



Council Background to Notice of Motion

Submitted by: Councillor Kimberley Guiry

DATE: Monday, August 19, 2024

TITLE: Addressing accessibility in Design Guidelines through the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™

WHEREAS Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) is a national rating system that measures and certifies the level of meaningful access of buildings and sites and the Rick Hansen Foundation found that 64% of Canadians have a disability or take care of a person with a disability.

And WHEREAS, one of the key findings of a 2020 Cost Comparison Feasibility Study issued by HCMA Architecture + Design was that when meeting the National Building Code there was a cost increase of 1% to achieve Rick Hansen Foundation Certified Gold which reinforces that “accessibility can be achieved with minimal cost impact through commitment to thoughtful/universal design.”

THEREFORE, Langford Council directs staff to consider Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) when completing the upcoming review of Langford’s Design Guidelines and through this process consider a possible timeline for adopting RHFAC as a standard for all new buildings in Langford.

INTRODUCTION:

The 2023-2027 Council Strategic Plan sets out an ambitious body of work for the City of Langford over four years. One of the strengths of the plan is that it allows for efficiencies of staff resources and workflow to achieve the plan’s priorities and objectives. The intent of this motion is to suggest direction to staff to capture the process of the upcoming work on updating the Design Guidelines for the City while considering an established assessment system of for improving accessibility through the Rick Hansen Foundation.

BACKGROUND:

The topic of accessibility has been gaining visibility and prioritization across the province. This is notable in both the upcoming updates to the BC Building Code that will require 100% adaptable dwellings in large condominium and apartment buildings and the requirement from the province for local governments to establish an accessibility committee, an accessibility plan, and a build tool to receive feedback on accessibility. As a result of the latter, the Capital West Accessibility Advisory Committee was created as a joint inter-municipal accessibility advisory committee to achieve the requirements outlined by the province and to provide a tool to receive accessibility concerns from the community. Similarly, the Rick Hansen Foundation has designed the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ to measure and certify a level of meaningful access of buildings and sites. The RHFAC uses a point system

over 12 different sections to evaluate a building with the potential outcome of two possible levels of certification, RHF Accessibility Certified and RHF Accessibility Certified Gold. While not all sections of the RHFAC will be applicable to Langford's Design Guidelines, the point system provides a framework and a toolkit for increasing accessibility of buildings and being thoughtful about accessible design.

In 2020, HCMA Architecture and Design shared the results of a feasibility study on behalf of the Rick Hansen Foundation that examined the cost implications of perusing the highest standard of the RHFAC, RHF Accessibility Certified Gold. Key findings of the study were,

"1. Cost Increase of 1%: The average new construction cost increase across the three building-related RHFAC site types to achieve RHF Accessibility Certified Gold with a score of at least 80% is estimated to be an additional 1% of the construction when meeting National Building Code or Ontario Building Code.

2. Score of 35% / 42%: To achieve an RHFAC certification, a project must achieve a score of at least 60% for Accessibility Certified or at least 80% for Accessibility Certified Gold. Projects built solely to National Building Code would receive an RHFAC score of 35%, and projects built to Ontario Building Code would receive an RHFAC score of 42%, at no additional cost.

3. Score of 70% / 74%: Approximately 46% of features within the RHFAC Rating Survey are more stringent or comprehensive than building code. However, these features can be achieved through thoughtful planning and design with no additional building cost (e.g. through careful planning, design decisions, material selection and specifications). These features correspond to approximately a third of available points required to achieve RHF Accessibility Certified Gold in the Rating Survey. Projects can achieve an RHFAC Rating Survey score of 70% or 74% (for NBC or OBC respectively) with no additional cost by achieving these features through thoughtful design.

4. Cost Increase of 6.4% / 6.1%: The average new construction cost increase across the three building-related RHFAC site types to incorporate 100% of RHFAC Accessibility Certification features is estimated to be approximately 6.4% for National Building Code and 6.1% for Ontario Building Code."

The feasibility study looked at 3 building-focused RHFAC site types including public spaces (community centre & secondary school), commercial spaces (office building & temporary housing) and multi-unit residential (high rise & affordable housing). The key findings of the study reinforced that the building codes examined (NBC & OBC) did not meet the needs of people with disabilities and that accessibility can be achieved with minimal cost impact through commitment to thoughtful/universal design.

RATIONALE:

According to the 2023-2027 Council Strategic Plan, the anticipated completion of the updated Design Guidelines is the third quarter of 2025. With work starting as early as fall 2024 there is an opportunity to take advantage of current workflow and consider more accessible design within the scope of the Design Guideline review. While early direction to consider RHFAC in this work has an impact on city efficiencies it would also lead to more opportunities for cost savings for the development community as the RHFAC Cost Comparison Feasibility Study found minimal cost increases with intentional and thoughtful design. Thus, planning for this change early could allow for meaningful increases in accessibility with the least impact on resources.

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES:

1d: Update Design Guidelines and consider an Advisory Design Panel

REFERENCES:

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ Cost Comparison Feasibility Study:
<https://www.rickhansen.com/sites/default/files/downloads/20200115-rhfac-final-report-full-v3.pdf>

Guide to RHF Accessibility Certification: <https://www.rickhansen.com/sites/default/files/2024-07/rhfacguidetocertificationv4220242r.pdf>

RHFAC Rating Survey v4.0: <https://www.rickhansen.com/sites/default/files/2024-01/rhfacratingsurveyv40january2024.pdf>