



DRAFT Smithers Accessibility Plan

July 24, 2023



We acknowledge that the Town of Smithers Accessibility Plan is within the ancestral and unceded lands of the Witsuwit'en Nation.

Key Words

When we think, talk & plan for accessibility a few key words help our understanding and frame our discussions of what it means.

Accessibility

- Everyone can take part in community life through work, play and other daily activities.
- Is important for everyone, especially people with disabling conditions.
- Is about removing barriers, increasing inclusion, and independence for everyone.

Barrier

Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with an impairment. Barriers can be caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies and affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

Disabling Conditions

Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication, or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society.

Impairment

Includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.

Meaningful Access

- Meeting the real accessibility needs of all users of a site.
- Provides a holistic experience, not just the individual access features.
- Goes beyond building codes' minimum requirements.
- Considers how people of all abilities interact with the environment.

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Part 1. Overview

The Town of Smithers, in partnership with the Smithers Public Library, is working towards improving the quality of life for residents of all ages and abilities by completing an Accessibility Plan.

The purpose of the Smithers Accessibility Plan is to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals participating in community life or employed by the Town or Library.

The Smithers Accessibility Plan focuses on answering two (2) primary questions:

1. What are the **accessibility barriers** that individuals encounter when interacting or working with the Town of Smithers or Smithers Public Library?
2. What **achievable actions** can the Town and Library take to eliminate, reduce, or prevent these accessibility barriers?

The plan provides a roadmap of ways the Town can move towards being a more accessible and inclusive place to live and work. It strives to build on the ongoing efforts by the Town and Library to find creative ways to decrease barriers and increase accessibility in the community.

In a more accessible Smithers...



All people can take part in community life



Everyone benefits, especially people with disabling conditions



Community inclusion & independence improves

Project Process

The Town of Smithers Accessibility Plan results from a planning process that began in January 2023.

Plan Development Process	
PROJECT PHASE	ACTIVITIES COMPLETED
1. Background Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project Start-Up Meeting• Policy & Planning Review• Age-Friendly Assessment & Action Plan Review & Analysis• Accessibility Baseline Report• Advisory Committee Meeting #1
2. Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project Engagement Strategy• Community Survey (164 Participants)• Organizational Survey (24 Participants)• Facility Site Visits (7)• Advisory Committee Meetings #2 & #3• Engagement Summary Report
3. Plan Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draft Report for Staff Review• Advisory Committee Meeting #4• Community Review• Finalize Report• Presentation to Smithers Council

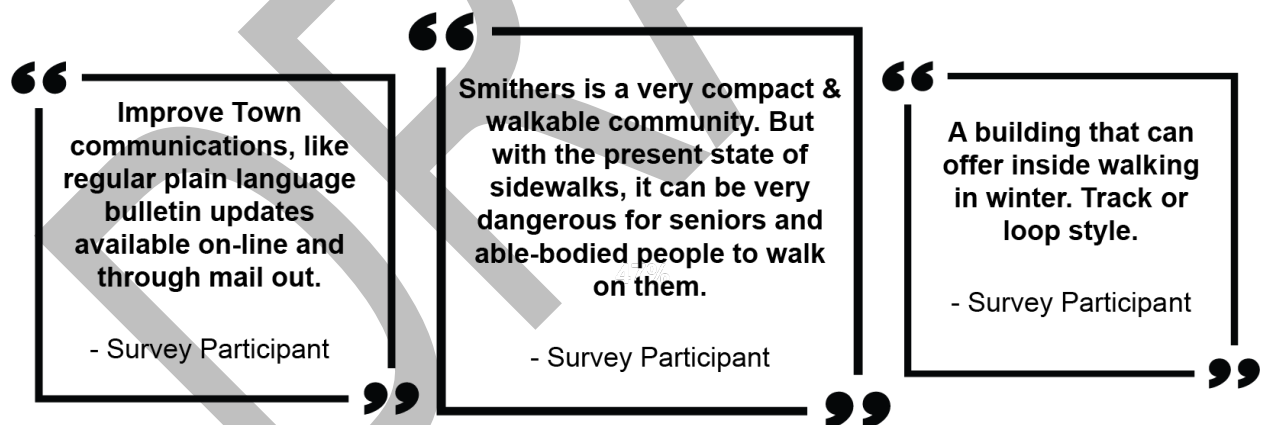
The Smithers Accessibility Plan aligns with the Province of BC's *Accessible BC Act*, which require designated organizations (including municipalities) to develop accessibility plans that consider principles of inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, and universal design.

Part 2. Barriers

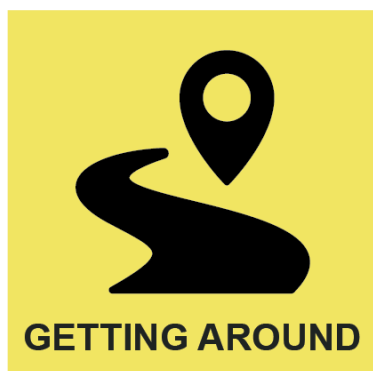
Residents with disabilities, including family members and friends who support them, face barriers that prevent them from fully participating in daily activities and community life. This includes accessing services, Town owned infrastructure, and employment.

A barrier is anything that hinders full & equal participation in society of a person with an impairment, including what we can see (visual) & what we cannot (invisible).

To better understand accessibility barriers, a range of engagement activities were completed in March and April 2023 that resulted in 200 people participating. Of all participants, 54% self-identified as having a disability or play a support role (family, friend, or through paid work). A full summary of engagement activities and results by activity are available in the [Engagement Summary Report](#).



Through engagement activities, six key barrier themes emerged, as shown below. These themes help the Town and Library to better understand and define accessibility barriers, including an appreciation for the diversity of experiences.



Physical barriers limit people from moving around Smithers, whether driving or walking. Top areas to improve: sidewalks, accessible parking & snow / ice management.



Accessible amenities (washrooms, picnic tables, benches, walking areas), including the awareness of where these amenities are located, are barriers & areas to improve.



Communication is a barrier to accessing services. Areas to improve: websites, plain language / hard copy, signage & accessible civic engagement options.



Policies, collaboration & staff training, like inclusion & mental health awareness, are ways to improve organizational accessibility.



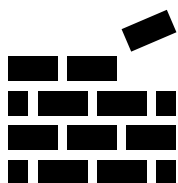
Attitudinal barriers limit participation due to not feeling valued or included because of a disability. Areas to improve relate to awareness, education & empowerment.



Physical barriers exist inside Town owned buildings, both visible and sensory. The 2016 Accessibility Audit remains a reference document.

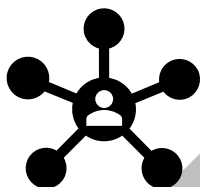
Part 3. Actions

The recommended actions outline steps to remove, reduce or prevent the identified barriers. They are intended to be a tool to guide the Town and Library on what could be achieved in 2023 through to 2026¹ in the following three focus areas:



1. ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Improve the accessibility of Town-owned infrastructure, including buildings, public spaces, parks, and transportation.



2. ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

Improve accessibility of Town & Library services, including how they are delivered, information is communicated and accessed, and to encourage residents' involvement and engagement.



3. ACCESSIBLE EMPLOYMENT

Improve the Town & Library's' accessible employment opportunities. This includes assessing their organizational cultures, policies & procedures.

The actions focus on achievable steps that consider organizational capacity, cost, operational authority, areas of internal momentum, and impact. They build on the ongoing work and accomplishments that have been made by the Town and Library over the past years and implement many of the Town's Official Community Plan policies as summarized in the [Baseline Report](#).

¹ The *Accessible BC Act* requires accessibility plans to be reviewed & updated at least every 3 years.

FOCUS AREA 1. ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Action	Why This?
1) Integrate an accessibility lens in the creation of the Town's Parks & Recreation Master Plan, including planning for all-ability amenities and an accessible walking loop location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of accessible amenities identified as a barrier. • Project budgeted for & underway.
2) Improve accessible downtown parking by a) erecting signs with the access symbol to mark the existing two accessible parking spaces in the new Second Avenue Town parking lot and b) creating one on-street van accessible parking location (following Town's plan).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited accessible parking identified as a barrier. • Stalls lack signage due to seasonal covering of pavement. • Implements Town's Accessible Parking Plan.
3) Work with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to create a map of existing Town owned accessible features, including washrooms, parking, amenities & walking areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited awareness of existing amenities identified as a barrier. • Provides a visual baseline to build on & communicate achievements
4) Improve sidewalk accessibility by a) referring to the Smithers Active Transportation Plan as the guiding document for future sidewalk enhancement/expansion and b) conducting an interdepartmental review of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redbrick sidewalk standard alternatives. • Snow / ice management improvement ideas (i.e., grit boxes & communications). • Summarize findings in a Report to Council that is first reviewed by the Advisory Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redbrick sidewalk identified as a physical and pain-related barrier. • Snow & ice identified as a barrier in winter. • Interdepartmental collaboration identified as an opportunity area.
5) Reference the Smithers Accessibility Plan, including the updated Accessibility Assessment, to guide improvements to inside and outside spaces. Consider staff training on Universal Access design principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible and invisible barriers identified. • Build staff knowledge capacity.

FOCUS AREA 2. ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

Action	Why This?
6) Ensure public communication materials (or accessible versions) meet Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines, are written in plain language and available in hard copy print versions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication & information identified as a barrier. • Not all residents connected digitally due to age, means, available personal technology & literacy levels.
7) Future updates to the Town and Library websites integrate current version of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating Town & Library websites identified as a barrier.
8) Integrate accessibility considerations in civic engagement. Ideas include providing hard copy print material versions, hosting meetings / dialogues in venues where assistive technology is available and asking if participants have accessibility requests prior to events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible civic engagement identified as a barrier. • Integrate accessibility into engagement planning. • Avenue for participants to self-identify their specific needs for access.
9) Establish a feedback mechanism for the public to provide input on accessibility by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Include accessibility in the existing Town Request for Service and Library feedback channels. b) Add “accessibility concern” to the Town’s existing “Report an Issue” platform with a link on the accessibility webpage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation requires establishing a feedback process. • Feedback is needed to inform & direct plan updates & priorities.
10) Share information on accessible events, resources & funding with residents and businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build awareness & exposure for available resources & learning opportunities.

FOCUS AREA 3. ACCESSIBLE EMPLOYMENT

Action	Why This?
11) Join the Community of Accessible Employers to receive support & resources on developing more inclusive workplaces (free membership offered).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Database of resources available. • Includes access to accessible workplace training.
12) Review workplace emergency plans to ensure employees with disabilities have access to emergency information and individualized workplace response plans are created, as required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive workplace emergency plans identified as an improvement opportunity. • Ensure Town & Library's existing plans are current.
13) Create an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (or similar) to formalize organizational commitment and to provide an overarching framework to guide other Town or Library policies, procedures, and practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication identified as a barrier. • Organizational policy identified as an improvement area.
14) Offer joint Town & Library staff disability inclusion and mental health awareness training sessions. Consider integrating this training as part of a new employees' orientation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for training identified as an improvement area. • Attitudes and communication identified as a barrier.
15) Include Town & Library staff in future reviews and updates of the Accessibility Plan, including feedback on steps taken and future actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving staff in planning identified as an opportunity area.

Part 4. Next Steps

The Smithers Accessibility Plan identifies 15 actions to improve community accessibility and inclusion of infrastructure, services, and employment. Some actions build on work already underway with little or no cost, while other actions require planning and funding allocation.

Improving community accessibility and inclusion is a continuous work in progress. The Plan is a working document and guiding tool to be implemented primarily by Town & Library staff, in consultation with the Smithers Accessibility Advisory Committee, Smithers Council and the Smithers Library Board. Key next steps to move forward with the plan include:



Approve: Endorsement of the Smithers Accessibility Plan by Smithers Council formalizes support for the actions, putting in motion the first steps to direct staff to move forward.



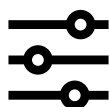
Act: Staff to review action items, gaining consensus on priority projects (quick wins), delegate roles and responsibilities, and share progress with the Smithers Accessibility Advisory Committee.



Track: Track actions taken (i.e., status summary) and community feedback received to be reported at regular intervals to the Smithers Accessibility Advisory Committee.



Review: Review the status summary at least annually with the Accessibility Advisory Committee for input and discussion. Consider new opportunities (i.e., projects, funding) and community feedback suggestions.



Update: Conduct an update of the Plan (every 3 years) that includes community & staff engagement to gain feedback on actions, barriers, and next step priorities.

Implementation Table

The following table outlines the details associated with the implementation of actions items, including lead department, timeline, and resources. Actual project implementation will be determined in concert with staff, following endorsement from Smithers Council.

FOCUS AREA 1: ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE			
ACTION	LEADS	TIMELINE	RESOURCES
1) Integrate an accessibility lens in the creation of the Town's Parks & Recreation Master Plan, including planning for all-ability amenities and an accessible walking loop location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development Services / Community Services 	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project already budgeted for.
2) Improve accessible downtown parking by a) erecting signs with the access symbol to mark the existing two accessible parking spaces in the new Second Avenue Town parking lot and b) creating one on-street van accessible parking location (following Town's plan).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development Services (work order) / Operations 	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within existing operational budgets or include in 2024 budget.
3) Work with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to create a map of existing Town owned accessible features, including washrooms, parking, amenities & walking areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development Services 	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-house mapping (staff resources) or retain a professional graphic designer (budget item).

<p>4) Improve sidewalk accessibility by a) referring to the Smithers Active Transportation Plan as the guiding document for future sidewalk enhancement/expansion and b) conducting an interdepartmental review of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redbrick sidewalk standard alternatives. • Snow / ice management improvement ideas (i.e., grit boxes & communications). • Summarize findings in a Report to Council that is first reviewed by the Advisory Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Services / Operations 	<p>Ongoing plan reference; report by 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources. • Budget considerations in report.
<p>5) Reference the Smithers Accessibility Plan, including the updated Accessibility Assessment, to guide improvements to inside and outside spaces. Consider staff training on Universal Access design principles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources. • Northern Development Initiative Trust Community Places program (up to \$30,000) & Recreation Infrastructure program (up to \$300,000).

FOCUS AREA 2: ACCESSIBLE SERVICES			
ACTION	LEAD	TIMELINE	RESOURCES
6) Ensure public communication materials (or accessible versions) meet Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines, are written in plain language and available in hard copy print versions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library ED Town engagement & comms lead (various) 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff resources CNIB Clear Print Guidelines Guidelines for Using Plain Language
7) Future updates to the Town and Library websites integrate current version of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT 	2026+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Budget in next website upgrade
8) Integrate accessibility considerations in civic engagement. Ideas include providing hard copy print material versions, hosting meetings / dialogues in venues where assistive technology is available and asking if participants have accessibility requests prior to events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town engagement lead (project specific) 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff resources Print cost / postage Government of BC Accessibility & Inclusion Toolkit

<p>9) Establish a feedback mechanism for the public to provide input on accessibility by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c) Include accessibility in the existing Town Request for Service and Library feedback channels. d) Add “accessibility concern” to the Town’s existing “Report an Issue” platform with a link on the accessibility webpage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website update initiated by Town planner / Library ED. 	<p>2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources to update existing platforms (digital & print versions).
<p>10) Share information on accessible events, resources & funding with residents and businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources. • Small Business BC Accessibility Grant (small business support) • Rebate for Accessible Home Adaptions

FOCUS AREA 3: ACCESSIBLE EMPLOYMENT

ACTION	LEAD	TIMELINE	RESOURCES
11) Join the Community of Accessible Employers to receive support & resources on developing more inclusive workplaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Services / Library Director 	2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No cost to join Presidents Group – Accessible Employers
12) Review workplace emergency plans to ensure employees with disabilities have access to emergency information and individualized workplace response plans are created, as required.	Designated Dept.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff resources
13) Create an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (or similar) to formalize organizational commitment and to provide an overarching framework to guide other Town or Library policies, procedures, and practices.	Human Resources	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff resources FCM's Resource Library for Inclusive Municipalities
14) Offer joint Town & Library staff disability inclusion and mental health awareness training sessions. Consider integrating this training as part of a new employees' orientation.	Human Resources	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff resources. Budget for training. De-escalation training (library focused)

15) Include Town & Library staff in future reviews and updates of the Accessibility Plan, including feedback on steps taken and future actions.	Organization accessibility leads	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources.
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