ACCESSIBILITY PLAN
2024 - 2026

qathet REGIONAL District

PrPL
POWELL RIVER
PUBLIC LIBRARY

PowellRiver
coastal by nature

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The qathet Regional District, City of Powell River, and Powell River Public Library acknowledge that our organizations are located on the traditional territories of the Tla'amin, shishalh, Klahoose, Homalco, and K'omoks First Nations. We recognize the significant contributions of Indigenous Peoples who have lived and worked on this land since time immemorial. We offer our sincere gratitude for their stewardship of these lands.

ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

This plan can be viewed with any PDF reader and most assistive technologies. If you require an alternative format, contact the qathet Regional District by emailing administration@qathet.ca.

HOW TO GIVE US FEEDBACK

To report errors or offer feedback on this plan, you can complete our feedback form or email us at administration@qathet.ca.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, and qathet Regional District would like to thank the Joint Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee and staff at each organization for contributing to the development of this plan. We would also like to thank the members of the public who participated in the public engagement and helped us identify barriers to our organizations.

INTRODUCTION

The City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library and qathet Regional District developed this plan to help our organizations identify, remove, and prevent barriers over the next three years. Our organizations are committed to working together to create a community where people of all ages and abilities can fully participate in daily life and experience a sense of belonging. This plan is an important part of that work.

In the spirit of 'nothing about us without us,' the partner organizations engaged with the public, the Joint Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee, and staff members to develop this plan. Provincial legislation and best practices from communities across Canada also informed the plan's priority actions.

Over a quarter of Canadians over the age of 15 report having one or more disabilities.[1]

The Plan explains the guiding provincial legislation, describes what we have done to date, and outlines the actions we will take over the next three years to improve accessibility within our organizations. While we will not become fully accessible in the next three years, the priority actions contained in this plan lay a solid foundation for more accessible and inclusive organizations now and into the future.

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[1] Statistics Canada. (2023). *Canadian Survey on Disability 2017 to 2022* [Data summary]. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231201/dq231201b-eng.htm

GUIDING FRAMEWORK

ACCESSIBLE BRITISH COLUMBIA ACT

In 2021, the Province of British Columbia passed the Accessible British Columbia Act (ABC Act). The ABC Act intends to create more accessible and inclusive communities across the province. Under the Act, the province and other public-serving organizations, including local government and public libraries, are required to:

1. **Establish an accessibility committee:**
   - composed of people with lived experience to advise on how to remove and prevent barriers.

2. **Develop an accessibility plan:**
   - informed by the accessibility committee
   - updated at least every three years.

3. **Receive feedback from the public**:
   - on the accessibility plan and barriers experienced when interacting with the organization.

These three actions are intended to help create a culture of accessibility and inclusion in local and provincial public-serving organizations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The ABC Act lists six principles an organization must consider when developing and updating its accessibility plan. The following definitions are adapted from the [BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#).

INCLUSION

- All British Columbians should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities, regardless of age or ability.

ADAPTABILITY

- Plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
- Ongoing commitment and partnership with the disability community and other stakeholders is required.

DIVERSITY

- Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience greatly inform the experiences of individuals.
- Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.

COLLABORATION

- Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility; everyone has a role to play.
- Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

SELF-DETERMINATION

- Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and purse the lives they wish to live.

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." An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to interact with the Organization.

WHO WE ARE

City of Powell River

- Oversees and provides services to almost 14,000 residents within City limits

- Some services include maintenance of roads, sewer & water, bylaw enforcement, land use and building services

Some accessibility initiatives to date:
- Automatic doors installed at recreation complex
- Full accessibility review of website underway
- Working on multiple payment options for taxes and other bills
- Council Chambers now in accessible location

Powell River Public Library

- Offers books, movies, music, games, and quality programming for all ages

- Provides diverse spaces for work, study and play

Some accessibility initiatives to date:
- Purchased handheld digital audio readers
- Obtained a Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) subscription to provide alternative formats to support people with print disabilities
- Implemented a home delivery service to bring library materials to homebound patrons

qathet Regional District

- Local government authority overseeing and providing services to over 20,000 residents

- Includes Savary, Texada and Lasqueti Islands

- Some services include rural land use planning, emergency preparedness, solid waste management, regional parks and fire protection, and many others

Some accessibility initiatives to date:
- Improvements to the website
- Improved mobility access to walking trails at Haywire Bay Campground, Shelter Point Park, and Palm Beach Regional Park

ACTIONS TO DATE

The partner organizations have:

1. Established the Joint Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee.

   a. The mandate of the Committee is to assist the City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, and qathet Regional District to identify, remove and prevent barriers experienced by persons with disabilities.

   b. The Committee is composed of members of the public with lived experience. Committee members played a key role in informing the goals and recommendations of this plan.

2. Implemented an accessibility feedback tool.

   a. Members of the public can use these tools to report barriers to our organizations and provide solutions on an ongoing basis.

   b. For up-to-date information on how to provide feedback to each organization, please visit the websites listed below:

City of Powell River: participatepr.ca/joint-accessibility-plan

Powell River Public Library: prpl.ca/accessibility-feedback/qathet

qathet Regional District: qathet.ca/accessibility-feedback/

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Priority Actions in the next section were informed by:

1. Engagement with staff and the public

    a. Between May 29 and August 15

    b. Input on barriers experienced in facilities of each organization

2. Research into best practices

    a. Reviewed guides and plans from a range of other communities in BC and throughout Canada

3. Scan of policies and procedures from each organization

    a. Each partner organization reviewed what was already in place and what was missing

PRIORITY ACTIONS 2024-2026

The City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, and qathet Regional District recognize that we cannot remove every barrier within the timeframe of this plan. Applying an accessibility lens to all of our work will take time. This section outlines the priority actions we can realistically achieve in the next three years. These actions are intended to:

- Improve physical and digital accessibility for more equitable access to our services and programs.

- Engage staff in creating accessible, inclusive environments.

- Apply an accessibility lens to all our policies, plans and strategies to ensure accessibility is considered in the decision-making process and to create accountability.

The **priority actions** are organized into six areas of focus:

Built Environment

Services and Programs

Information and Communications

Customer Service

Employment and Staff Engagement

Governance, Policies and Bylaws

The priority actions are listed by the organizations they apply to within each area of focus.

If a barrier is identified that is not included in this Plan, the organization is encouraged to address the barrier wherever possible or add it to a future Plan.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Priority Actions:

CITY OF POWELL RIVER

1.	Ensure ramp access to all areas.
2.	Provide accessible playground equipment at all or most playgrounds.
3.	Assess existing and potential beach access trails to determine the viability of creating an accessible beach access.
4.	Assess parks and aim to provide at least one pathway or trail that is accessible at each regional park.
5.	Improve sound and lighting options in meeting spaces throughout City facilities (Recreation Complex, Dwight Hall).
6.	Ensure both police and fire stations are accessible with ramps, automatic doors and lowered counters.

POWELL RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

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1.	Ensure washrooms are fully accessible.

QATHET REGIONAL DISTRICT

1.	Incorporate universal design principles into capital and service plans.
2.	Work towards accessibility certification for our buildings and facilities. Train three staff to support the certification process for existing and new buildings.
3.	Conduct an accessibility audit of qRD buildings, facilities and parks through a certified third-party consultant that includes identification of long-term infrastructure updates and resources required.

ALL ORGANIZATIONS

1.	Incorporate retrofits and infrastructure identified in accessibility audits into capital and operations training.
2.	Provide accessible parking at all buildings, parks and facilities, ensuring there at least one designated accessible parking stall, where possible.
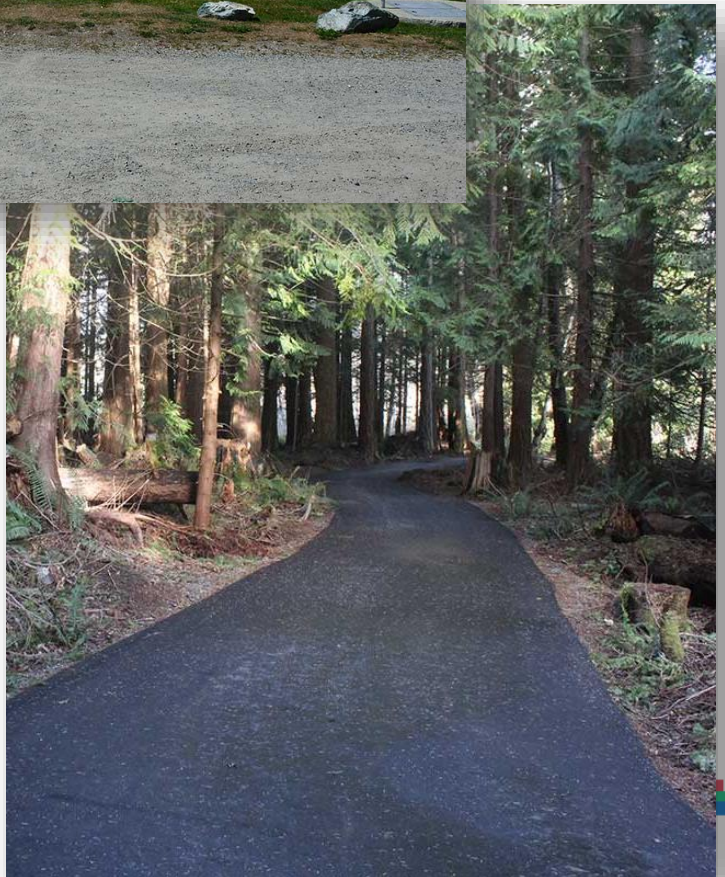
SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Priority Actions:

CITY OF POWELL RIVER

1.	Review and update phone system.

POWELL RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

1.	Update current inventory of accessible hardware and assistive devices.
2.	Improve accessibility of self-checkout stations.
3.	Review the accessibility of public workstations.

QATHET REGIONAL DISTRICT

1.	Ensure emergency response centers are universally accessible.
2.	Review and update phone system.

ALL ORGANIZATIONS

1.	Review service desk procedures to ensure that bills, fees and fines can be paid in an accessible way
2.	Ensure accessible services are well promoted.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Priority Actions:

CITY OF POWELL RIVER

1.	Consider offering forms and common information materials in multiple languages.
2.	Make strong effort to use plain language wherever possible.

POWELL RIVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

1.	Incorporate accessibility standards and best practices into the Library's Style Guide for advertising and marketing.

QATHET REGIONAL DISTRICT

1.	Update the Board Procedure Bylaw to ensure auto-captioning is used for all live and recorded online meetings of the Board and any standing, select and advisory committees.
2.	Incorporate accessibility best practices into communications and public engagement policies and procedures.

ALL ORGANIZATIONS

1.	Conduct an accessibility audit of qRD, City and Library websites to determine if website design is compliant with the most recent Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.
2.	Work towards WebAIM certification (Web Accessibility in Mind) for all websites and platforms.
3.	Provide training on communication accessibility standards for staff with responsibility for editing and updating websites.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Priority Actions:

<div align="center">**ALL ORGANIZATIONS**</div>

1.	Provide accessibility awareness and sensitivity training to all staff on visible and invisible disabilities once per calendar year.
2.	Incorporate accessibility awareness and sensitivity training into on-boarding procedures for new staff members.
3.	Maintain a record of training dates.

EMPLOYMENT AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Priority Actions:

ALL ORGANIZATIONS

1.	Provide training to staff involved in the recruiting process on accessible recruitment practices.
2.	Support universal design principles for employee workspaces.
3.	Establish a written and transparent accommodation policy and process.
5.	Develop and implement an accommodation assessment to be completed during employee onboarding that identifies an employee's specific barriers in their workspace and potential remedies.
6.	Include funding in annual budget for accommodations identified in employee assessments.
7.	Conduct an anonymous survey for employee feedback on accessibility and inclusion once per calendar year.
8.	Celebrate and encourage staff to participate in awareness-raising events including National AccessAbility Week (starting last Sunday in May) and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3).
9.	Conduct an audit of the application process and hiring procedures to assess how employees with disabilities could be better supported throughout the hiring process.

GOVERNANCE AND POLICIES

Priority Actions:

ALL ORGANIZATIONS

1.	Develop an Accessibility Policy to guide compliance with accessibility standards across the organization.
2.	Review all existing plans, policies, and procedures to ensure they follow the Accessibility policy and have applied an accessibility lens.
3.	Incorporate an accessibility lens in all future strategic plans, policies and strategies.
4.	Have each organization's Board or Council advocate to provincial and federal governments for support and funding to remove barriers.
6.	Develop and incorporate accessibility criteria into the process for procuring goods, services and facilities.
7.	Each organization's governing body supports grant applications for funding to implement accessibility and inclusion initiatives.
8.	Provide accessibility awareness training to each Board and Council.
9.	Require event organizers who use City, Library, or qRD facilities to address accessibility in their event permit applications.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Regular monitoring and evaluation ensures we are consistently moving forward with the priority actions identified in this plan.

How we stay accountable:

- The partner organizations will provide regular updates to the Joint Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee at each of their quarterly meetings.

- Each partner organization commits to formally reporting to the Committee on progress made and lessons learned once a year.

- Members of the public can also comment on the plan and our progress on the priority actions by completing the feedback form or emailing us at administration@qathet.ca. To access the feedback form, visit qathet.ca/accessibility.

If needed, we will review and update the plan once a year to incorporate lessons learned, advice from the Committee, and feedback received from the public. Feedback may identify long-term actions that are beyond the scope of the current plan that will inform future accessibility plans.

APPENDIX I - GLOSSARY

Accessibility means that all people can take part in their communities through work, play and other daily activities. Accessibility is important for everyone, especially people with disabilities. Accessibility is about removing barriers wherever possible to increase inclusion and independence for everyone.

Barrier means 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 are affected by intersecting forms of discrimination. The different types of barriers are defined as such:

- Attitudinal – When people think and act based upon false ideas.
- Physical – When obstacles make access difficult.
- Information or Communication – When communication methods do not reach people with disabilities.
- Systemic – When an organization's policies or procedures aren't inclusive.
- Technology – When technology can't be accessed by people with disabilities.
- Sensory – When lights, sounds or smells prevent participation in the environment.

Belonging means to feel natural and unthreatened in a group. It is to understand and be understandable to other members of that group; to be able to recognize and be recognized within.[2]

Disability means an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.

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

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[2] Chin, C. (2019). The concept of belonging: Critical, normative and multicultural. Ethnicities, 19(5), 715–739. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26782088.

Inclusion means valuing contributions of each community member, thus seen as the opportunity for persons with disabilities to participate in the planning and decision-making process in issues that affect them.[3]

Participation means involvement in a life situation, which requires understanding the quality of an experience (not just frequency or range of experiences).[4]

Partner organizations refers to the City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, and qathet Regional District.

Universal Design means designing products and environments to be used independently by as many people as possible without the need for adaptation, modification, or assistive devices. Includes seven principles intended to guide the design of environments, products and communications:

1. Equitable use – The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

2. Flexibility in Use – The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

3. Simple and Intuitive Use – Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

4. Perceptible Information – The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

5. Tolerance for Error – The design minimizes hazards and adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

6. Low Physical Effort – The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

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[3] Social Planning and Research Council of BC. (2009). *The Accessible Community Bylaws Guide.* https://www.lakecountry.bc.ca/en/business-information/resources/Document-Manager/Reference-Documents/Accessible-Community-Bylaws-Guide.pdf.

[4] World Health Organization. (2001). *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). https://www.who.int/classifications/international-classification-of-functioning-disability-and-health.*

7. Size and Space for Approach and Use – Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.[5]

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[5] Centre for Excellence of Universal Design. (2020). The 7 Principles. https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/the-7-principles/.