

# Comox Valley Social Planning Society 2024 Annual Report To Comox Valley Regional District

## Introduction

In February 2024 the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and the Comox Valley Social Planning Society (CVSPS) entered into a Contribution Agreement for the CVRD to provide annual funding toward the CVSPS operational capacity to administer and coordinate the efficient functioning of the Comox Valley Regional Accessibility Committee (Committee). This agreement enables the CVRD and its member jurisdictions to meet their obligations under the Accessibility British Columbia Act (Act). This report outlines the work carried out and outcomes achieved during the first year of the Contribution Agreement and identifies both the work of the Committee and the Society as their work intersects.

### The Inaccessibility Cycle



The Committee works towards disrupting this Inaccessibility Cycle so people with disabilities can participate fully in our community.

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The Accessibility Committee is coordinated by the part time (15 hours per week) CVSPS Coordinator who provides support to Committee members, support to a person with disabilities who has been hired to provide technical support to the Committee meetings (see below), manages all correspondence, meeting organization and minutes as well as any actions required between meetings. The Committee met ten times during 2024 with an average of 10 people attending each meeting.

In late 2023, the Committee reviewed Section 9 of the Accessibility British Columbia Act and made changes to the Committee Purpose and Guidelines (Terms of Reference) to comply with the Act. The major point of discussion related to the composition of the Committee. The Act requires Accessibility Committees to be made up of 50% or more of people with disabilities and service providers of people with disabilities and/or family members of people with disabilities. Committee members decided that they preferred to have as close as possible to 50% of the committee be people with lived expertise of disability and that the committee would be led by people with disabilities.

See Appendix A for Committee Purpose and Guidelines and the composition of the Committee.

The following are some of the accomplishments of the Committee in 2024:

- **Provided a Safe Space:** Besides action on accessibility in the Comox Valley one of the more important functions (if not the most important) of the Committee is to provide a safe space and support to members as they navigate an ableist system as a person with a disability no matter what the type of disability. Sometimes the members simply support people as they need to be supported, and this is extremely important work.
- **Engaged with both the School District #71 and North Island College Accessibility Committees** that were also formed in the Comox Valley in accordance with the Act. A representative of both these committees are members of the Regional Committee,

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attend meetings regularly and report on what their Accessibility Committees are doing. Like the CVRD both institutions also have Accessibility Frameworks and are working on Accessibility Plans. This has created a forum to learn from, get ideas from one another and opportunities for collaboration. For example, the School District Committee and the Regional Accessibility Committee worked together on accessibility audits in several schools in the SD #71.

- **Hired a member of the Regional Advisory Committee** who has lived expertise of disability to provide technical support for both the Regional Accessibility Committee and the Social Planning Society. This technology enhancement has resulted in the inclusion of more people in meetings and consultations as there is always an option for zoom or attending in person. This has been very successful particularly in winter when getting to meetings can be difficult for some of the members of the committee.
- **Presented Interim Accessibility Audit Reports to CVRD and local municipality staff** -Two members of the Committee who are auditors with disabilities hired for the Accessibility Audit Project presented the reports along with the Coordinator of the CVSPS and staff from the Social Planning And Research Council of BC who are partners on the Accessibility Audit Project.
- **Provided in person consultation to:**
  - City of Courtenay on McPhee Meadows development
  - Town of Comox on their Accessibility Plan
  - BC Transit on design of proposed new Transit Exchanges in the Comox Valley
  - CV Community Health Network on the design of their new website so that it is accessible for multiple disabilities. Some of the Committee members have considerable expertise in this area
  - Town of Comox Public Works after a delegation to Comox Council by a person with disabilities asking for high visibility contrast for accessibility of public spaces in the downtown core to create safe and inclusive travel for persons with visual impairment.

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- o Comox Valley Regional District when 2 members of the Committee did Accessibility Audits of the Comox Valley Sports Centre and the Comox Valley Aquatic Centre in preparation for the CVRD to apply for a grant to improve accessibility at the two centres.
- **Provided consultation via letter upon request to:**
  - o Town of Comox about a proposed development and a request for a variance from the original development permit that could present some accessibility concerns
  - o CVRD on the Regional Parks and Trails Strategy
- **Advocated for:**
  - o **Accessible Examining Tables in Physician Offices:** The Committee contacted the CV Division of Family Practice to increase the number of accessible examining tables in physician offices. The Division sent information out to all the physician offices with information provided by the Committee about available grants for accessible examining tables. So far this advocacy has resulted in the number of offices with accessible examining tables increasing from 1 office to 7 offices with accessible examining tables. This is progress but the Committee continues to advocate to offices who still do not have accessible examining tables.
  - o **Accessible Taxis:** The Committee sent a letter to Comox Valley Taxi regarding the availability of their accessible taxi service as Committee members had numerous incidents of not being able to get an accessible taxi despite the company advertising they are available. This resulted in a correspondence between the Taxi company manager and the Committee about the issues that we hope will improve the situation.
  - o **Telecoil Hearing Aids:** A Committee member discovered that new hearing aids now have the telecoil technology in them that can be used in public spaces in the Comox Valley that have loop systems (e.g. the CV Airport has just installed the loop system). However, people who are getting hearing aids do not necessarily

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get this information about the telecoil or loop systems from their audiologist. The Committee sent a letter to all the Audiology Clinics in the CV to ask that clients be informed about this technology when they get hearing aids so they could use them in public spaces.

- o **Sidewalk Access During Construction:** A Committee member brought up the issue of construction workers putting up signs on sidewalk at one end of a block where the construction is happening but not at the other end. This results in people with mobility issues travelling some distance to discover the sidewalk is blocked. The Committee wrote a letter to the City of Courtenay to ask them to make sure signs are at both ends of a block if there is construction that impedes passage anywhere on the block. The Committee received a response with thanks from the municipality for pointing this issue out and they would take action on it..
- o **Community Transit Committee:** Access to reliable transit concerns is raised regularly by people on the Committee and the CVSPS hears about transit concerns in the community from other organizations. Transit was also raised when CVSPS calculated the Living Wage this year when it was determined that improving regional transit could lower the Living Wage in Comox Valley by over \$2.00/hour. Besides being an accessibility issue, transit intersects with poverty, support for newcomers, students and many other groups and issues in our community. Beginning with members of the Accessibility Committee who are transit users and a couple of other community organizations, a Community Transit Committee was formed to explore issues and potential solutions from the perspective of users. This Committee is still in a formative stage but will be reaching out to local government partners once established.
- o **Letter of Appreciation:** Wrote a letter of appreciation to the Courtenay and District Fish and Game Protective Association who fundraised for and installed Mobi-Mats at Comox Lake. This pathway allows access from the parking lot next to the campground caretaker right into the lake for folks with wheelchairs, strollers,

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walkers etc. The Accessibility Committee is so pleased when organizations step up in this way in the community.

**The following are some of the accomplishments of the CVSPS in 2024:**

- **Community General Meetings:** We hosted speakers on topics of interest to the community 5 times in 2024 with an average of 31 people attending each meeting. This year we offered both in person and zoom options to attend the meetings to make them more accessible to people. The guests and topics included:
  - January – a panel of Councillors from all local municipalities and the Regional District spoke on housing and homelessness initiatives in the Comox Valley
  - March –Dayna Forsgren, Coordinator of the Comox Valley Situation Table provided information about the Situation Table in the Comox Valley
  - May – Iglia Ivanova, Senior Economist and Public Interest Researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - BC Office spoke about how the Living Wage is calculated and implications of a Living Wage in the Comox Valley
  - September – Christine Colbert, Executive Director of the Comox Valley Hospice Society spoke about the community programs offered through Hospice.
  - November –Annual Bunny’s Brown Bag Lunch where CVSPS presents the Bunny Shannon Heart of the Community Award and local organizations share information and updates about their programs. The Brown Bag Lunch has been held every year for 20 years.
- **Initiatives:** The CVSPS led or co-led several initiatives in 2024 and actively participated with other organizations on the CV Poverty Reduction Table.
  - Living Wage: The CVSPS is a partner with Living Wage BC and along with 24 other communities in BC calculates the Living Wage annually and encourages our local employers to become Living Wage employers. In 2024 the Living Wage for Comox Valley was \$24.36/hour, an increase of \$2.34/hour over the living

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wage in 2023. The major increases in costs were related to housing and food. The number of living wage employers in the Comox Valley is 24 and the CVSPS continues to encourage employers to pay a Living Wage and the provincial government to increase the minimum wage to \$20/hour to close the gap between a living wage and the minimum wage.

- o **Equity Project:** Equity is the fair distribution of opportunities, power, and resources to meet the needs of all people, regardless of age, ability, gender, income, education level, culture, or background. This means providing support based on an individual's level of need, instead of providing the same amount of support to everyone. The CVSPS received a grant from BC Healthy Communities in partnership with the City of Courtenay in 2023 entitled "Bringing an Equity Lens to Healthy Public Policy Project" and had a community workshop in 2023. We have identified some examples of where an equity lens is being used to develop policy in our community and are in the process of putting these examples together to assist local governments and community organizations to get ideas for creating healthy public policy through an equity lens. This should be complete in 2025.
- o **All Candidates Meetings:** In partnership with LUSH Valley Food Action Society and with financial support from the Comox Valley Community Health Network, CVSPS co-facilitated two all candidate sessions for community members before the provincial election.. This Forum was unique in that it did not showcase candidates on the same stage. Rather community members sat at tables and candidates moved from table to table answering questions submitted by 11 Comox Valley based social sector agencies. In this format, candidates responded directly to members of the electorate and not to other candidates. The sessions were recorded and posted to YouTube for those unable to attend. Plans are underway to conduct a similar session for the upcoming federal election.
- o **Accessibility Audits:** Accessibility Audits continued this year, with some adaptations to the way information was recorded (making it easier to compile

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technical information). Additional help has been sought to facilitate the audits through 2025.

- o **Regional Collective Impact Poverty Reduction Work:** CVSPS is an active partner in the poverty reduction collective impact work being done locally and with Tamarack Institute and 9 other communities in Western Canada working on addressing poverty in their communities.
- o **Island Wide Social Planning Group:** CVSPS has been the convener for quarterly meetings with other Social Planning organizations/government organizations engaged in social planning on Vancouver Island. The communities involved are Victoria, Cowichan, North Cowichan, Nanaimo, Port Alberni and Campbell River. We share information and learn about initiatives other island social planning organizations are doing.



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**Appendix A**

**Comox Valley Accessibility and Inclusion Committee  
Purpose and Guidelines**

**Purpose**

The purpose of the Comox Valley Accessibility and Inclusion Committee is to promote equity and social inclusion within the Comox Valley.

The Accessibility and Inclusion Committee will:

- Identify barriers to inclusion and accessibility and make recommendations to remove the barriers to the appropriate body (e.g. local government, businesses)
- Identify best practices in other communities and make recommendations based on the findings to the appropriate body.
- Participate in reviewing local government draft plans, policies, and procedures to prevent the creation of barriers in the future
- Engage with the community on issues related to accessibility and inclusiveness
- Work to increase public awareness on issues related to accessibility and inclusion for all community members.

**Structure**

The Accessibility and Inclusion Committee is a committee within the Comox Valley Social Planning Society structure and accountable to the CVSPS Executive. The Committee reports regularly at CVSPS quarterly meetings and liaises with CVSPS through a designated member on the CVSPS Board.

As a partner of the CV Social Planning Society and the CV Community Health Network, the Collaborative also agrees to work within their CHN [values](#).

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**Accessibility and Inclusion Committee Composition**

The BC Accessibility Act requires Accessibility Committees to be made up of 50% or more of people with disabilities and service providers of people with disabilities and/or family members of people with disabilities.

The legislation does not define disability specifically; this means that committee members can cover the range of disability from invisible to visible, neurodiverse to neurotypical etc.

The Accessibility and Inclusion Committee's preference is for people with disabilities to participate over service providers.

It is recognized that some people are both a service provider and have a disability.

The Accessibility and Inclusion Committee will be led by people with disabilities.

Accessibility and Inclusion Committee membership is open to community members who wish to participate. The committee will make specific efforts to recruit members to represent ethnic and gender diversity. The committee will reserve some seats for people under 30 who have disabilities.

**Meetings**

The Committee will meet monthly (excluding December) at a time and location decided upon by the committee.

Zoom Hybrid meetings, with accommodation, can be held.

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Recorded versions of the meetings will be taken for those who are unable to attend the meetings in person or on Zoom.

**Modified Consensus Decision Making**

The Committee makes decisions using a modified consensus decision making model and uses the process developed by Comox Valley Community Health Network that can be found below.

Gradients of Agreement:

1. Whole-hearted Agreement
  2. Agree with minor concern
  3. Don't like but will support
  4. More discussion needed
  5. Serious Disagreement
1. The gradient of agreement scale is explained to participants. After discussion on a topic for a decision and airing of any concerns, the facilitator takes a "pulse check" on a proposal for decision using the gradients of agreement. If everyone indicates 1-3, the decision is made by full consensus and the group moves on.
  2. If any participant expresses a 4 or a 5 on the scale, they are given the opportunity to explain their concerns and suggest alternatives. Once those have been heard, the facilitator works with the group to rephrase a revised proposal for a decision that attempts to address concerns.
  3. Participants at the meeting are asked for a pulse check again to communicate their level of agreement with the altered proposal.
    1. If all participants fall within 1-3 full consensus is reached.
    2. If fewer than 10% of participants express a 4-5, the group will proceed on the basis of a modified consensus.
    3. If more than 10% of the participants at the meeting fall within 4-5, the decision requires more discussion (and may be further discussed or delayed). At any point

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in the decision-making process, people who express 4-5 must be willing to work with the group to develop a compromise proposal.

**Comox Valley Regional Accessibility Committee Composition**

As at 2025.01.27	Compiled by: Christopher Bate, Coordinator
Visible Disabilities	9
Invisible Disabilities	3
Neurodiverse	4
Staff Supporting People with Disabilities	0
Family Supporting People with Disabilities	3
<b>Total People with Disabilities or Supporting People with Disabilities</b>	<b>19</b>
Elected Government Reps	5 (Cumberland, Courtenay, Comox, CVRD, School District #71)
Paid Government Staff	0
Others attending	2 (Other Social Sector agency, VIRL)
Undisclosed if disability exists or not	6
<b>Total Committee Membership</b>	<b>27</b>