Space – 79.5% | |

## ROADMAP

The final Building Audit Reports provide individualized descriptions, ratings, roadmap, and recommendations for each audited building. However, a roadmap of action items can be developed based on overarching areas the RMWB can target for improvement. The RMWB should develop a strategy to identify key areas to allocate capital investment and staff capacity by prioritizing recommendations from the accessibility audit.

## 4.3 BUILDING AUDIT COMMON THEMES

Using the RHFAC Rating Scores assigned to each building, an average rating for the 8 key areas of focus across all audited RMWB buildings can be used to indicate building accessibility deficiencies. Average scores are presented for all 14 sites audited by combining all scores by key area and dividing by the number of sites visited. Lower average scores would suggest a key area in need of more prioritization or resources, whereas higher average scores imply areas suffering from fewer accessibility shortcomings. Common issues that appeared across all or multiple audited buildings provide insight into the biggest accessibility flaws within each area of focus.

| BUILDING AUDIT FINDINGS | | |
|---|---|---|
| KEY AREA OF FOCUS | AVERAGE SCORE | COMMON FINDINGS |
| **Vehicular Access** (parking, general vehicle access) | 59.1% | • Unclear vertical/horizontal signage<br>• Lack of safe pedestrian pathways within parking lots<br>• Lack of shelter for designated accessible spaces |

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| | | • Few passenger drop-off and pick-up zones |
| **Exterior Approach** (exterior pathways, ramps, stairs, building entrances) | 68.2% | • Surface is not firm, stable and slip-resistant<br>• Lack of entrance seating and shelter<br>• Exterior ramps lack sufficient handrails<br>• Exterior stairs are not colour-contrasted and do not have slip-resistant strips on nosing<br>• No power-operated entrance door<br>• Entrances do not have a level threshold<br>• Outward-opening door paths are not clearly marked |
| **Interior Circulation** (doors and doorways, path of travel, corridors and hallways, interior ramps, elevators, stairs, escalators, platform lifts) | 72.7% | • No power-operated interior doors or open entries<br>• Lack of clear opening width of doors and doorways<br>• Vision panels are at inaccessible heights<br>• No colour contrast between walls and floors<br>• Interior stairs lack tactile attention indicators (truncated domes), adequate handrails on both sides, and slip-resistant strips on nosing |
| **Interior Services and Environment** (lobby and reception, reception desks and service counters, waiting areas, meeting rooms, kitchens, acoustics, illumination and building systems) | 66.9% | • Not enough seating variety in waiting areas, meeting rooms, or by reception desk<br>• Desk/counters are not at accessible heights or provided at a variety of heights<br>• No space for knee clearance at transaction points for public and staff<br>• Lack of audio accessibility and communication enhancement technologies<br>• Kitchen counters and sinks are at inaccessible heights<br>• Building controls are at inaccessible heights (light switches, thermostats, etc.) |
| **Sanitary Facilities** (washrooms, showers) | 51.9% | • Lack of washroom identification signage<br>• No power-operated or screen wall entry |

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| | | • No grab bars at accessible heights and locations<br>• No power outlets near accessible toilets<br>• Lack of emergency call buttons<br>• Lack of accessible child change tables<br>• Lack of universal washrooms |
| **Wayfinding and Signage** (general wayfinding and signage, room identification, directory boards) | 57.4% | • Interior directional signage is not comprehensive or clearly visible<br>• Limited variety of wayfinding techniques<br>• Lack of blade signage to supplement overhead signage<br>• Room identification signage does not include Braille or raised characters/symbols<br>• Room identification signs not placed at the recommended height |
| **Emergency Systems** (emergency exits, areas of refuge, fire alarm systems and equipment, evacuation instructions) | 53.3% | • Emergency exit signage is not clear or accessible<br>• Lack of visual fire alarms throughout facilities<br>• Fire-fighting and first aid equipment is not placed at accessible heights and locations<br>• No accessible evacuation instructions |
| Additional Spaces | 65.7% | • Desk heights are not adjustable in office spaces<br>• Outlets and switches are not at accessible heights in office spaces<br>• Little to no accessible seating spaces in assembly areas<br>• Limited variety of seating options available in restaurants and cafeterias<br>• Lack of accessible benches with arm and backrests in changing rooms |

Sanitary Facilities have the lowest average score of the 8 key areas of focus at 51.9%, noting major shortcomings with the accessibility of washroom access and design. At 72.7%, Interior Circulation has the highest average score and reported fewer accessibility barriers across the audited RMWB buildings.

It should be noted that the summary of results does not represent the average building across the RMWB, as many of the buildings were identified as being inaccessible in the Accessibility Audit Survey. The results are, however, a representation of common accessibility flaws and limitations across inaccessible buildings in the municipality. Common issues may be due to insufficient accessibility

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requirements in building codes and legislation or a limited understanding/representation of accessibility requirements and are in no way a reflection of an unwillingness to provide accessible features.

## 4.4 ACTIONING BUILDING AUDIT FINDINGS

Based on the summary of results, it is recommended that the RMWB develop a strategy to target key areas with an overarching need, such as sanitary facilities, vehicular access and emergency systems. Recommendations outlined in the individual building audit reports indicate whether an action is critical (short-term) or simply desirable (long-term) and should be utilized in RMWB accessibility strategy planning.

Additionally, responses from RMWB accessibility engagement work conducted between August and September 2022 through 'PARTICIPATE Wood Buffalo' should be reviewed to understand accessibility barriers to existing public infrastructure. Respondents indicated accessibility challenges with public infrastructure and maintenance, transportation programs/schedules, and housing. Other obstacles shared during the engagement period that fall outside of the accessibility audit project scope include:

- Some crosswalks have no audible pedestrian signals
- No audible bus announcements
- Curb cutouts do not always lead to a pedestrian crosswalk
- Lack of braille throughout the region
- Transportation for wheelchair/disabled people is limited
- Improved SMART bus schedule and access
- Lack of sidewalks in the downtown area
- Public bathrooms are not accessible
- Obtaining parking permits
- Lack of programs for newcomers
- Uncleared pathways (snow, ice) during the winter months.

Community awareness is another key aspect of improving building accessibility in the RMWB. Through public campaigns and staff training, there is an opportunity for public and private property owners to conduct an independent, high-level accessibility audit and implement the appropriate measures to improve building accessibility.

## ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLISTS

Concurrent with the Background Review and Building Audits, the project team researched and reviewed several accessibility audit checklists, which were identified in literature and in-use by other municipalities/organizations, with preference given to those following RHFAC program standards.

Three user-friendly Accessibility Checklists were developed specifically for the RMWB which reflect best practices and are designed to support residents and businesses in doing an accessibility review on their own. The checklist's main objective is to provide high-level accessibility standards in an easy to use format, to ensure people can independently identify key areas where accessibility can be improved. The checklists are available online on the RMWB website.

**Building Accessibility Checklist** (Appendix B)

The Building Accessibility Checklist (also available on the 'Accessibility around the RMWB' webpage) is designed for residents, private businesses, and RMWB staff to evaluate the accessibility of a building, going beyond the minimum standards outlined in the Alberta Building Code. The high-level standards outlined in the checklist are a summarised version of the RHFAC program that synthesizes the 8 key sections identified by the RHF into four (4):

- Approach & Entrance – Ensuring there are no accessibility barriers that prevent people from accessing a building.
- Washrooms – Providing accessible washroom spaces for people to use.
- Building Interior – Ensuring people can access all parts of a building intended for their use.
- Additional – Examining the accessibility of additional building elements.

Accessible document design principles were implemented in the finalized checklist format and design, including accessible fonts/sizes and simple, user-friendly language.

The Accessibility Audits were not conducted using the Building Audit Checklist, as they present a synthesized version of the RHFAC program and do not replace existing legislation and building codes, such as the Alberta Building Code. However, their applicability and usability were confirmed through field testing, and revisions were made to ensure there were no gaps or challenges with the toolkit.

## Event Accessibility Checklist (Appendix C)

The Event Accessibility Checklist (also available on the 'Accessibility around the RMWB' webpage) is designed for residents, businesses, and RMWB staff to evaluate the accessibility of a public or private event, rather than a building or site. This tool helps identify key areas where accessibility can be improved for a specific event to meet all community needs and should be used in tandem with strategic sections of the Building Accessibility Checklist. There are 6 areas of focus included in the Event Audit Checklist:

- Event Planning – Ensuring an event will be accessible to the greatest number of people, starting from the planning stage.
- Promotional Materials – Designing promotional materials that are more inclusive to increase the likelihood that members of different disability demographics will participate in an event.
- Location & Entrance – Selecting a location that is accessible, for everyone to be able to participate. This section should be completed in addition to the 'Approach and Entrance' section of the Building Audit Checklist.
- Communication – Sharing large amounts of information, such as event schedules, event navigation, presentations and dining options, requires different approaches for different materials and abilities.
- Catering & Food – Preparing for and providing food at an event that meets diverse dietary requirements to make everyone feel included and comfortable.
- Event Space – Confirming the accessibility of the temporary features/structures, such as chairs and navigation, and making improvements to the space before an event starts. This section should be completed in addition to an accessibility-focused walk-through and the 'Washroom' portion of the Building Audit Checklist.

Physical, permanent structures are the primary focus of the Accessibility Audit Project. However, resources like the Event Accessibility Checklist are necessary to provide the public and RMWB staff

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with high-level accessibility guidance beyond the built environment. Accessibility best practices can be applied to all aspects of life to ensure that everyday life is barrier-free.

Accessible document design principles were implemented in the finalized checklist format and design, including accessible fonts/sizes and simple, user-friendly language.

### Site Plan Accessibility Checklist (Appendix D)

In addition to the two public-facing event and building checklists, a Site Plan Accessibility Analysis document was created for the municipality to provide users, such as land use planners, with a series of questions from an accessibility lens to help assess site plans. The accessibility analysis is fragmented into four common elements:

- Approach & Path of Travel – Examining the pedestrian approach from the street and parking lot to the building entrance.
- Parking – Assessing pedestrian movement between on-site parking, off-street parking, and nearby transit stops.
- Entrance, Ramps & Stairs – Evaluating the accessibility of building entrances.
- Landscaping, Lighting & Finishings – Considering the intended users of a site and ensuring the necessary features are in place to support simple and safe site navigation.

The document works in tandem with the RMWB Building Accessibility Checklist and provides additional direction on the design and accessibility of a building's 'Approach & Entrance'.

# 5.0 ACCESSIBILITY SIMULATION EVENT

In August of 2023, the RMWB requested additional support from the Project Team in organizing an event to coincide with the 2023 International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) on December 4, 2023. The event was opened with remarks by a representative from the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

A half-day event was held for elected officials and RMWB senior leadership to learn more about accessibility and the accessibility audit project. The IDPD event for decision-makers consisted of two components:

- First, an accessibility-focused simulation activity was designed to task participants to try and navigate the Jubilee building and outdoor areas in a wheelchair, walker, with weighted vests, and with eyeglasses simulating vision loss, as well as to complete tasks such as opening pill bottles with gloves simulating arthritis.
- Second, Stan Leyenhorst with Urban Access Design Inc. was invited as a speaker to present on the importance of accessibility and key areas where municipalities may wish to focus efforts to improve the quality of life for residents with disabilities. The session included time where attendees could ask questions related to accessibility.
- Finally, the event concluded with a round table panel discussion which included lived and living experiences with accessibility in the RMWB.

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*Figure 2 Event Opening Remarks by Representative from Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities*

The accessibility simulation was delivered by staff from St. Aidan's Society, a social profit organization that has been operating in the RMWB since 1973. St. Aidan's mandate is to ensure that older adults are valued, respected, and have opportunities to thrive in the community. This exercise involved participants wearing special equipment or gear to simulate having various disabilities, including vision impairment, muscle degeneration, need for walking aids (such as walkers or wheelchairs), and hearing loss. Participants were divided into two groups, one tasked with completing day-to-day tasks such as opening pill bottles and reading information, the other with navigating various scenarios around the Jubilee Lobby. These scenarios included accessing washroom facilities, engaging with Planning and Development and front desk staff, entering and exiting the building, and accessing Council Chambers.

Participants then participated in a debrief / reflection discussion. Key themes identified through the debrief include taking for granted how many spaces and places are designed for individuals without disabilities, the difficulty experienced in trying to navigate the building in a wheelchair, unclear or missing signage, and the many obstacles located in the path of travel for someone in a walker or wheelchair.

Following the debrief, Stan Leyenhorst with Urban Access Design Inc. delivered a presentation on the importance of accessibility and key areas where municipalities can focus efforts to improve the quality of life for residents with disabilities. This presentation focused on the importance of municipal leadership in addressing accessibility barriers, but also acknowledging that other levels of government have an important role to play in terms of setting standards and funding accessibility projects. Participants then had the opportunity to ask Stan questions related to enhancing accessibility in the RMWB.

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*Figure 3 Accessibility Focused Community Organization Representatives Participating in Round Table Discussion*

Next, representatives from four community serving organizations (Autism Society of the RMWB, Regional Inclusive Committee Member, local advocate, and Keyano College) participated in a panel discussion exploring the following questions:

- As service providers who work with folks living with accessibility needs, what kinds of barriers do your clients face living in the RMWB?
- Can you speak to any initiatives or efforts your organization has made to enhance accessibility?
- What role do you think the RMWB can play in enhancing accessibility?
- Do you feel that residents of the RMWB are aware of and understand accessibility needs?
- What role do you think policy can play in enhancing accessibility in the RMWB? Does your organization have any accessibility policies?

This discussion engaged people with lived experience of disabilities and advocates on behalf of individuals with disabilities, providing a safe platform to share experiences. Challenges, opportunities, and successes were all discussed and participants shared an optimistic view for the future based on progress they have already seen within the region.

The session concluded by thanking participants for attending and discussing the project's next steps, including finalizing building audit reports, sharing findings with building owners/property managers, and opportunities for the municipality to continue supporting and advancing accessibility.

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# 6.0 ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY IN THE RMWB

Through the course of this project, several opportunities for enhancing accessibility in the RMWB have emerged. These opportunities include:

- Exploring, initiating and/or supporting building retrofits;
- Developing and implementing accessibility policies;
- Expanding building audits to include additional properties;
- Conducting research and promoting awareness of best practices on universal design; and,
- General advocacy and education to increase public awareness of accessibility challenges and the importance of universal design.

Opportunities to enhance accessibility in the RMWB are grouped into 3 categories presented below:

**Physical Assets:**

- **Continue completing accessibility assessments on existing buildings and infrastructure when required.** A continual awareness and effort will be needed over time, not forgetting to stay current with accessibility guidelines and best practices.
- **Assessing new municipal infrastructure projects to make sure they are accessible and align with universal design principles.** It is important to engage community members with lived or living experiences of disabilities or accessibility design experts early in the project phases, ideally before any building or site design work has been completed.
- **Review RMWB Transit network and stops to identify accessibility barriers**, as per Vehicle Access guidelines in the RHFAC v4.0 rating system. Prioritize and remove potential accessibility barriers that are low or no-cost options.
- **Undertake renovations to municipal properties to enhance accessibility through regular asset management practices**. Prioritize recommendations identified through accessibility audits as part of capital investment/replacement planning.
- **Consider the perspectives of individuals with disabilities.** When investments into new physical assets are being considered, leverage existing Committees and working groups to ensure an accessibility lens is applied to projects.

**Planning, Programs and Policy:**

- **Continue to support and promote the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program (DRIP) and grant streams that support accessibility improvements**. DRIP has recently been reviewed and changed to include opportunities for property owners to enhance accessibility in several projects including the façade, interior, and premises grant streams.
- **Consider developing a municipality-wide grant supporting accessibility enhancements at both the building and site level**, including expanding eligibility of properties in rural communities in the RMWB.
- **Consider reviewing engineering standards and amending them to establish a higher standard for accessibility.** Work with property owners and managers to ensure compliance

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with the existing Alberta Building Code to ensure technical requirements are met where feasible and monitor potential changes and harmonization of building codes moving forward. Review design standards in other municipalities or provinces to determine the best approaches to enhancing design standards in the RMWB.

- **Develop an Accessibility Policy for the municipality**. This Policy should focus on accessibility standards applicable to owned or occupied municipal properties, public interactions with the municipality, establish a written statement of commitment to accessibility, and articulate formal policies or rules that the RMWB will adopt to achieve accessibility goals. An Accessibility Plan, in turn, should also be developed to outline what steps the municipality will take to achieve any gaps made apparent through policy.

- **Monitor and apply for grants and other incentives available to support accessibility in the Region**, including in partnership with community organizations where possible. Funding streams change regularly but have been available at various times to support building renovations, events, and increasing awareness of accessibility at the community level (see Advocacy and Education).

- **Consider Universal Design Principles** when developing Statutory Plans and planning documents to ensure the communities in the Region are more accessible and accessibility is implemented.

**Advocacy and Education:**

- **Provide RMWB staff with training opportunities to learn more about accessibility in their work.** Staff could be encouraged to pursue accessibility-related learning opportunities through existing professional development pathways, or, tailored programs or courses could be developed or explored.

- **Consider creating and internal Accessibility Practice Group led by municipal staff**. RMWB staff interested in advancing accessibility should be encouraged to meet regularly to discuss best practices in accessibility, how accessibility impacts their work, and opportunities to increase internal knowledge and application of universal design practices in municipal operations.

- **Continue to support non-profits and community organizations delivering programs and services to those with disabilities in the community**, which could include financial and organizational capacity building supports.

- **Advocate to senior levels of government on the importance and benefits of investing in accessibility and the RMWB's unique context**. As one of the largest municipalities in Canada, geographically, the Wood Buffalo covers a big area and encompasses diverse communities with unique demographics and development histories. Accessibility limitations need different solutions across communities and other decision-makers must understand that nuanced, flexible support is needed.

- **Work with Community organizations to make proposals to Council in the proclamation of National Access Ability Week and the International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPD) each year,** and, consider hosting events in partnership with community organizations to promote accessibility awareness.

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- **Develop educational or promotional material to follow up on the advancement of accessibility,** and, raise awareness of accomplishments of individuals with disabilities in the community.
- **Encourage and support property owners to complete their own audits of buildings and places using the Accessibility Checklist and consider how to collect, action, and publish findings**. Geographic Information Systems may be an option to explore for collecting and spatializing audit data collected by residents.



*Figure 4 Participant in Accessibility Simulation Activity*

# 7.0 CONCLUSION

In undertaking this project, the Municipality in collaboration with ACoA and RACIDE has demonstrated a commitment to and leadership in advancing accessibility within the municipality. The Province of Alberta does not have an overarching accessibility legislation in place, therefore municipalities must determine their approach to accessibility.

By commissioning audits of both public and private properties, as well as buildings with different functions, sizes, and layouts, the RMWB has advanced its understanding of accessibility barriers and opportunities. Private property owners/managers agreed on importance of conducting the accessibility audits and the impact on creating awareness to enhance accessibility in their properties. Where possible and financially feasible, the RMWB should continue to support accessibility projects and efforts to increase community awareness and the importance of accessibility.

A major recommendation of this report is to develop an Accessibility Policy for the Region. However, there are many other opportunities available to enhance accessibility in the RMWB, ranging in complexity, financial commitment, and time commitment. In addition, advancing accessibility in the region is not solely the responsibility of the RMWB: there are many opportunities for residents, property owners, and non-profit organizations to reduce barriers to accessibility and increase awareness: many of these are easy and low-cost solutions.



The RMWB has programs in place (e.g. DRIP) to support physical retrofits of spaces and places and strong relationships with community organizations working to support individuals with disabilities. There are several effective and active Committees functioning in the RMWB that can continue to advocate for and guide implementing accessibility.

As the RMWB's population continues to increase, age, and become more culturally diverse, it is important to begin taking steps toward a more accessible community. This should be an overarching priority but specially for the design and construction the built environment and program/service design and delivery. Increasing awareness of the challenges that many individuals with disabilities face on a day-to-day basis can help to build empathy and understanding, as well as – ultimately – to drive change at the community level.

*Figure 5 Participant in Accessibility Simulation Activity*

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# Appendices

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND REPORT

# URBAN SYSTEMS MEMORANDUM

CAFEDATE: September 5, 2023
TO: Isela Contreras-Dogbe, Supervisor Culture & Social Development
FROM: Hayley Inglis, Jake Papineau
FILE: 2375.0094.01
SUBJECT: Accessibility Audit – Background Document Review Memo

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) is committed to accessibility and inclusion for all residents and visitors to the region. In June 2018, the Government of Canada passed Bill C-81, known as the Accessible Canada Act, which aims to ensure a barrier-free Canada. The overarching purpose of this legislation is to ensure that Canada is barrier free by January 1, 2040.

Since the passing of Bill C-81, several Canadian provinces have passed similar legislation in their own jurisdictions (e.g. Accessible British Columbia Act, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act). Alberta is one of the last Canadian provinces without overarching accessibility legislation in place. In absence of higher-level provincial legislation and guidance related to accessibility, the RMWB has initiated work to better understand accessibility needs in the community, both from a municipal and private property owner perspective.

The RMWB has several plans and policies in place that directly intersect with accessibility. An integral document is the Age-Friendly Work Plan (2021-2024) which seeks to remove barriers to aging with dignity in the RMWB. A component of this plan is the completion of a comprehensive accessibility audit of municipal and private properties to understand gaps and opportunities to making the RMWB barrier-free. This work has been advanced by the RMWB's Advisory Committee on Aging.

The RMWB, working with Urban Systems Ltd. and Universal Access Design Inc., commenced this accessibility audit project in April 2023. While the primary objective of the project is to physically review municipal and private properties in the RMWB to identify building deficiencies, another important component is reviewing existing RMWB plans and policies to understand the municipality's current approach to accessibility and what opportunities are available to the RMWB to influence accessibility within the municipality more broadly.

This memo presents the findings of the plan and policy review component of the accessibility audit project and identifies opportunities to incorporate accessibility best practices into municipal plans, policies, and decision-making. The first section presented below explores accessibility at a broad perspective and identifies influential legislation and guiding documents.

## 2.0    WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY?

Knowledge of what accessibility looks like and who it involves have evolved over time:

| 1950's | Barrier Free Design | Focused primarily on providing physical access to buildings for people with mobility needs. |
|---|---|---|
| 1970's | Accessible Design | Expanded focus on access to buildings to include access to services and products for people with disabilities. |
| 1990's | Universal Design | Universal design creates spaces that are useable for everyone regardless of age, height, or ability: "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaption or specialized design" (Ronald Mace, 1988). |

Today, **Universal Design is the leading approach** driving the creation of inclusive, welcoming communities.

### Barriers to Accessibility

Defining accessibility is challenging as there are many interconnected dimensions, including the social dimension of disability, where socially-constructed barriers prevent people from meaningfully participating in all aspects of daily life. These perceptions, and more importantly, misconceptions, influence how people with disabilities are treated, the number and type of opportunities available to them, and the level of inclusion they experience in life. Often, these perceptions manifest as physical and intangible barriers. The six common barriers to accessibility are[1]:

1. **Attitudinal** – people think and act based on false ideas of someone's abilities
2. **Information & Communications** – communication methods do not reach people with disabilities
3. **Technological** – technology is not accessible by people with disabilities
4. **Systemic** – organization policies are not inclusive of different abilities
5. **Physical & Architectural** – obstacles / design make access to the physical environment difficult
6. **Sensory** – lights, scents, and / or sounds prevent participation

These barriers persist in many areas of daily life and emerge through interactions between people with accessibility needs, other people, and their built environment. The Accessible Canada Act identifies several priority areas to remove barriers: [2]

- Built environment (buildings and public spaces)
- Service design and program delivery
- Employment
- Transportation
- Information and communication technologies
- Other forms of communication
- Procurement

**The focus of this memo is primarily on accessibility of the built environment**, although we recognize that creating an accessible community involves identifying and removing barriers across each of these priority areas to enable people with disabilities to operate with more independence and participate more meaningfully in daily life.

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[1] The Accessible Canada Act lists five types of barriers in its definition; sensory has been added as it is often included by advocacy groups and other legislation.

[2] List of priority areas identified from Summary of the Accessible Canada Act

## 2.1.1     Guiding Accessibility Legislation and Frameworks

The development of accessibility legislation in Canada was spearheaded by Ontario in 2005 when the Province passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The legislation sets wide-ranging accessibility standards that apply within the public and private realm. Other provinces followed suite and developed their own legislation, and at present, only Alberta and Prince Edward Island have no accessibility legislation in place or under development (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Map of Canada showing provinces with enacted accessibility legislation and date of adoption.[3]



Although there is now guiding accessibility legislation at a National level – with the passing of the Accessible Canada Act in 2019—this legislation only applies to Federal entities, leaving substantial gaps in accessibility policy for provinces without their own dedicated legislation requirements. Although the Accessible Canada Act cannot directly influence provincial policy, it sets an important precedent in legislating a standard for accessibility that provinces can choose to follow.

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[3] Quebec enacted accessibility legislation in 1978 and amended it in 2004. Despite this early start, the legislation is limited in scope and currently under review.

## What does this mean for accessibility in Alberta?

Without any overarching accessibility legislation, Alberta is subject to a patchwork of provincial legislation related to accessibility, ultimately resulting in policy gaps. The default legislation relating to accessibility in the built environment in Alberta is the Alberta Building Code.

**Alberta Building Code**

The 2019 edition of the Alberta Building code sets technical requirements for barrier-free and is supplemented by the Safety Codes Council Barrier Free Design Guide. While this guide does a good job of including best practices recommendations consistent with universal design principles, a significant limitation is that the guide does not require existing buildings to retrofit to comply with modern accessibility standards.

**Accessibility Standards**

Municipalities may go beyond the minimum requirements set by the building code by adopting rigorous accessibility standards. Standards draw from best practices and are often prepared by different agencies and organizations to set higher standards than what is included in a building code. However, as standards are not mandated by legislation, they are not enforceable and rely on municipalities, businesses, and other organizations voluntarily adopting them.  A key accessibility standard is CSA B651-12:

| | |
|---|---|
| **CSA B651-12: Accessible Design for the Built Environment** | This technical standard sets accessibility requirements for buildings and facilities in the built environment considering a range of user needs. These standards are a National Standard of Canada meaning they are widely accepted as a best practice and are permitted to be used instead of the Design Standards set by the National Building Code.[4] |

**Additional Resources**

Multiple resources exist that provide municipalities with additional guidance on making public and private spaces in the built environment more accessible:

| | |
|---|---|
| **CMHC Universal Design Guide** | This guide provides recommendations on how to incorporate elements of universal design into multi-unit residential buildings. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification** | This rating system is fundamentally a measuring tool for accessibility of buildings (public, commercial, multi-unit) and trails. This system is unique in taking a comprehensive approach to assessing the level of meaningful access users have for a given site in addition to considering universal design principles. [5] |

## 2.2    ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT APPROACH

RMWB's approach to accessibility is heavily influenced by a community committed to advancing priorities related to accessibility, age-friendliness, diversity, equity, and inclusion. This focus recognizes the prevalence of disability in our society and likelihood of acquiring a disability with age. A 2017 survey of Canadians with

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[4] As a model code, CSA B651-12 can be adopted by municipal, provincial, and federal governments. The Union of BC Municipalities encourages northern communities to adopt the code for planning, new construction, and renovation.

[5] The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification assesses meaningful access by examining the holistic user experience of visitors to a site considering a range of impairments (mobility, vision, hearing, cognition, etc.,).

disabilities found that 20% of Canada's population lives with a disability, and that nearly 50% of people have a disability over the age of 75.[6] The RMWB is committed to removing barriers to people with disabilities, especially for older adults and seniors.

The RMWB uses Committees to provide advice and direction around community priorities related to accessibility. Pertinent committees include:

- Council Appointed Committees

    o  Advisory Committee on Aging (ACoA)

    o  Regional Advisory Committee on Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (RACIDE)

    o  Wood Buffalo Development Advisory Committee

    o  Wood Buffalo Downtown Revitalization Advisory Committee

    o  Wood Buffalo Transportation Advisory Committee

- Community Committees

    o  RIC

    o  SRC

Both RACIDE and ACoA have been instrumental in identifying recommendations that have influenced municipal direction to pursue a comprehensive accessibility audit. RACIDE identified removing barriers to resources and services as one of six guiding priorities in the Diversity & Inclusion Community Plan, while ACoA embedded accessibility throughout the goals of the Age Friendly Work Plan. Two of the most influential components of the Age-Friendly Work Plan are Domain 8, which sets a goal that "outdoor spaces and community buildings are designed and maintained to be age-friendly, safe, and accessible" and Domain 4 which calls for the creation of an accessibility audit to support implementation of barrier-free building design.

The Diversity & Inclusion Community Plan and Age Friendly Work Plan have influenced additional Municipal documents. The relationship between these Municipal plans, and the determination to audit 14 buildings is illustrated in Figure 2 on the following page.

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[6] Canadian Survey on Disability Report

Figure 2: Municipal document pathway leading to the completion of facilities accessibility audits[7]



| Year | Document | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 2017 | Diversity & Inclusion Community Plan | Set Municipal Accessibility Priorities <br> • Physical accessibility of facilities & inclusive spaces & services |
| 2018 | RMWB Strategic Plan 2018-2021 | Defined Accessibility Strategy <br> • Complete facility accessibility assessments & retrofits |
| 2021 | Age Friendly Work Plan | Develop Key Actions: Support the implementation of barrier-free building design <br> • Complete an accessibility audit |
| 2022 | What We Heard About Facilities Accessibility Report | Conducted stakeholder and resident engagment to identify buildings in need of retrofit |
| 2023 | Accessibility Audit | Completed Rick Hansen Foundation accessibility audits of 12 buildings |

The buildings included in the 2023 Accessibility Audit emerged from a selection process that involved community engagement with residents and stakeholders. These sessions produced feedback on barriers to accessibility within RMWB and identified specific buildings within the public and private realm (commercial, municipal, institutional, and residential). Institutional and residential buildings were determined to be outside the scope of the desired accessibility audit. Ultimately, buildings included in the audit were selected based on a combination of community feedback, the building's role within the public domain (i.e., frequency of use, access to public), responses by private business owners, and municipal authority/responsibility.

The completion of these audits is the culmination of several years of dedicated efforts to make the RMWB a more welcoming, inclusive place for people of all abilities and ages. The resulting audit reports will form a foundation for future building retrofits.

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[7] RMWB's Downtown Revitalization Incentives program (not shown on the graphic) ran from 2022 to April 2023 and offered businesses funding to complete interior accessibility improvements and is an example of an action stemming from the 2018 Strategic Plan that included commitments to completing accessibility-related building retrofits. DRIP successfully funded accessibility improvements to 30 businesses. Improvements included barrier-free access doors, universal washrooms, ramps, and handrails.

# 3.0   RMWB PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Over the years, the RMWB has produced several guiding documents intended to shape the Municipality's actions over the short, medium, and long term. This section examines these influential high-level planning documents in relation to the inclusion of accessibility policy.

## 3.1   PLANNING DOCUMENT REVIEW

A range of municipal planning documents were reviewed to provide a thorough understanding of the existing state of accessibility policies guiding actions within RMWB. Where applicable, plans profiled below include recommendations for potential improvements to strengthen the focus on accessibility. Plans are presented in order of year published.

### Municipal Development Plan (2011)

**Summary**

The Municipal Development Plan is the highest-level planning document in the RMWB and is designed to guide short and long-term decision making over the next 20 years. The Plan sets direction on several key priorities including growth management, environmental stewardship, culture, development, sustainability, community belonging, and economic resilience.

**Accessibility**

Although several directions contained in this plan reference the need to make communities more accessible to people of all ages and abilities, the most pertinent action is 4.3.3: **Promote accessibility through universal design**. This action charges the Municipality with applying principles of universal design in all aspects of public development (i.e., buildings, transportation systems, etc.) through consultation with people with lived and living experience. Where the Municipality does not have direct control, such as over private projects, they are tasked with encouraging the integration of universal design standards.

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**Municipal Development Plan 2022-Draft**

The draft of the 2023 MDP directs a wide-ranging focus on accessibility under action 1.2.4: **Plan for an accessible community**. This action strengthens commitments to improving accessibility throughout the region and goes beyond what was identified in the 2011 Plan by including:

- The creation of Design Guidelines that incorporate universal design principles (to be accomplished through consultation with members of the accessibility community).

- The prioritization of accessibility improvements to municipally owned assets in the Downtown

- Pursuit of an Age-Friendly Designation from the World Health Organization

- Investigation of developing region-wide Universal Design Guidelines

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## Our Sustainable Future – City Centre Redevelopment Plan (2012)

**Summary**

The Plan outlines a regulatory framework to guide the revitalization and development of economic growth in the City Centre through to 2030. Policies presented in the plan highlight the importance of developing a sustainable, people-centric city where density enables active transportation and a reduced carbon footprint.

**Accessibility Components**

The creation of an accessible city is identified as one of the Plan's eight overarching objectives. However, the language used in the plan is misleading as terminology like "accessibility" and "universal access" refer to active transportation rather than to principles of universal design. Providing users with multiple options to move through the region is only one element of accessibility and does not sufficiently address the range of barriers that prevent people from meaningfully participating in daily life.

**Areas for Improvement**

Strategies, Policies, and Actions in the Plan could be updated to better address principles of universal design beyond simply focusing on multi-modal travel options and active transportation. Possible areas elements of universal design could be integrated include:

- The public realm: streetscape, public facilities (e.g., community services, recreation providers, etc.), trail networks, parks and open spaces, etc.

- The private realm: development of accessible entrance guidelines, private amenity spaces, residential development requirements, etc.

- Signage and wayfinding (both within the streetscape and facilities / publicly accessible areas)

- Accessible community programming

**Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan 2023 - Adoption in progress**

The draft Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan is intended to replace the existing City Centre Redevelopment Plan and provide the RMWB with a policy framework for development over the next ten years. This Plan improves on the 2012 version by incorporating universal design principles into overarching policies and including accessibility in the vision statement for the Downtown. This approach means accessibility will be considered when (re)developing the Downtown in terms of built form; parks and open spaces; and transportation and mobility. However, the Plan does not currently include explicit policies related to the integration of universal design in two of the five overarching policies. When implementing the Plan, consideration should be given to the following actions:

- Land Use

  o Encourage new multi-family developments to include universal design principles.

- Heritage, Culture, and Public Art

  o Support the retrofit (where possible) of publicly accessible heritage, civic arts, and cultural facilities to meet universal accessibility standards.

## Regional Indoor Recreation & Community Facilities Master Plan (2015)

**Summary**

The Regional Indoor Recreation & Community Facilities Master Plan is designed to guide the municipality until 2025 in the investment and dedication of resources related to the development and operation of indoor recreation, community facilities, and programming throughout the region.

**Accessibility Components**

Access to recreational and community-oriented opportunities, programs, and services is identified as a key goal in the Master Plan. Embedded within this goal are objectives to ensure facilities are accessible, and that programming is offered for a people with a range of needs. Additional recommendations address the need to promote programming information in an accessible manner.

**Accessibility Improvements**

Best practices and accessibility standards can offer additional insight into how to improve facility accessibility and ensure important aspects are not overlooked (e.g., parking and drop-off, presence of accessible washrooms, exterior pathways, wayfinding and signage, etc.). Actions taken to ensure facility accessibility should reference the following documents:

- CSA B651-18 Standard – Accessible Design for the Built Environment

- Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification

As the Facilities Master Plan also speaks to the accessibility of informational materials, the following best practice outlines standards for accessible information communication:

> ### BEST PRACTICE
>
> **What is it?**
> Ontario was the first province to develop accessibility legislation with their Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005). The law applies to government, private sectors, and non-profits, and sets standards for employment, transportation, communications, the design of public spaces, and customer service.
>
> **Communications and Information Standard**
>
> The Communication standard requires employers to provide the public with accessible information. The AODA website provides examples on how to comply with legislated requirements. More in-depth information can be found in municipal document guidelines, such as Peterborough's Guide to Accessible Documents (2018). The guide provides insight on technical choices that can be made when creating and publishing accessible documents:
>
> - Font type, size, and formatting
>
> - Document colour and contrast
>
> - Document navigation, and use of styles
>
> A comprehensive standard for online documents is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which sets an internationally recognized standard.

## Diversity & Inclusion Community Plan (2017)

**Summary**

The 2017 Diversity Plan sets out six priorities derived from community consultation and public engagement. The associated workbook sets out possible partners, measurements, and actions to be taken between 2017 and 2022 that will support RMWB in being a welcoming, inclusive community that celebrates diversity.

**Accessibility Components**

Accessibility is closely interwoven with diversity and inclusion and emerges most clearly in Priority 6: Reduce Barriers to Resources & Services. The following goals are identified:

- Increase physical accessibility of facilities
- Create inclusive spaces and services
    - o Conduct physical accessibility scan
    - o Promote Universal Design standards
    - o Implement regular accessibility checks

**Areas for Improvement**

The Diversity and Inclusion Community Plan includes Priority 1: Effective communication of information to and Within the Community. This priority sas a desired outcome of making communication more inclusive.

- Review this action item with an eye to including accessible communication methodology (see best practice profiled above for guidance).

## Parks Master Plan (2019)

**Summary**

The Parks Master Plan (2019) guides investment and planning for RMWB's open spaces, ensuring strategic development and management of municipal parkland through to 2030. The Plan identifies gaps within the existing parks system, such as communities that require additional parkland, parks in need of upgrades, and additional park amenities. Key priorities outlined in the plan include:

- Enhancing urban parkland
- Expanding the quantity and enhancing the quality of rural parkland
- Implementing innovative practices for parks operations and maintenance.

**Accessibility Components**

The Plan has a limited definition of accessibility and is mostly concerned with resident access to parkland (i.e., community members have parks within a 10-minute walk, and have access to waterfront). The Plan's general recommendations only include principles of accessible design in two areas:

1. Recommendation to audit all playgrounds to ensure "Access for All" (different ages / abilities)
2. Consider integrating Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) in park design

Several additional accessibility recommendations occur throughout the document but are only made for specific parks, and not as overarching recommendations. This document could benefit from high-level accessibility recommendations that address the development or retrofitting of trail networks, wayfinding, and the presence of universal washrooms.

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### BEST PRACTICE

**What is it?[8]**

The Rick Hansen Foundation provides guidance on the creation of accessible trails, playgrounds, universal washrooms and wayfinding, which can be supplemented by Alberta's Barrier Free Design Guide (2017) which has an entire section devoted to creating accessible outdoor spaces.

**Areas for Improvement**

- Design of trailheads, and accessible paths - considers surface treatments to support users with mobility devices and strollers; path slope, width, and presence of rest areas; and means of creating access across different terrains (e.g., beach, boardwalks, etc.).

- Signage and wayfinding – considers elements like signage prevalence and interpretability (symbols, contrast, tactile components)

- Type and layout of outdoor eating spaces – ensuring seating options are varied and have room for mobility devices

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## Urban Forest Strategy (2019)

**Summary**

The Urban Forest Strategy (2019) outlines recommendations to ensure the long-term health and vitality of RMWB's trees and forests. Although the strategy refers to urban forests, its principles apply throughout the region, and include any tree on public land. The Strategy sets principles, objectives, and recommendations to ensure RMWB's forests are prepared to meet future challenges associated with wildfires, development pressures, ongoing maintenance needs, pest and disease control, and the impacts of climate change.

**Accessibility Components**

Urban forest strategies do not typically include an accessibility focus as they generally prioritize the health and maintenance of trees and are less focused on interactions with humans. This Strategy does not include any accessibility-related policies.

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[8] The Rick Hansen Foundation provides several resources, such as a checklist for accessible trails, general considerations for beaches & playgrounds, as well as a comprehensive ratings survey that is the foundation of their accessibility certification.

## BEST PRACTICE

**What is it?**

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Foundation developed comprehensive guidelines that present best practices in universal design on creating accessible environments for people with visual impairments. The guide, Clearing Our Path (2016), provides insight on exterior and interior design elements including landscaping. And although the guide's focus is on individuals with visual impairments, many of the suggestions have cross benefits for people with balance challenges, and mobility needs.

**Areas for Improvement**

A recommendation included in the Urban Forest Strategy calls for the development of a Tree Policy that will provide guidance on tree planting, species selection, and tree maintenance. The creation of this Policy should include a review of landscaping suggestions presented in Clearing Our Path and other best practices to ensure suggested species do not create accessibility challenges in the streetscape:

- Thorny plants can catch on clothing and create disorientation, interfering with the path of travel.

- Poisonous plants can be harmful if ingested by a service animal.

- Plants with large seed pods or fruit can create obstacles and tripping hazards in the path of travel.

## Wood Buffalo Age-Friendly Work Plan (2021)

**Summary**

The Wood Buffalo Age-Friendly Work Plan is a living document that outlines goals through to 2024 that will make the RMWB more accessible to older adults. The Plan sets a vision of aging with dignity throughout the region and was developed by the Advisory Committee on Aging (ACoA) based on findings from a 2017 Age-Friendly Needs Assessment. Proposed actions are organized across 8 domains including housing, transportation, and outdoor spaces and buildings. A key component of this Work Plan is the development of universal design principles, and inclusion of a comprehensive accessibility audit to identify building retrofit needs.

Age-Friendly Needs Assessment (2017)

The results of the Age-Friendly Needs Assessment heavily influence the Age-Friendly Work Plan as it outlines gaps where seniors' needs do not meet age-friendly standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO). The Assessment was completed as part of the process to include RMWB in WHO's global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. Recurring accessibility issues identified in the assessment include:

- Communications – Need for information to be disseminated and presented in an accessible manner
- Social participation – Need for civic engagement, social inclusion, and opportunities geared to people with disabilities
- Transportation – Need more transportation options for a range of abilities, and ones in rural areas
- Housing – Need more accessible housing and access to homecare services
- Outdoor spaces and buildings – Need more accessible public washrooms and streetscapes to be better designed for accessibility

**Accessibility Components**

Generally – the Work Plan's approach to accessibility is comprehensive and includes

- Access to information and accessible communication

- Accessible housing options that enable ageing in place

- Improvements to public transportation options that improve mobility of older adults

- A call for universal designs principles to be integrated into outdoor spaces including the development of public washrooms, rest spaces, and park pathways / trails.

## Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures (2021)

**Summary**

This document creates a consistent construction standard for all work completed in the RMWB, extending to utilities, roads and open spaces. The manual guides developers, consultants, contractors, and Municipal staff in the planning, preparation, and execution of public and private infrastructure projects.

**Accessibility Components**

The document specifically calls for accessible and barrier-free design to be considered in the construction of parking lots, parks, and playgrounds and directs users to refer to several accessibility standards:

- National Building Code of Canada

- Barrier-Free Design Guide (2008) – Government of Alberta Safety Codes Council

- CAN/CSA Z1614:20 Annex H – Playground equipment and surfacing

**Areas for Improvement**

The Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures manual currently refers to an out-dated edition of the Barrier-Free Design Guide and incorporates accessibility standards only in isolated sections. The manual could benefit from a comprehensive review to ensure alignment with current accessibility best-practices.

While construction works must be consistent with the National Building Code, best practices such as those presented below, provide innovative ways of addressing barriers in the built environment that disadvantage people with accessibility needs.

- CSA B651-18 Standard – Accessible Design for the Built Environment

- Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification

## Additional Resource

RMWB has a few resources, websites, and publications that provide additional guidance around accessibility.

**Playground Safety & Accessibility**

RMWB's Parks Team ensures playgrounds comply with the Canadian Playground Safety Institute standards. These standards focus on safety as well as accessibility features and ensure playspaces are designed to have accessible surfaces, equipment, and routes of play.

## BEST PRACTICE

**What is it?**
Creating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Playbook of Considerations and Strategies (2022)

- Developed by Canadian disability and activity researchers to provide strategies on the creation of accessible playgrounds and associated environments.

- The Playbook does not set standards for safety and accessibility but rather identifies common gaps and issues that are overlooked when developing inclusive playgrounds. The Playbook pulls from accessibility standards such as CSA, ADA, and the Rick Hansen Foundation to present recommendations.

**Areas for Improvement**
Often, the development of accessible playgrounds focuses on limited user needs (i.e., wheelchair users) and accessibility features (e.g., type of play surface, physical equipment). The Playbook considers broader accessibility applications:

- **Ensure accessible parking spots are present** – consider the entire route of travel to the playground including the proximity to and number of available accessible parking spaces.

- **Communicate accessibility features to users** – on-site playground communications (e.g., QR codes, informational panels, site maps) can be used to share information with families about site features and support spatial navigation.

- **Plan for weather / different seasons** – considering different temperatures and weather conditions not only expands the use of a playground, but makes it more accessible for people with medical conditions or specific medications that may be sensitive to disruption from the elements.

- **Design for a range of users** - play equipment is varied and considers both physical and sensory abilities and is offers different levels of challenges.

**URBAN**SYSTEMS MEMORANDUM

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## 4.0    WHAT ARE OTHER MUNICIPALITIES DOING?

Municipalities have been recognizing and addressing gaps in accessibility legislation for decades. A common solution is to enact dedicated accessibility or disability-related policy. Sometimes this policy has a specific application such as St John's 1994 enactment of their Leisure Services for Persons with Disability Policy which focuses on barriers users may encounter accessing recreational programs. And sometimes, policy development has more wide-ranging accessibility objectives such as Montreal's Strategy to Support Universal Accessibility Actions (2021-2022) which identifies four areas of action: architecture and urban planning; programs, services and employment; communications; awareness and training.

In the absence of guiding provincial accessibility legislation, municipal accessibility policy can link to other higher levels of legislation that explicitly include disability rights such as Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms or Human Rights Act as well as other accessibility standards such as the National Building Code of Canada and CSA B651-12.

Through the development of dedicated accessibility policy municipalities can determine the barriers to accessibility they wish to address. Some target areas municipalities may wish to consider for the development of accessibility policy include those outlined in the Accessible Canada Act:

- Buildings and public spaces
- Service design and program delivery
- Employment
- Transportation
- Information and communication technologies
- Other forms of communication
- Procurement

### 4.1    MUNICIPAL SCAN

In the absence of overarching provincial accessibility legislation, Albertan municipalities have taken different approaches to the need to address accessibility in their communities. The following table provides a high-level overview of existing accessibility plans and policies at municipalities that are similar in population size or density to RMWB. As RMWB is a unique municipality, characterized by an immense land base that contains both a dense urban centre and a rural population, one-to-one comparisons to other municipalities are difficult. A range of urban to rural municipalities are presented below:[9]

| | Population | Population Density (per km$^2$) | Existing Accessibility Plan / Policy / Guide | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strathcona County | 95,597 | 84.8 | Yes | Diversity & Inclusion Policy (2020) commits to removing barriers to accessibility. No associated accessibility plans have been developed yet. |
| St. Albert | 68,232 | 1,426 | Yes | The City's Universal Access Plan focuses on accessibility of the built environment and transportation. |

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[9] For reference, RMWB's 2021 population is 72,326 with a density of 1.2 people per km$^2$

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grande Prairie | 64,141 | 483 | Yes | Have an accessibility incentive policy to fund improvements to public commercial spaces |
| Medicine Hat | 63,271 | 565 | No | Have an accessibility statement but no accompanying plans or documents |
| County of Newell | 7,465 | 1.3 | No | -- |

Although several municipalities listed above have a policy, plan, or guide that recognizes accessibility, their scope is limited. Of the municipalities reviewed that are similar in population size and density to RMWB, Strathcona County is the only municipality with a policy in place that recognizes accessibility, and St. Albert is the only municipality with an accessibility plan.

Without an overarching accessibility policy, resulting accessibility plans or programs can be piecemeal and lack alignment with the priority areas outlined by the Accessible Canada Act. The remainder of this section presents approaches other municipalities or cities in Canada are taking to address accessibility. The profiles below have been selected based on their alignment with federal priority areas.[10]

## Edmonton – Accessibility for People with Disabilities (2019)[11]

City Council passed Edmonton's Accessibility for People with Disabilities policy in 2019 committing the city to pursuing objectives related to increasing the level of access for people with disabilities through a universal design approach.

Without overarching provincial legislation, the policy seeks alignment with principles presented in the Accessible Canada Act and United nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Edmonton's Accessibility for People with Disabilities policy and corresponding Corporate Accessibility Plan identify six action areas that broadly align with the target areas identified in the Accessible Canada Act (see table below).

| Built Environment | Service Design | Employment | Transportation | Information & Technology | Communications | Procurement |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ | - |

The Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy is implemented through the Corporate Accessibility Plan (CAP) which is updated every three years. The CAP identifies over 70 accessibility actions that will be undertaken by City departments in conjunction with guidance from the Corporate Accessibility Working Committee. These actions contained in the CAP align with other municipal planning documents including:

- Edmonton's Strategic Plan

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[10] A policy scan by the University of Alberta completed in 2022 identified 27 municipal policies that focus on universal accessibility and design. Edmonton and Victoria were selected from this list as being two recent examples, and Whistler was added as its Accessibility Action Plan was recently recognized with an award by the Planning Institute of BC for excellence in policy planning.

[11] Accessed here: https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PoliciesDirectives/C602.pdf?cb=1689775702

- The City Plan

- Diversity and Inclusion Framework

Actions outlined in the CAP related to the built environment direct the Municipality to increase awareness and construction of buildings and spaces in compliance with the City of Edmonton's Access Design Guide – a document that exceeds the requirements of the 2019 National Building Code with regards to universal design principles.

## Victoria – Accessibility & Inclusion Policy (2020)

Victoria's Accessibility and Inclusion Policy was passed by City Council in 2020 and serves as guiding policy to ensure City planning, design and improvements are committed to identifying and addressing systemic barriers to inclusion and equitable access for people with disabilities. Policy implementation is enabled through the creation of the Accessibility Framework which embeds a universal design approach in the creation of accessibility goals and targets. The Framework draws guidance from international and national accessibility legislation including the Accessible Canada Act and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Victoria's Accessibility Framework identifies three focus areas with associated goals and priorities to guide departmental action. These three focus areas broadly align with the target areas identified in the Accessible Canada Act (see table below).

| Built Environment | Service Design | Employment | Transportation | Information & Technology | Communications | Procurement |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | - |

Goals related to accessibility of the built environment are broad and call for the systemic removal of barriers in public parks and open spaces, municipal facilities, and transportation infrastructure. The City has also completed Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification ratings for 22 municipal buildings as part of existing efforts toward accessibility.

## Whistler – Accessibility Action Plan (2022)[12]

Whistler developed the Accessibility Action Plan (AAP) to remove barriers for residents and visitors within the Resort Municipality of Whistler. The AAP was endorsed by Council in 2022 and sets a high-level policy that embeds principles of universal design, inclusion, and diversity within the municipal framework. Crucially, Whistler's AAP links with other accessibility guidance; it:

-  Identifies actions that advance accessibility policy directions of their Official Community Plan (BC's version of Municipal Development Plans)

- Addresses requirements of the Accessible British Columbia Act

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[12] Accessed here: https://www.whistler.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/September-6-2022-Whistler-Accessibility-Action-Plan.pdf

Whister's Accessibility Action Plan (AAP) identifies six action areas that broadly align with the target areas identified in the Accessible Canada Act (see table below).

| Built Environment | Service Design | Employment | Transportation | Information & Technology | Communications | Procurement |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| √ | √ | √ | √ | - | √ | √ |

The AAP sets actions for each of the six areas and identifies staff departments as well as external agencies (e.g., Federation of Canadian Municipalities) that will be integral to meeting their timelines. Anticipated actions to meet goals for improved accessibility of the built environment include:

- Being Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certified for new municipal facilities and pedestrian environments

- Examine existing accessibility retrofit programs and increase awareness of accessibility retrofit subsidy

- Explore standards to guide accessible housing development

Changes outlined in the AAP will involve the development of new policy and updates to existing policy to ensure alignment with overarching accessibility goals.

## 4.2    ACCESSIBLE DESIGN STANDARDS

Following the review of municipal approaches to accessibility policy, two communities emerged that demonstrate how local governments can approach targeted accessibility improvements to the built environment: St. Albert and Calgary.

- **St. Albert** – The Universal Access Plan was developed by St. Albert to ensure municipally-owned buildings and public spaces are accessible for people of all abilities. A component of the plan was the identification of accessible design standards that could be adopted to guide interior and exterior building design requirements. The City of Burlington's Accessible Design Standards is the recommended option.

- **Calgary** – The City of Calgary developed their own Access Design Standard to guide construction of buildings on City-owned land. The standards embed universal design principles, referencing other standards like CSA B651-12 and CNIB's "Clearing Our Path" and exceed the standard for accessibility set by the Alberta Building Code. The City has worked to update the Standards following new editions to the province's Building Code.

These examples show how municipalities can develop their own practices (or adopt existing standards) to meet the needs of their communities.

# 5.0 NEXT STEPS

The review of municipal approaches to accessibility reveals that municipalities are tailoring their methods to align with their unique community needs and priorities. Some municipalities are choosing to address the broad spectrum of priority areas outlined by the Accessible Canada Act, while others are taking a focused approach and homing in on specific areas like the built environment. The following recommendations recognize that RMWB is seeking to comprehensively improve access to the built environment. This focus requires renovations to existing buildings and considerations for designing future buildings.

**Renovations**

The RMWB has already initiated several actions to increase accessibility of existing spaces, such as through the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program and building audits. To ensure these actions have ongoing relevance it will be important to:

- Monitor incentive programs and identify additional funding opportunities. Examining the effects of funding will be key to determining obstacles for enrollment, successful areas for resource allocation, and desired support areas.

- Develop a strategy to prioritize recommendations from the accessibility audit. The strategy would identify key areas to allocate capital investment and staff capacity.

**Future Buildings**

When considering future buildings, the RMWB should contemplate adopting universal design principles into engineering standards to meet a higher level than that set by the existing Alberta Building Code. When considering developing design standards the following considerations are important:

- Working with RMWB community members with lived or living experiences of disability to best identify common obstacles and desired standards

- Compliance with the existing Alberta Building Code to ensure technical requirements are met

- Collaboration with planning and development staff who are familiar with development applications and major City projects.

- Review design standards operating in other municipalities or provinces that exceed minimum building code requirements to determine approaches that could be appropriate for RMWB.

Recognizing that the RMWB is operating within a broader national (Accessible Canada Act) and provincial (no guiding legislation) context, its important that the municipality be cognizant that policy and legislation can change relatively quickly. However, RMWB has consistently demonstrated leadership within the accessibility space. By continuing to take steps toward improving the built environment and adopting universal design principles, RMWB will continue to move towards its overarching goal of being a welcoming place for people of diverse ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

APPENDIX B

BUILDING ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST

# Building Audit

## Approach & Entrance

Barriers to access can exist before people even enter a business. It is important to consider how customers and guests access a business whether by foot, transit, or vehicle.

| Approach & Entrance | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is there a designated accessible parking spot?** The spot should be close to the building's entrance, clearly marked by vertical signage and painted markings using the internationally-recognized handicap symbol. A stall width of 2,600 mm minimum is desired alongside a side access aisle that is at least 2,000 mm wide. A parking block or wheel stop should also be present. | | |
| **Is there an appropriate number of accessible parking spaces?** Between 1-3 spots per 50 spaces is desired. More spaces may be desirable depending on the building's intended use (e.g., hospital, healthcare services, senior's housing, place of worship, etc.). | | |

| Approach & Entrance | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is there a transition feature between the parking lot and pathway to the building entrance?** Curb ramps (curb cuts) can be used to reduce challenges produced by any level change. These features should also be present adjacent to accessible parking spots. Curb ramps should be designed with tactile attention indicators at the base of the ramp, a turning space of 1,390 mm X 1,390 mm at the top of the ramp, and a running slope between 1:15 and 1:10 (6.6% - 10%). The curb ramp should be a minimum of 1,500 mm wide and match the width of the crosswalk / access aisle where possible. | | |
| **Is there a clear path of travel through the parking lot?** For routes where pedestrians regularly cross parking lots to access the building's entrance, paths should be clearly marked with high-contrast paint, tactile pavers, and vertical signage. | | |
| **Is there a defined path from the street, closest transit stop, and parking area to the business entrance?** The path should be made of a firm, slip-resistant surface, and be level, without cracks. A path with a width of 1,600 mm allows multiple users to pass each other. | | |
| **Are there low points in the path of travel that could fill with rain or ice?** Level paths and drainage features (e.g., storm sewer grates, rain gardens) can help reduce pooling. Drainage features should be located off the path of travel and any grates should have a maximum opening of 13 mm. | | |

| Approach & Entrance | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is the path of travel kept clear in the winter through the use of plows / shovels and sand?** Salt can be sensitive on service animals' paws, and where possible, sand is preferred. | | |
| **Does landscaping or street furnishing (e.g., sandwich signs, benches) create obstacles in the path of travel to the business?** Obstacles can occur at a range of heights (overhead as well as tripping hazards) and should be placed outside the path of travel, or if not-possible, be high-contrast. Any headroom clearance should be provided up to 2,050 mm free from overhanging objects. | | |
| **Is the exterior access route level with the door entrance?** There should be no gap, or step up, required to enter the building. A threshold higher than 6 mm should be beveled and be a maximum of 13 mm. | | |
| **Do entrance stairs have major accessibility features like handrails, high-contrast slip-resistant nosing, and tactile warning strips?** Handrails should be rounded, easy to grasp, and not stick out at the end (where they can catch purses and clothing). Risers should be closed to prevent feet from being caught in the open space. Tactile attention indicators should be placed at the top of stairs in a high-contrast colour as well as on any landings present. | | |

| Approach & Entrance | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If stairs are present to access the building entrance, is a ramp or lift option provided?** Desired slopes for ramps are 1:20 ratio or 5% (ideal) and not steeper than 1:12 ratio or 8.3%. Ramps should be made from a slip-resistant material, offer rounded hand-rails and have colour contrast strips at the top and bottom. Long ramps should be interspersed with landings for rest and all ramps should offer edge protection. Ramps should provide access to the same entrance as the stairs (e.g., not a rear, or back entrance). | | |
| **Is there a level landing at the door entrance?** Doorways that open onto ramps or slopes create challenging conditions for people with mobility aids when entering and exiting a building. Level landings with clear maneuvering space on both sides of a door are also required to help users enter and exit buildings. | | |
| **Are the entrance doors clearly marked?** From a distance, the building entrance should be easy to locate (e.g., the entrance contrasts with the surrounding building - this can be done through material choice, colour contrast, and landscaping). | | |

| Approach & Entrance | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is the building's signage easy to find and interpret?**<br>Signs should accurately identify the name of the facility, address, indicate the entrance location, and be legible at a distance (e.g., simple fonts, high-contrast colours). Section 4.6 of CSA B651:23 provides more information on signage design. | | |
| **Is the building entrance power-operated?**<br>Door-opening controls should be easy to locate beside the door, should not require much force to push, and are at an accessible height for a range of users (e.g., children, people who are seated). | | |
| **For entrances that are not power-operated, is the door easy to open?**<br>The door should not be so heavy that it is difficult to open or could bump someone while closing. Different styles of doorknob can affect someone's ability to easily open a door. Push panels, D-style openers, and lever handles are all preferable to standard rounded doorknobs which are difficult for some people to grip. | | |
| **Is the clear width of the entrance at least 850 mm?**<br>This width permits comfortable access by users with mobility devices and / or service animals. | | |
| **Is the entrance and path of travel to the business well lit?**<br>Automatic lighting that is activated at dusk creates a safer environment. | | |

# Washrooms

Providing an accessible washroom is critical to ensuring the dignity and independence of building users.
People may decide not to go to certain buildings or stay very long if they know there is no accessible washroom.

| Washrooms | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Does the building have directional signage indicating to users where they can find the washroom?**<br>Directional signage should be written in clear font with high-contrast colours, and easy to spot from areas of high-traffic. | | |
| **Does the washroom have appropriately mounted signage?**<br>Signs should be mounted beside the door frame at a height suitable for a range of users (1,500 mm from the floor to the centre of the sign) and contain both Braille and tactile characters. Signs placed on doors create hazards for users trying to read them. | | |
| **Is the clear width of the entrance to the washroom at least 850 mm?**<br>This width permits comfortable access by users with mobility devices and / or service animals. | | |

| Washrooms | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Can the entrance door to the washroom be opened and closed easily?** <br> Accessible washrooms can be power-operated. For those that are not, the door should not be too heavy to open, and the handle hardware should be of a style easy for people with limited mobility in their hands (e.g., lever-style). | | |
| **If the washroom contains urinals, is one available at a lower height?** <br> Stall-type urinals that provide coverage all the way to the floor serve a range of users. For urinals that are hung on the wall, the bottom portion of the well should be no higher than 430 mm. | | |
| **Is there an accessible stall with a door that opens outwards?** <br> If the washroom contains multiple stalls, at least one should be large enough to accommodate a wheelchair. | | |
| **Is the toilet properly installed and the right style choice?** <br> Toilets in accessible stalls or washrooms should have the lever on the 'transfer' side of the toilet (the area where someone moves from their chair to the seat). The toilet should also have a solid back to provide the user with added support (e.g., a toilet tank or lid). | | |

| Washrooms | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is the toilet paper within easy reach from the toilet and not covered by the dispenser?**<br>Open-roll style toilet paper dispensers are best for people with limited mobility in their hands. | | |
| **Is a grab bar properly installed beside the toilet?**<br>'L' style grab bars offer users support as they move from a standing to a seated position. The installation of the grab bar should not interfere with access to the toilet paper. Check that the grab bar has not been installed the wrong way around (the low point of the grab bar should be the portion closest to the toilet). | | |
| **Is the lock on the stall door an appropriate style for easy opening?**<br>Test opening the lock with a closed fist. Turn-style locks are more difficult to open for people with limited mobility in their hands than push-pull style latches. | | |
| **Does the accessible stall have any additional amenities?**<br>Coat hooks at an accessible height (maximum 1,200 mm) and outlets (commonly used to charge medical devices) offer users additional support. | | |

| Washrooms | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is the accessible washroom (or stall) equipped with an emergency alarm?** Emergency call systems that offer both audible and visual signals are important inside washrooms to alert people in case of emergency. Additionally, an alarm call button should be located within the accessible stall so users can alert others if they need assistance (e.g., in case of a fall). Call button placement should be beside the toilet at 300 mm. | | |
| **Does the design of the washroom offer colour contrast between the floor and wall?** Floor and wall coverings that are too similar in colour / pattern / texture may obscure a sense of depth for some users. Patterns should be simple. | | |
| **Is knee clearance provided at sinks and plumbing enclosed or otherwise protected?** Wheelchair users should be able to place their knees under counter-tops as they wash their hands. Ensuring plumbing is not exposed prevents users without feeling in their extremities from possible burns. See figure 43a) in the CSA B651:23 standard for additional direction on knee clearance in a washroom. | | |

| Washrooms | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is there a change station available?**<br>Stations should be present in all washrooms regardless of gender and be placed at an accessible height. Baby change stations should be present in all washrooms regardless of gender. Adult change tables are desirable in universal washrooms and should have a horizontal grab bar. All change tables should be mounted at between 500-900 mm and should be installed so they do not interfere with access to the toilet. | | |
| **Are washroom accessories easy to use and placed near the sink?**<br>Soap, paper towel dispensers, and trash cans should be automated or usable with a closed fist. Angled, or floor to ceiling mirrors provide use for all users regardless of height or seated position. | | |

## Building Interior

It is important that building users can access all parts of a building intended for their use.
Often, design features of a building's interior can be disorienting or create obstacles for building users.

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Does the building's accessible entrance provide access to all public spaces?** The primary access entrance should provide users access to all areas they are expected to use or enable access to elevators for other areas of the building. | | |
| **Is the floor material firm, slip-resistant, and anti-glare?** Lighting can sometimes create glare on polished, shiny, or reflective flooring that can be disorienting for people with depth-perception challenges or vision differences. | | |
| **Are carpets flat (especially along the edges) and do they have a short pile?** Area rugs and carpets can curl at the corners and create tripping hazards. Long pile carpets (anything taller than 13 mm) can also cause difficulty for people with mobility accommodation needs. Special attention should be paid in winter to ensure that entrance carpets are not stacked to an inaccessible height, and are placed immediately near doorways to prevent slipping. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Does the design of the interior offer colour contrast between the floor and wall?**<br>Floor and wall coverings that are too similar in colour / pattern / texture may obscure a sense of depth for some users. Patterns should be simple. | | |
| **Is building lighting sufficient to illuminate interior circulation routes and signage?**<br>It is important to strike a balance between lighting that is not too bright or harsh (that it creates glare) and lighting that is not too dim that it makes it difficult to identify possible obstacles. Lighting that casts strange shadows can also be disorienting for some building users. | | |
| **Is the interior circulation route intuitive and does it offer a clear path to the desired destinations (e.g., reception desk, check-out counters)?**<br>Paths through aisles / service areas should be at least 1,000 mm wide (850 mm is okay for short distances, and 1,700 mm is preferred), easy to navigate and have areas for wheelchairs to turn around (1,700 mm diameter or T-shaped turning space). | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Are there any objects protruding into the path of travel?** Common objects include signs, fire extinguishers, and drinking fountains. If the object projects more than 100 mm into the path of travel, and can't be moved, add colour contrast to highlight it. | | |
| **Are there tripping hazards in the path of travel?** Features that could offer unstable footing are considered tripping hazards (e.g., transition spaces between different flooring types if gaps are left, step-ups). Hazards that cannot be removed should be highlighted through the use of colour contrast. | | |
| **Is directional information signage posted near the entrance?** For large spaces, signage should support user navigation and also identify key egress routes in case of emergency. Signage should follow universal design conventions like having a combination of raised text, symbols, and high-contrast sans serif font. Any modular furniture should have locking features so they can be stabilized when in use. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Are all interior doorways a minimum clear width of 850 mm with appropriate hardware?** <br> The door should not be so heavy that it is difficult to open or could bump someone while closing. Push panels, 'D' style openers, and lever handles are all preferable to standard doorknobs which are difficult for some people to grip. | | |
| **Do interior doorway thresholds offer minimal level change?** <br> Door thresholds should be no greater than 13 mm (and be beveled if over 6 mm high) to enable easy navigation by people with limited mobility. Where level changes exist and can't be changed, consider adding ramps or, at minimum, colour contrast nosing. | | |
| **Are the frames of the internal doorways colour contrasted with the walls?** <br> High colour contrast helps people better identify the location of internal doors. | | |
| **Is there an assortment of furniture types?** <br> Different design features on seating types (e.g., back support, arm rests, heel clearance, padded seats) can make them more accessible for a range of users. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is seating available where people are expected to wait or need rest breaks?** <br> Lobbies, entryways, service lines, and long hallways are areas where people could benefit from having seating. | | |
| **Are seating areas designed to accommodate someone with a wheelchair?** <br> Tables should have enough knee clearance to enable a person in a wheelchair to sit at them, while chairs and tables should be movable to provide more flexibility to meet different user needs. Tables that provide knee clearance to a depth of 480 mm and a height of 685 mm minimum enable users with wheelchairs to comfortably sit. See figure 56a) in the CSA B651:23 standard for additional dimensions on knee clearance. | | |
| **Do internal building stairs have major accessibility features like handrails, high-contrast slip-resistant nosing, and tactile warning strips?** <br> Handrails should be rounded, easy to grasp, and not stick out at the end (where they can catch purses and clothing). Risers should be closed to prevent feet from being caught in the open space. Tactile attention indicators should be placed at the top of stairs in a high-contrast colour as well as on any landings present. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If stairs exist within the building, is a ramp, lift, or elevator option provided?**<br>Desired slopes for ramps are 1:20 ratio or 5% (ideal) and not steeper than 1:12 ratio or 8.3%. Ramps should be made from a slip-resistant material, offer rounded hand-rails and have colour contrast strips at the top and bottom. Long ramps should be interspersed with landings for rest. | | |
| **If the building has an elevator, is the location easy to find from the main entrance?**<br>Signage at the entrance can be provided to help users navigate to an elevator if it is not clearly visible in the lobby / entry area. | | |
| **If the building has an elevator, does it incorporate accessibility features?**<br>Key features include elevator buttons mounted at an accessible height (max 1,200 mm), the presence of Braille and raised tactile numbers on elevator buttons, colour contrast between the floor and elevator walls, audible announcements identifying the floor (if more than one), and the presence of visual and auditory alarm system in case of emergency. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If people are expected to access products / information from shelves, are the most popular items placed at an accessible height?**<br>Installing shelves or moving items to an accessible height (between 400 and 1,200 mm) can provide users with greater independence if they do not have to ask for help retrieving items. | | |
| **Are all accessories (coat hooks, light switches, electric plugs, fire alarm pulls etc.) at an accessible height?**<br>Users should be able to use these features without straining to reach. A maximum height of 1,200 mm is standard for most operating controls, while electric outlets should be around 400 mm to the centre of the panel. | | |
| **Do service counters or reception areas have a counter that offers a lower height option with knee clearance?**<br>Offering service at a range of heights helps ensure anyone can have access to face-to-face communication. For users who don't fit at a taller counter, it can be difficult to hear and properly receive information. Counters that provide knee clearance to a depth of 480 mm and a height of 685 mm minimum enable users with wheelchairs to comfortably sit. See figure 56a) in the CSA B651:23 standard for additional dimensions on knee clearance. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Do emergency exit routes consider access for a range of user types?** <br> In multi-storey buildings where users with mobility aids cannot use an elevator, there should be a plan for their evacuation. | | |
| **Does the alarm system include both auditory and visual components?** <br> Alert systems that combine flashing lights with alarm sounds bring awareness to a range of users in case of emergency. | | |

## Additional

Depending on the building's use, the following elements should also be examined.

| Additional | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Does the building include a quiet space that is clearly marked on building wayfinding?**<br>Low stimuli environments are useful for a range of people, from people looking to nurse babies, to people with neurodiversities, and people of different faith backgrounds. | | |
| **Are there alternative communication systems in place?**<br>Induction loops, for example, support people with hearing aids in challenging acoustic environments or places where it is important to hear what is going on. Other types of assistive listening systems include infrared systems, and radio frequency systems. The presence of these systems should be advertised with signage depicting standard accessibility pictograms. | | |
| **Is the building's navigation signage accessible for different users?**<br>Directory boards should be viewable from a seated position and include a combination of raised characters and symbols in addition to visual information. Any tactile information should be located within 1,200-1,500 mm. Signs can be placed higher than this if they are to be viewed from a distance (e.g., blade signage indicating the presence of a washroom). | | |

| Additional | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If the building has an intercom system is it accessible for different users?** Styles that combine raised buttons (with Braille markings), a screen, and auditory read-outs, support a range of users. | | |
| **Is the Point of Sale (POS) system usable by people with visual impairments?** Often, point of sale systems that are screen-based and do not have buttons, can be difficult for users with visual impairments who cannot read the screen prompts. POS systems with buttons help users navigate payment options easily. Sometimes screen-based options are sold with an accompanying tactile cover that can be used to modify the system for users with visual impairments. | | |
| **Does the cash register display information visually and auditorily?** The amount-owing should be readable from a range of heights and offer audible. | | |
| **If there is a menu, is it easy to read?** Menu boards should be at an accessible height for reading, while individual menus should have accessible font (large text, sans-serif, high contrast colours). Offering the menu online as a PDF (not as a photo) can help people with screen readers learn the menu items in advance. | | |

| Additional | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Are there strong scents or fragrances present in the building?**<br>Common sources of scented items include scented products, air fresheners, soaps, detergents, and perfumes. Replacing items with unscented versions and creating a fragrance free environment can improve air quality for building users and employees. | | |
| **If there is background music, is it low enough that people can clearly have conversations?**<br>People should not have to raise their voices or strain to hear over the music. | | |
| **Does the building / business state accessibility features on the website?**<br>People with accessibility accommodation needs often conduct research on a building before going to it for the first time to determine if it has an accessible entrance / washroom / menu. Advertising this information clearly on a website can provide more user confidence and promote awareness of the building's features. | | |
| **Are service animals considered?**<br>Accommodations could include seating in low-stimuli environments, and designated water dishes. | | |

APPENDIX C

EVENT ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST

# Event Audit

## Event Planning

In order to ensure an event will be accessible to the greatest number of people, it is necessary to embed an accessibility lens from the planning stage.

| Event Planning | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Have individuals with disabilities been invited to be part of the event planning team?** | | |
| **Have the accessibility requirements of presenters and attendees been asked about and planned for?** Considerations include the need for accessible room accommodation, presentation equipment, and dietary needs. | | |
| **Has event information been prepared to include messaging about equity and inclusion?** E.g. "We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals to engage fully. To be respectful of those with allergies and environmental sensitivities, we ask that you please refrain from wearing strong fragrances. For inquiries about accessibility or request specialized equipment, please contact XXX." | | |

| Event Planning | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Have staff / volunteers been trained on the presence of event accessibility features?** <br> Staff / volunteers should be able to answer questions and speak knowledgeably of any accessible components of the event. For example, staff should be able to direct attendees to accessible spaces (e.g., quiet room, different seating types, washrooms etc.) and ask attendees how they can provide any additional assistance. | | |
| **Have staff / volunteers been trained on how to speak to individuals with accessibility needs?** <br> It is important to ask if individuals require aid rather than make assumptions, and also important to direct questions to the individual rather to any companion who may be present. Person-first language should also be used to emphasize the person rather than the difference (e.g., a person with visual impairments rather than a blind person). | | |
| **Has an accessible website been designed to support participants in booking event tickets / accessing event information?** <br> Web Content Accessibility Guidelines create an international standard for website accessibility. Important considerations include high colour contrast, large text options, and speech-to-text compatibility. | | |

## Promotional Materials

Designing promotional materials to consider accessible best practices makes marketing materials more inclusive, and increases the likelihood that members of different disability demographics will be able to participate in the event.

| Promotional Materials | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Has the event been promoted using a variety of mediums?** Examples include printed advertisements, newspaper, social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok), and radio. | | |
| **Do the promotional materials embed principles of accessible design?** Materials should use high-contrast colours, colour palettes that consider forms of colour blindness, large sans-serif font, sentence-case text, and be written in plain language. Images should have descriptive captions, and essential information should not be placed in graphics (which cannot be read by assistive technology). | | |

| Promotional Materials | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Do videos include audio descriptions and captions?** | | |
| **Do the materials include information about accessible features?**<br>Important considerations include the presence of accessible washrooms, accommodations for service animals, and any assistive communications (e.g., interpreter, tech options). | | |
| **Do the materials provide a contact for accessibility-related questions?**<br>A designated staff member or volunteer should be made responsible for responding to requests for information. | | |

## Location & Entrance

The location of an event and how people are able to access it often determines if people are able to participate. This section should be completed in addition to the Approach and Entrance section of the Buildings checklist.

| Location & Entrance | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If transport links are provided (e.g., shuttle bus, taxi, ride share options) are they accessible?** Vehicle options should provide for a wheelchair. Transportation options that are equipped with wheelchair lifts / seating should be available prior-to, during, and after the event. Event times should be aligned with SMART bus operating hours to ensure attendees can get to and from the event reliably. | | |
| **Is the location of free parking evident, or have parking costs been advertised in advance of the event?** People with accessibility needs often also have lower incomes and need to be aware of any additional budget expenses. | | |
| **Have event planners checked the accessibility of available parking and egress routes?** Refer to the Approach & Entrance section of the Buildings Checklist. | | |

| Location & Entrance | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If entrance doors are not automatic, are they propped open?** | | |
| **Are any gates, turnstiles and openings wheelchair accessible?** | | |
| **Are registration tables offered at a height to accommodate people with wheelchairs?** <br> Tables should also have appropriate knee clearance. | | |
| **If a line is expected at the check-in area, are there seats available?** <br> Seats with armrests should be made available in areas where people are expected to wait. | | |

# Communication

Events involve sharing large amounts of information with participants, from event schedules and dining options, to conference presentations and event navigation. Ensuring information is transmitted comprehensively requires different approaches for different materials and abilities.

| Communication | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Is wayfinding signage present throughout the venue?** Event planners should conduct a walk-through to ensure there is signage to support navigation from parking / drop off to the venue, throughout the venue, and to major event spaces (rooms, dining hall, washrooms, registration, etc.). | | |
| **Does signage combine multiple accessibility features?** Because signage may be temporary it can be difficult to include Braille or raised tactile lettering, but other changes can be made such as using sans serif font in sentence case (using upper and lower case letters), using large text, having high colour contrast between the sign and letters, and including symbols and pictograms on the sign. | | |
| **If print materials are provided, is there a large print version?** Large print (greater than 14 point text) and sans-serif font are legible to most people. | | |

| Communication | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If print materials are provided, have they been made available in an online PDF?** <br> Screen readers and other assistive devices are used by people with visual impairments to access documents. | | |
| **Is a hearing enhancement system present to amplify sound to users?** <br> Depending on the event, selecting a space that provides induction loops can support hearing for people with hearing aids. Headphones and induction loop receivers can be provided to assist people without hearing aids. Other assistive listening devices can be made available upon request. | | |
| **Has a sign language interpreter been hired?** <br> If the event expects to cater to people with hearing loss or members of the Deaf community, it will be necessary to engage an interpreter. The interpreter should be provided a visible place on the stage that is well-lit and easy for people to see. | | |
| **If videos are being played, or the event has an online component, are captions provided?** <br> Many platforms offer auto captions, and although faulty, these can be better than having no-captions. | | |
| **Are name tags easy to use with a place for pronouns?** <br> Name tags should be easy to apply for people with dexterity issues. | | |

| Communication | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Are microphones provided to speakers and audience members (during question period)?** Even if people are confident about their ability to speak loudly enough without one, microphones should be used at all times so everyone can hear what is being said - by both the speaker, and audience members. | | |
| **Has seating been reserved near the presenter for people with auditory needs?** A position close to the presenter can help people who are hard of hearing, and also support lip reading by people who are deaf. | | |
| **Are auditory portions of the event available in written format?** Participants could receive written material at the registration / check-in desk. | | |
| **If there is background music, is it low enough that people can clearly have conversations?** People should not have to raise their voices or strain to hear over the music. | | |

## Catering & Food

Having access to appropriate food that meets dietary requirements not only influences people's perception of the success of an event, but also is a significant factor in making people feel included and comfortable.

| Catering & Food | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Are food stations, condiments, and cutlery all within easy reach?** Consider reaching from a seated position. The food service counter should also be at an accessible height for people in a wheelchair. | | |
| **Are drinking straws and cups with handles available?** Some people with dexterity needs may have these requirements for beverages. | | |
| **If food is self service, have staff / volunteers asked if people are in need of assistance?** Rather than single out people with disabilities, all people should be asked, and an attendant can be notified if help is needed. | | |
| **Has food been labeled with the key ingredients?** Whether on the menu or at the food service station, common allergens should be identified. | | |

| Catering & Food | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Have participants been given the opportunity to indicate a dietary restriction and / or allergen?**<br>It is important to ensure everyone can be assured that they will be able to eat. | | |
| **Are sugar-free and caffeine-free drink options available?**<br>A range of alternative sweeteners can also be provided for people who drink tea / coffee. Bendy straws and lightweight cups should be placed at wheelchair accessible height. | | |
| **Do food service and beverage stations have easy to read signage?**<br>Signage that combines pictograms and text is preferred. Font should use a mixture of upper and lower cases to help readers better distinguish between letters. Service attendees can be prepared to describe food to people with visual impairments. | | |
| **Does the food selection address a range of lifestyle choices, dietary restrictions, and religious observances?**<br>Vegetarian and gluten-free options should be provided. Depending on the demographic of the event, vegan, halal or Kosher food should also be provided. Food catering to these different needs should not cross-contaminate with other food options. | | |

## Event Space

As event spaces are often temporary and involve many moving pieces, event planners do not have the same margin for error as with more permanent structures where accessibility improvements can be made over time. An accessibility-focused walk through as well as completion of the washroom portion of the Building Checklist before the event can help catch potential oversights.

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **Are high traffic areas free from tripping hazards like wires and cables?** Areas with these types of tripping hazards should be off-limits to event attendees, or, if not possible, the wires should be fixed to the ground and highlighted through the use of colour contrast. | | |
| **Has a quiet space been identified and is clearly marked on event wayfinding?** Low stimuli environments are useful for a range of people, from people looking to nurse babies, to people with neurodiversities, and people of different faith backgrounds. | | |
| **If there is a raised stage, is it accessible?** Ramps should be well-lit, and any stage edges should be well-defined or highlighted with colour contrast. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If a podium is expected to be used, is it height-adjustable?**<br>The microphone or podium should be usable by shorter individuals and people in wheelchairs. | | |
| **Is the event space evenly-lit?**<br>The venue should be well-lit to facilitate navigation, but should not be too harsh that it creates glare. | | |
| **Is the stage well-lit and disorienting lighting effects minimized?**<br>Strobe lighting should be avoided. | | |
| **Is the stage / projection screen visible from all seating?**<br>The presenter should be visible from the furthest seating area and the sides. | | |
| **Are the washrooms accessible?**<br>Refer to the washroom portion of the Buildings Checklist. | | |
| **Is there an assortment of furniture types?**<br>A variety of chair types (with and without armrests) should be provided. | | |
| **Is the event surface firm, level, and slip resistant?**<br>If the event is outdoors, pathways through the event space should be identified that avoid slopes, slippery areas, and loose surface materials (e.g., gravel, sand, tree roots). Any temporary surfaces that are installed should have good traction and minimize gaps. Gaps that can't be avoided should run perpendicular to the path of travel. | | |

| Building Interior | Yes / No | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| **If the event is outdoors, are there sheltered areas from the elements?**<br>Depending on the time of year, it may be necessary to provide structures to protect people from the sun / wind / rain, as well as cooling or heating stations (e.g., a misting station or outdoor heater). | | |
| **Is seating available where people are expected to wait or need rest breaks?**<br>Lobbies, entryways, service lines, and long hallways are areas where people could benefit from having seating. | | |
| **Are seating areas designed to accommodate someone with a wheelchair?**<br>Tables should have enough knee clearance to enable a person in a wheelchair to sit at them, while chairs and tables should be movable to provide more flexibility to meet different user needs. | | |
| **Do service animals have a designated toilet space?**<br>An outdoor space with clear access should be identified. If different service animal species are expected, provide multiple designated spaces (e.g., service ponies are prey animals and should not go in the same area as a service dog). | | |
| **Is there a drinking dish identified for service animals?**<br>Staff / volunteers should be prepared to provide water to service animals. | | |

# APPENDIX D

## ACCESSIBILITY SITE PLAN GUIDE

# Site Plan

## Accessibility Analysis
Regional Municipality Wood Buffalo

This document provides a series of questions to help the user develop an accessibility lens for examining site plans. This document works in tandem with the RMWB Buildings Checklist which references measurements from CSA B651:23 Accessible Design for the Built Environment – the national accessibility standard of Canada.

Four common elements of a site plan are covered by this document:

- Approach & Path of Travel
- Parking
- Entrance, Ramps & Stairs
- Landscaping, Lighting & Finishings

☛ Reference the "Approach & Entrance" section of the RMWB's Buildings Checklist for additional direction on design & measurements regarding **bolded checklist elements**



### Approach & Path of Travel
**Examine the approach from the street and parking lot to the building entrance.**
- ☐ Is the approach to the building's entrance intuitive?
  The path of travel should be obvious through both visual cues (building design, surface treatments, colour-contrast) and cane-detectible features (tactile elements, path edges).
- ☐ Does the design consider the shortest distance to the entrance while accounting for slope?
- ☐ Is the path of travel designed so it is free from obstacles (hydro poles, signage, decorative features, landscaping, etc.) both projecting into the path and pedestrian **headroom**?
- ☐ Is a defined furnishing zone provided adjacent to the path of travel?
  The amenity or furnishing zone should be differentiated from the path of travel using texture and colour. Seating areas off the path of travel should include a level vacant space which can be used by a person in a wheelchair, service animal, or used to store a mobility aid.
- ☐ Are pathways made of a material that will be stable and slip-resistant regardless of season?*
- ☐ Does the **path width** enable multiple users to pass each other?
- ☐ Are level changes minimized, and where necessary, include **ramps** next to **stairs**?
- ☐ Is the path of travel graded to prevent surface pooling and does it incorporate drainage features off the path of travel?
- ☐ Do plans include defined pedestrian crossings for sections of the approach that require crossing the street and/or parking lot?

*Brick pavers are a popular option that can trap snow and ice and become slippery in winter

### Parking
**How are pedestrians expected to navigate the parking lot? Consider movement between on-site parking, off-street parking, and nearby transit stops.**
- ☐ Do accessible parking spaces and drop-off zones lead to an accessible entrance?
- ☐ Are there an **appropriate number of accessible parking spaces** for the site's intended use(s)?
- ☐ Are accessible parking spots located close to the building's entrance?
  If there are multiple entrances users are expected to access, accessible parking spots should be located near each one.
- ☐ Are **curb ramps** present where pedestrians are expected to access the path of travel (at pedestrian crossings, access aisles)?
- ☐ Is there a defined drop off / loading zone with direct access to the building's entrance?
- ☐ Is the parking lot made of a material that will be stable and slip-resistant regardless of season?
- ☐ Is the parking lot graded to prevent surface pooling and does it incorporate **drainage features** off the path of travel?
- ☐ Do users have access to a protected pedestrian pathway and or access aisle that removes the need to travel behind/in front of vehicles?

### Entrance, Ramps & Stairs
**Half of all building entrances are expected to be accessible. Users should be able to easily-identify the building's entrance.**
- ☐ Is the entrance equitably designed so users with different needs can access the building together?
  Users with accessibility needs should not be penalized by having to use a side entrance, or a longer pathway to access the building's entrance.
- ☐ Does the entrance have a **level landing** and clear **manoeuvring space** before the door?
- ☐ Is the building entrance designed with a level **threshold** so users do not have to step up and into the building?
- ☐ If the building is not designed to be level with the path of travel, are accessibly-designed **ramps** and **stairs** included in the design?

### Landscaping, Lighting, & Finishings
**Consider who the site's intended users are and if the necessary features are in place to support them navigating the site simply and safely.**
- ☐ Are trees oriented to offer shade and wind protection to pedestrians?
- ☐ Does landscaping incorporate edge protection along paths of travel and is it cane detectible (e.g., raised curb, mulch edging)?
- ☐ Has space been considered for snow storage that will not impede the path of travel or accessible parking spots?
- ☐ Is lighting planned that will provide even coverage for pedestrians along paths of travel and for vehicles in parking lots?
- ☐ Are tactile <u>direction</u> indicators planned for areas where the path of travel is not clearly defined (e.g., no cane detectible features / edges)?
- ☐ Are tactile <u>attention</u> indicators planned for areas where the path of travel intersects with hazardous areas (e.g., stairs, ramps, curb ramps)?
- ☐ Have finishings been chosen that are glare-resistant, avoid strong (disorienting) patterns/colours, and offer contrast from their surroundings?