

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Accessibility Planning 101 to be offered at UBCM SPARC BC's new guide outlines first accessibility bylaws in BC

Burnaby, BC; September 23, 2009 – On September 29, 2009, SPARC BC (Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia) will unveil the province's most comprehensive planning guide for community accessibility. The Accessible Community Bylaws Guide will be presented at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities convention.

The guide, which SPARC BC has nicknamed "101 Ways to Build an Accessible Community" is the first of its kind in BC and is the result of two years worth of research, feedback and writing in coordination with a provincial advisory committee made up of representatives from elected officials, municipal recreation staff, city engineers, and people with disabilities.

"We are very positive that this guide will be a very useful education and planning tool for municipalities," says Emese Szücs, Manager of Accessibility Programs at SPARC BC. "It includes more than one hundred recommendations under nine model by-laws on everything from parks, streets, and buildings to grand-stands. No accessibility bylaws exist in BC; we are suggesting a place to start."

The BC Building Code sets accessibility standards for public buildings in BC, however, The Accessible Community Bylaws Guide goes beyond the BC Building Code, suggesting accessibility standards for things like trails and footbridges, the availability of accessible taxis, and widths of sidewalks and bus stops. The guide also includes one model policy on access to employment, and also suggests density bonusing as a way to increase the creation of accessible housing.

The guide aims to empower municipalities to enact bylaws based on their own unique local conditions, giving municipalities and residents the power to fine tune things according to their needs.

"The bylaws could be adopted by any community of any size" says James Baker, Mayor of District of Lake Country and advisory panel member. "It's a package every municipality should take a look at. There are improvements that will benefit a large portion of the population."

Sarah Tipler, Measuring Up Coordinator for Whistler/Squamish, also sat on the advisory panel and believes the guide can make a difference. "After my spinal injury nine years ago, I became an accessibility advocate. Education is vital. Getting municipalities on board with changing by-laws can make a real impact, but also ensuring that the message gets to the person building the trail or sidewalk is important as well."

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101 Ways to Build an Accessible Community

Szücs echoes Tipler's sentiments and credits the diverse voices on the advisory panel with the successful creation of The Accessible Community Bylaws Guide. The importance of advisory panels is also made clear in the document. Of the nine model by-laws presented, the first one addresses the need for annual accessibility planning and the establishment of citizen-led advisory committees.

"The Accessible Community Bylaws Guide is about ensuring universal access," says Szucs. "Among many other things, that means inviting people to be part of decision-making on issues that affect their community."

SPARC BC will be presenting a workshop to municipalities on the model by-laws and conducting a wide scale outreach plan to share the information with disability groups across BC and Canada. The document is available from the SPARC BC website.

About SPARC BC

SPARC BC is a non-partisan, charitable organization focused on positive change in the key social issues of income security, accessibility, and community development. By providing research services, consulting, advocacy, and the Parking Permit Program for People with Disabilities, SPARC BC works with communities to build a just and healthy society for all.

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