

2023-2026

Regional District of Nanaimo Accessibility Plan



Accessible trail in the Regional District of Nanaimo: Lighthouse Country Regional Trail

Table of Contents

About Our Plan	2
Introduction.....	4
What is Meant by Accessibility?	4
Key Terms	5
About the RDN.....	6
RDN Context and the Accessibility Journey.....	7
Parks	7
Recreation	8
Our Three-Year Plan	8
Accessibility, the Organization and Our People	9
Recommended Actions.....	9
Accessibility in Our Service Delivery, Spaces and Facilities	9
Recommended Actions.....	9
Accessibility in Our Public Information and Communications	10
Recommended Actions.....	10
Accessibility Plan Implementation and Monitoring	11
Recommended Actions.....	11
How to Give Feedback and Stay Connected.....	11

About Our Plan

As the inaugural Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Accessibility Committee, we are honoured to share our perspectives on accessibility barriers, opportunities and successes in RDN service delivery, public spaces and facilities to develop the first RDN Accessibility Plan (the Plan). The Accessibility Committee (the Committee) volunteers represent the voices and lived experiences of persons with disabilities, parents/guardians of persons with disabilities, persons representing disability-serving organizations and persons invested in continuously improving the accessibility and overall service experience of RDN residents and others.

The Committee includes representatives from Recreation Services, Transportation Services, Long Range Planning, Energy and Sustainability, Information Services and GIS, Finance, Parks Services, Regional and Community Utilities, Human Resources and Safety, Development and Emergency Services and Communications and Engagement.

Over several half-day and full-day workshops facilitated by Meaningful Access Consulting, the Committee considered accessibility barriers in our employment experience and reflected on barriers observed and shared in our experience serving the public. Recommended actions were then developed using the following principles: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination and universal design. These principles are consistent with the accessibility plan requirements for public sector organizations under the [Accessible British Columbia Act](#).

The RDN Accessibility Plan is an important milestone in the accessibility improvement journey with some of the most important work still to come. Feedback from the public on inclusion and accessibility will deepen our understanding of where we need to improve and guide updates to the Plan in three years. We are committed to championing and implementing the Plan.

Accessibility Committee

- Lisa Moilanen, Communications and Engagement
- Lisa Grant, Development and Emergency Services
- Tiffany Moore, Financial Services
- Sarah Nixon, Human Resources and Safety (Committee Chair)
- Jason Birch, Information Services and GIS
- Patricia Reynes, Long Range Planning, Energy and Sustainability
- Jessica Beaubier, Long Range Planning, Energy and Sustainability
- Kaitlin Fader, Parks Services
- Jennifer Hopewell, Recreation Services
- Beth McCue, Regional and Community Utilities
- Sheldon Racz, Regional and Community Utilities
- Derek Modeste, Transportation Services
- Dillan Eckel, Transportation Services
- Mandy Griffin, Transportation Services



2023 RDN Accessibility Committee

Back row (left to right) – Dillan Eckel, Sheldon Racz, Patricia Reyes, Jessica Beaubier and Lisa Grant

Front row (left to right) – Sarah Nixon, Lisa Moilanen, Kaitlyn Fader, Tiffany Moore and Denise Le Gal

Absent – Jason Birch, Jennifer Hopewell, Beth McCue, Derek Modeste, Mandy Griffin

RDN Staff Leads

- Sarah Nixon, Human Resources and Safety (and Committee Chair)
- Lisa Moilanen, Communications and Engagement (and Committee Member)
- Denise Le Gal, Human Resources and Safety

Consultants

- Karin Pasqua and Marco Pasqua of Meaningful Access Consulting

Introduction

In June 2021, the Government of British Columbia enacted the *Accessible British Columbia Act* (the Act). The Act aims to remove barriers and promote inclusion for people with disabilities by establishing standards across various aspects of community life. As a public sector organization under the Act, the RDN must create an Accessibility Committee, a three-year Accessibility Plan and a community feedback mechanism.

The RDN's Accessibility Plan will guide the organization's accessibility and inclusion efforts over the next three years and beyond. The RDN is committed to providing the highest level of public service to its residents and others.

To promote inclusivity, the RDN will integrate accessibility and support a comprehensive understanding of disabilities into its work planning, employment practices and service delivery. Over the long term, this proactive approach will involve the ongoing identification, removal and prevention of barriers encountered by people with disabilities when interacting with the RDN.

What is Meant by Accessibility?

Accessibility is a general term that describes the ease or difficulty that a program, service or space can be used and enjoyed by people with disabilities. It requires that the people planning, designing and delivering programs, services and spaces are consciously aware of how to identify and remove barriers during design and delivery to enable meaningful use by all.

An accessible community is barrier-free and does not limit anyone's participation in everyday life. In accessible communities, people with disabilities can be active participants in their own lives and their communities.

Accessible communities:

- Allow for the interaction and engagement of all members,
- Reduce social isolation and improve mental health for people with disabilities,
- Increase economic gains for local businesses, and
- Improve physical health opportunities and outcomes for all.¹

Expanding accessibility considers the needs of individuals with disabilities and their lived experiences. It addresses the barriers they have faced in accessing programs, services, buildings, information, communications and other RDN services.

Accessibility means there is equitable and meaningful access to RDN programs, services, employment, buildings, events and spaces for everyone, and that all abilities can participate in a way that is meaningful to them.

The following key terms will support readers in their review of the RDN Accessibility Plan and for participating in community conversations about accessibility and inclusion.

¹ The Upside of Accessible and Inclusive Communities, Rick Hansen Foundation Blog, 2018

Key Terms

Barrier: “Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with [a disability]. Barriers can be caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications or technologies, and affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.”²

Built Environment: The constructed aspects of physical surroundings, “including homes, communities, schools, workplaces, parks/recreation areas, business areas, roads and green spaces, [that vary] in size from large-scale urban areas to smaller rural developments.”³ For the purposes of the RDN Accessibility Plan, the built environment applies to all public spaces. This includes RDN buildings, parks, playgrounds and other public infrastructure encountered by people in their everyday life.

Disability: “An inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.”⁴ Many persons with disabilities prefer the term disability; however, this is not necessarily the case for everyone, and other terms may be preferable for some members of the community.

Equity: “Equity is the fair treatment and access to equal opportunity (justice) that allows the unlocking of one’s potential, leading to the further advancement of all peoples. The equity pursuit is about the identification and removal of barriers to ensure the full participation of all people and groups.”⁵

Inclusion: “Inclusion is a universal human right and its objective is to accept, welcome and embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need. Inclusion consists of the efforts and practices to ensure groups or individuals with different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and treated equally.”⁶

Universal Design: “The design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.”⁷

Wayfinding: “Wayfinding has the function to inform people of the surroundings in the (unfamiliar) built environment, it is important to show information at strategic points to guide people into the right directions.”⁸ This includes elements like signage, acoustics, illumination and surface finishes.

² Accessible British Columbia Act. Government of British Columbia, 2021

³ Healthy Built Environments. Government of British Columbia, 2017

⁴ Accessible British Columbia Act. Government of British Columbia, 2021

⁵ Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2021

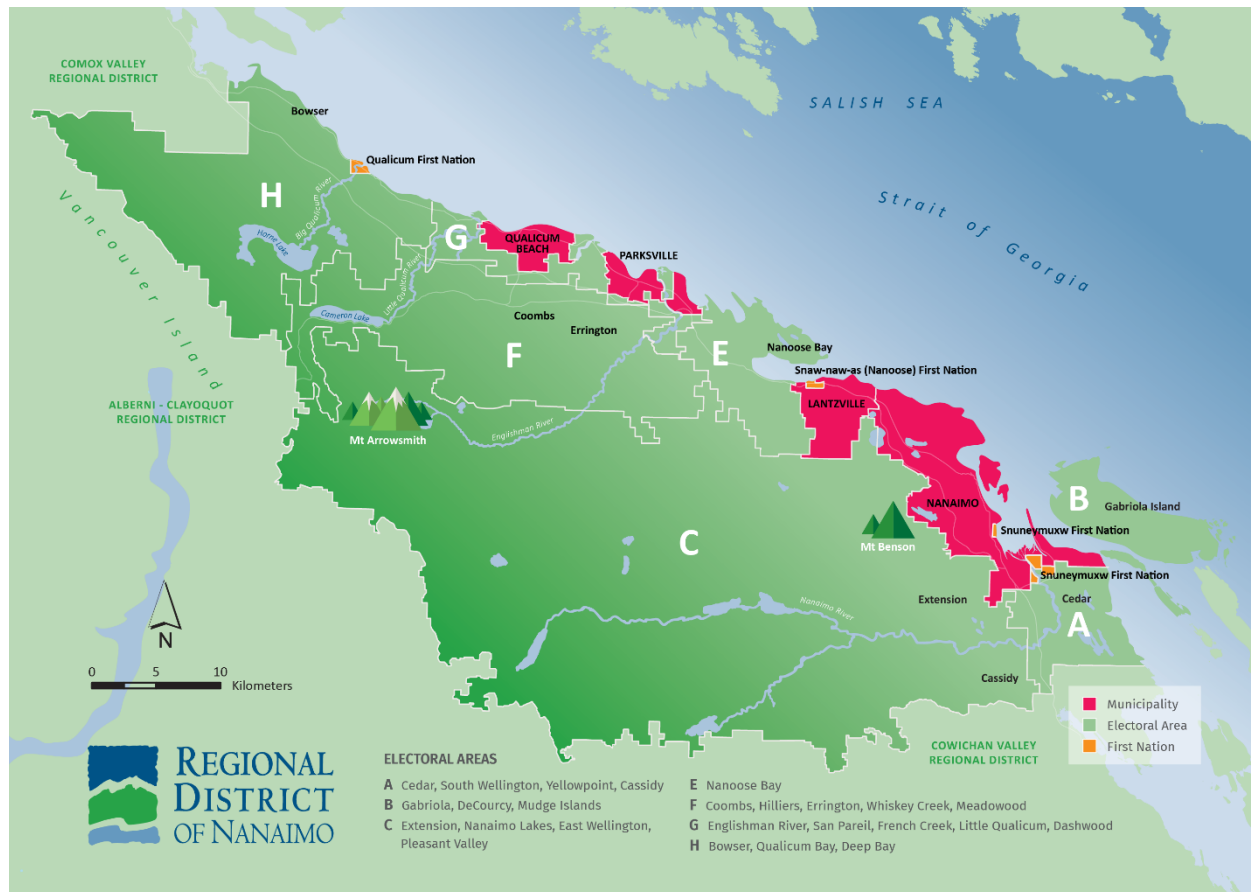
⁶ What is Inclusion? Inclusion Ontario, 2022

⁷ Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. National Disability Authority, 2020

⁸ Introduction to Wayfinding. Design Workplan, 2023

About the RDN

The RDN provides regional governance and services throughout Vancouver Island's beautiful central east coast. Communities within the regional district include the municipalities of the City of Nanaimo, District of Lantzville, City of Parksville and Town of Qualicum Beach, as well as seven unincorporated Electoral Areas. The RDN is situated within the traditional territory of several First Nations, including Snuneymuxw, Snaw-Naw-As and Qualicum First Nations. Established in 1967, the RDN is British Columbia's fifth-most populous Regional District of the 27 throughout the province, and home to over 170,000 people (2021 census).



The RDN is governed by a Regional Board, comprised of directors of locally elected municipal councillors and directors elected by electoral area residents. Board members also sit on a variety of regional select and standing committees for key services, as well as the RDN Committee of the Whole.

The RDN provides a variety of services to residents including solid waste, recycling, wastewater services, water and utility services, emergency services, energy and sustainability, GIS and mapping, regional transit, bylaw services, recreation programs and over 200 regional and community parks and trails.

Under the direction of the Chief Administrative Officer, RDN employees are responsible for designing, delivering and managing strategies, policies, programs, services and facilities in a manner that is consistent with policy and governance direction from the Board including, for example, the *2023-2026 Board Strategic Plan*, and Board-endorsed plans such as the *2022-2032 RDN Parks and Trails Strategy*. Policies and bylaws adopted by the Board, and administrative policies approved by the Chief Administrative Officer, provide formal direction to staff on what to do in response to issues and situations that arise in the course of their duties.

RDN Context and the Accessibility Journey

While the RDN Accessibility Plan is the first for the RDN as a whole, accessibility is well established as an integrated planning focus within Parks and Recreation Services. The purpose of this section is to highlight that each of our business areas is at a different starting point in our journey of continuous improvement toward accessibility, with some areas further along than others. Our Plan will support the future establishment of accessibility as an integrated focus for each RDN service.

Parks

The RDN's *Community Parks & Trails Strategic Plan Electoral Areas E, F, G, & H*, notes the importance of accessibility in outdoor recreation in 2014. The plan highlighted the benefits of life-long physical activity for everyone, particularly seniors and persons with disabilities.

The *2022-2032 RDN Parks and Trails Strategy* guides the development and management of RDN regional and community parks and trails for the next 10 to 20 years. This strategy includes:

- Promoting park systems where access for people of all abilities and ages is possible,
- An audit of RDN parks and trails, and
- Considerable engagement around the accessibility of RDN's parks and trails system.

The strategy report outlines the communities' feedback on the importance of updating wayfinding and signage, improving the accessibility of parks and trails and meeting the needs of people of all ages and abilities to be able to experience outdoor recreation together.⁹

The RDN's website highlights our trails and parks features, including accessibility features, using a combination of icons, photos and written information. The *Lighthouse Country Regional Trail*, for example, has a level grade that allows for mobility device users to experience the beauty of our rare coastal Douglas-fir forest and a continuous tapping rail for people who are blind or have low vision.

The *Regional Parks and Trails Guide* provides RDN trail information, including trail difficulty, terrain and grade and the experience that each individual trail offers. The guide features notes on accessibility and a section that highlights recreation for everyone. This guide is expected to be updated in 2024 with a focus on accessibility in our parks and on our trails.

⁹ RDN Parks and Trails Strategy. Regional District of Nanaimo, 2022

Recreation

Adaptive and inclusive recreation in the RDN has been a service offered to the community for many years. The primary focus is on inclusive recreation, welcoming individuals into programs and providing supports. The RDN supports successful recreation experiences by having a dedicated budget for accessibility program supports, providing staff with comprehensive inclusion training and assisting during the registration process.

Financial supports are available to program participants through partnerships with the Society of Organized Services (S.O.S), Q-Points and KidSport. Trained staff support individuals with disabilities in registered programs, and attendants supporting a person with a disability are welcomed at no charge.

In 2019, the RDN, in partnership with the Social Planning and Research Council of BC, completed a review of several recreation facilities and program spaces. This review looked at the accessibility successes and barriers in creating welcoming spaces for people with disabilities. In addition to the built environment, the review included other access factors such as economic, social and attitudinal barriers. It highlights current program supports including partnerships, financial assistance and adaptive programming as well as the alignment with creating intergenerational and age-friendly communities.¹⁰

Our Three-Year Plan

The RDN's Accessibility Plan identifies a framework for ongoing accessibility improvements which includes the participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities, seniors and all community members who use our services, public spaces and facilities.

RDN employees deliver these services and build and maintain RDN spaces and facilities. RDN employees are part of virtually every interaction the public has with the organization. The Plan reflects the belief that continuous accessibility improvement begins with its employees through accessibility and disability awareness.

Under the direction of the RDN Board of Directors, employees are responsible for:

- The development of bylaws, policies and procedures and their administration and enforcement,
- The development of strategic and corporate plans,
- Service program design and delivery,
- Asset management, and
- Capital project planning.

Almost every facet of employee responsibilities presents opportunities to improve accessibility at a systems or one-on-one service-delivery level. The RDN Accessibility Plan actions will require all employees to apply an accessibility and disability awareness lens to their work internally and in service to the public. This will be achieved by providing education as well as clarity on the roles and responsibilities of each person with respect to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility.

In addition to building the accessibility and disability competency of employees as an important next step in accessibility improvement, the Plan identifies how the RDN will enhance its understanding of accessibility and inclusion in its programs, services, facilities and spaces.

¹⁰ RDN Northern Recreation Services: Community Facilities and Program Accessibility and Inclusion. Regional District of Nanaimo, 2019.

Accessibility, the Organization and Our People

Employees are integral to the design and delivery of RDN services, spaces and facilities. In consideration of this, the Committee identified the following actions among the most critical:

- Building on the existing skills of employees in accessibility and disability awareness.
- Identifying inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility as a strategic focus for the RDN as an employer and organization.

Recommended Actions

1. Formalize the RDN's commitment to advancing inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) by developing a guiding IDEA statement for incorporation into internal plans, human resource plans, policies, procedures and new employee orientation to provide on-going guidance on IDEA.
2. Develop and implement an accessibility and disability awareness employee training program to increase organizational awareness and capacity to identify, prevent and remove accessibility barriers, as well as support employees to provide inclusive services to the public.
3. Cultivate a workplace culture of accessibility and inclusion through the development of an IDEA strategy as part of the RDN's human resources planning.
4. Establish and expand current partnerships with local disability service and community-based organizations.

Accessibility in Our Service Delivery, Spaces and Facilities

The Committee highlighted the need to develop more inclusive and accessible experiences and interactions with the RDN when receiving services and participating in programs. The discussion included the need to provide a variety of ways for people to exchange information with the RDN, participate in democratic processes, and register and pay for programs or services. Recreation services already supports considerable accessible programs, including program registration assistance and prioritized programming based on functional need. The learnings from the recreation services team can be leveraged by other service areas in their journey toward improving accessibility at the RDN.

The Committee identified hundreds of actions for consideration based on their lived experiences as persons with disabilities and/or as staff persons serving persons with disabilities and our diverse communities more broadly. The Committee concluded, however, that developing employee awareness and competency across all departments and at all levels was an essential first step. Following this step, a more comprehensive understanding of the accessibility deficits and existing opportunities in major service areas, facilities and spaces is required. This would be led and informed by the responsible departments, with input from persons with disabilities and/or organizations serving persons with disabilities.

Recommended Actions

5. Each RDN service area, including Transit Services, Regional and Community Utilities, Recreation and Parks, Development and Emergency Services and Corporate Services, will undertake an IDEA review of their programs and service delivery to identify accessibility barriers and prioritize specific actions to remove or reduce barriers.
 - Barrier and action identification will include input from the public and review of the alignment with existing RDN Board plans including, but not limited to, the 2023-2026 Board Strategic Plan, 2023-2027 Financial Plan, the 2022-2032 Parks and Trails Strategy and 2018-2027 Solid Waste Management Plan.

- Prioritized accessibility actions will be recommended for inclusion in the 2027 – 2030 RDN Accessibility Plan.
 - Each service area will receive a list of potential areas of focus for their respective reviews as identified by the Committee in development of the 2023-2026 RDN Accessibility Plan.
 - The review need not be an additional exercise if an IDEA review or lens can be incorporated through an expanded scope of previously committed planning or review work within a service area or department or can be demonstrated to have been recently completed.
6. Investigate the opportunity for people to pay for services, register for programs or receive information from the RDN in a variety of ways.
 - Suggestions for review include the opportunity for in-person registration or payments taken at various RDN facilities by phone or video-call and with different payment methods, extension of service hours, the opportunity to book appointments with employees and allow people to request materials in large-print, paper copies and not rely strictly on the patron-owned technology (e.g. smart phones or computers).
 7. Continue to review and update language in public-facing program descriptions and facilities, highlighting the inclusive opportunities and accessible features.
 8. When reviewing and updating master plans, policies and procedures, review with an accessibility lens (imparted through the recommended employee training – action #2).
 9. Explore and apply for relevant grants to implement initiatives that advance accessibility and respond to the [Accessible British Columbia Act](#).

Accessibility in Our Public Information and Communications

Another key area of focus for the Committee is making public communication more accessible and sharing what accessibility features or supports are available. A portion of the population does not have reliable access to computers or smart phones and some individuals struggle with digital communications and using online tools. There is acknowledgement that the information available to residents and users could be more accessible, such as plain language, and that the accessible features of RDN facilities, public spaces, services or programs could be better highlighted so that the public are aware what accessibility features exist and whether their individual needs could be met.

Recommended Actions

10. Review Communications and Engagement tools, templates and standards including the RDN Style Guide with a lens on accessible communications and engagement best practices (e.g., inclusive and plain language, ALT-Text, close captions, enabling transcriptions etc.) to identify opportunities that will increase access to information for people with disabilities both in print and electronically.
11. Continue to remove barriers to accessing information on the RDN website by updating webpages to meet modern accessibility standards and establishing content guidelines. This includes a recommended in-depth accessibility audit and implementation of resulting recommendations.
12. Develop templates or a framework to consistently provide accessibility-related information, pictures and/or videos on RDN webpages.
13. Create an "Accessibility Resources" button/link on the RDN website homepage which links to a page that offers accessibility related information and resources within the RDN.

14. Provide employees with training that will help improve their accessibility related communications and engagement skills such as plain language and IDEA public engagement training.
15. Review the current public engagement toolkit to ensure up-to-date accessibility best practices are included in alignment with International Association for Public Participation and to ensure that people of all abilities can provide meaningful input.

Accessibility Plan Implementation and Monitoring

The Committee was clear that developing and adopting an administrative policy framework is a critical step for ensuring the Plan is effectively operationalized.

Recommended Actions

16. Develop an IDEA Administration Policy to establish a framework that provides direction to employees on the RDN's continuous accessibility improvement journey, including but not limited to:
 - Identification of roles and responsibilities.
 - Inclusion of accessibility in the development or review of future and current plans, policies and programs.
 - Board and public reporting on progress.
17. Resource the 2023-2026 RDN Accessibility Plan through the 2024-2028 Financial Plan development process, recommending to the Board the resources required to support the Plan.
18. Incorporate the 2023-2026 RDN Accessibility Plan actions into annual service and departmental work plans to advance the recommended actions and to respond to related information received through public feedback. Recommended actions must also be considered in the annual Financial Plan development process.

How to Give Feedback and Stay Connected

The RDN's public online engagement platform is the best way to share comments and feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan at: getinvolved.rdn.ca/accessibility. The public can send comments or questions directly by registering on the Get Involved RDN platform or emailing our Chief Human Resources Officer at hr@rdn.bc.ca.

By registering, you will be able to stay connected to the project and will receive direct email updates as the Accessibility Plan evolves. Members of the public who would like a paper copy of the plan and/or to discuss any feedback on the plan can contact the RDN's Human Resources Department through the RDN's main information line at 250-390-4111.