

Accessible Community Forum: Built Environment

May 21, 2021

Moderator: Ben Mortenson – Associate Professor in Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at UBC

Panelists:

Heather McCain – Creating Accessible Neighbourhoods

Paul Gautier – Individualized Funding Resource Centre

Dylan Passmore – Senior Engineer for City of Vancouver (Transportation Design Branch)

Karen Lai – Accessibility Planner for City of Vancouver

Brad McCannell – Vice President of Access and Inclusion for the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF)

Question: How can we address the rising housing costs for people with disabilities in British Columbia?

Brad: Housing prices are artificially increased when developments set aside a percentage of units (10-20%) in a project for accessibility but the builder considers it non-market housing outside their inventory. They try to make a profit on the remainder of the project which artificially increases the cost of the other units. Designating accessible units as non-market units marginalizes people who benefit from accessible environments and artificially increases the cost of housing.

Paul: We need access to more rent supplements and have the supplements attached to the individual with disabilities (floating subsidies), rather than the housing unit, so they are able to move if they choose.

Heather: The rent supplement for people with disabilities has not been increased in a long time and doesn't reflect the current housing market. Also, co-op housing doesn't offer the same rental protections. A federal plan introduced last year that addressed rent subsidies caused an increase in rents by more than 40% causing some individuals to lose their housing. The pandemic rent freeze didn't apply to them. We need floating subsidies to allow people to get into accessible units.

Paul: Even if you are able to buy housing as a person with disabilities, the cost of renovation to make a unit accessible is extremely high. There are some great B.C. housing programs out there but not everyone is eligible. We need to even the playing field around accessibility to these programs. It costs so much to do these renovations, but if we could have better structures, it would cost less.

Brad: At the design stage, it doesn't cost any more to do it properly, to create a universal space that is adaptable and anticipates the needs of the users down the road. So why as a community are we accepting this and why are municipalities only requiring 10-20% of units in a development to be accessible? Access is not a design question; it is a management question. It doesn't cost any more to design or build an accessible space. The Rick Hansen Foundation

(RHF) did a study that showed, to reach the gold level accessibility certification, it might cost as much as 1% more than your budget. All new developments should be 100% accessible.

Paul: If you add the rent supplements, builders would see it would be worthwhile to build more fully accessible units. Units that are accessible are good from an investment perspective because if a tenant with disabilities moves in, we know, they don't leave! There are so many great intentions but there's disconnect between the builders or tradespeople in making properly accessible units. For example, installing a roll-in shower that has a 3-4" lip, or a kitchen where everything has been lowered but doesn't allow space for a wheelchair to fit underneath. We need to keep track of the accessible housing stock and make it public for people across the province with disabilities to access.

Heather: Housing is essential to people's mental and physical health. The province will save money by providing adequate housing for people. We have so many members whose mental health is made worse, who are set back because of the stress. Paul mentioned that there are various programs that help, but you have to know that they exist, then you have to get through the application process. We need to remove some of the barriers to these programs and get the information to people who need it. A lot of people, especially those who are new to disability don't know where to go to access information. With last year's federal change to the co-op subsidy program, there was no plain-language information, there were no people to support you. The document that supports it is in such government-speak that, even as an advocate who has been doing this for over a decade, it was difficult for me to understand all the details of the program. It's very hard for people with disabilities to fight some of these decisions when the information is so inaccessible.

Paul: There really needs to be a one-stop shop for all this information. We want to get on with our lives, have our home and have the funds to do it. A lot of people think that people with disabilities are housed, but I believe we are in a situation of invisible homelessness. There are so many people with disabilities that are living in homes they can't fully access, and to me, that is still homelessness. Just because there is a roof over our heads doesn't mean that we are properly housed.

Question: Are there municipalities that incentivize or require a percentage of accessible units in newly built multi-unit buildings?

Brad: Not that I know of as a blanket policy. It's a game of whack-a-mole right now. Each new development we hear about, we go over and try to make it accessible. Instead of having a policy that addresses this, we end up wasting so much time and resources re-inventing the wheel each time. It's one of the reasons we created the Rick Hansen Foundation Certification (RHFC), to create common language, and an easy way to measure what's there. We need a good, reliable housing registry and it needs to be populated. People need to know what's actually out there. Developers and builders need to understand when they see accessible units being populated, that we are market housing.

Heather: We have units that are labeled as accessible but have non-disabled people who have moved into them, and have taken out the accessibility features. Any features that are taken out by

a non-disabled person should be replaced at their own expense when they move out. I know from personal experience. In my unit the carpet was so thick, my wheelchair wouldn't go over it. The previous tenants had removed all of the accessibility features and I had to pay for it to be replaced. I have been in this unit a very long time and I don't want to go into the market again. There's less turnover of accessible units which means there's less of a market for accessible units. We need more units, and there's too long of a waitlist.

Paul: Unfortunately, we've seen way too many times able-bodied individuals utilizing wheelchair accessible units. There's such a shortage of units that we can't lose any of them. It is a tragedy when that happens, very frustrating.

Heather: It's a problem in Vancouver but it's even worse in small communities where they only have one or two units. Smaller communities need to have housing availability as well. Brad mentioned that 24% of the population has a disability, and 30-35% in the Indigenous community. What's the accessibility of housing on reserves? In remote communities? A lot of people aren't able to go out into their communities because of the lack of accessibility. There are additional barriers in small, remote communities. Geographical inaccessibility needs to be addressed as well.

Paul: We need to team up because we are stronger as a larger voice. When we come to the registry concept, everyone is doing little bits but I think it would be better if we pooled together somehow. Let's make sure we don't lose any more housing stock. We need to make sure we know where they are, how they fit and we understand that what may not work for one person could work for another person.

Heather: We need to pressure the government to create legislation that has bite. We need to have actual laws and guidelines that are followed. A document that supports the work that is being done. Right now, we already have rights that are being denied and we need stronger legislation that supports what we should be getting.

Paul: It's great that we have new accessibility legislation coming forward but I think a lot of people are concerned it doesn't have the teeth it needs. Where is the right for people to have access to home support? There is none. It's a policy, and a policy can be denied. When you can be denied access to housing or home support, this is a problem.

Brad: We do need better enforcement of whatever we get in place, but any funds raised in the process, any fines levied need to go into a research fund that circles back to create accessible housing or co-ops.

Paul: We see so many of those dollars going back into general revenue and it needs to go into something that will move this forward.

Question: Is there a way to standardize what accessibility features are added into accessible housing or does it have to be individualized? Does it make it harder or easier for action to occur because of that?

Brad: In my experience, homes are so personal. I'm a C6 quadriplegic and in my house, there are no grab bars because I can't grab. You have to create a space where the infrastructure anticipates the needs of the user. You have to get the cost of making these changes down but it costs less if it's designed properly. The solutions are all there, the question is not how do it, the question is why aren't you doing it?

Ben: Concerns have been raised about suites that are shrinking and some municipalities are removing or lowering suite minimum size rules with an aim to improve affordability. Does this mean that people in wheelchairs don't have maneuvering space in kitchens and bathrooms?

Paul: This is becoming a major problem. Developers are trying to make more money and to do that they need to shrink the square footage. What does it really mean to make a percentage of the building wheelchair accessible? The discussion around square footage needs to be part of that. Builders are getting leniencies from different cities and when we're making wheelchair accessible units there need to be some leniencies in regards to that square footage just to accommodate people with disabilities. I'd be quite happy to prove that I have a disability if we could reduce the full market value condo to make it more affordable. I need the square footage not for luxury, but to be able to get around.

Heather: There's group we've missed which are people who do not currently use mobility devices but know that they should. They know they need accessible housing but don't feel they're disabled enough to apply for it. We need to work on that stigma and talk about the people who don't currently need accessibility features but need houses that will be able to shift to their needs. Often when you apply for things, you have to prove you have a disability and also that you have the right disability or that you're disabled enough. All these processes are really damaging to people and create internalized ableism that puts them off getting the assistive equipment they need.

Paul: It can take up to five years or longer to get access to accessible, affordable housing, but you can't get on the waitlist if your disability is not at that point yet. We need a way to allow individuals who know they're going to need accessible housing to get on a waitlist so they have it when they need it.

Heather: That's important for the older adult population as well. Many of them, because of stigma and prejudice, won't call themselves disabled so they won't apply for disabled accommodations. There are a lot of older adults that should move into a unit where they can age in place. We've had some members who are blind and having to move is quite traumatic for them because they've learned their neighborhood and have become comfortable with their environment. When they have to move it's not as simple as moving their home. They're changing their environment completely. If they're able to stay in that unit, they don't have to go through all of that, which can be quite traumatic. Leaving that home is more than just losing your housing, it's losing a support system as well.

Paul: We need to work together with the senior population as we're moving forward, either politically or from an advocacy perspective and figure out our common grounds on issues and try to move forward all together. Connecting with families is good too because anyone who's had a

stroller wants a door that's wider, wants a hallway where they can let their kid out of the stroller and where the kid can go past the stroller not where the stroller takes up the entire entrance way. Accessibility is for so many more user groups than people with disabilities and we need to utilize that power. Someone took the initiative to put a ramp down to the curb in front of my building so I could go across to the park. I've been watching outside my window and the amount of people who don't have physical disabilities that use the ramp is incredible. It is accessibility for all, at the end of the day. Thanks to the city of Vancouver for having it done and the individual who called it in.

Angela: We talked about how they are making new places more accessible, but how do we go about that for places that already exist? Building the ramps, or trying to make apartments more accessible, etc.

Dylan: I deal more with the built environment and it's a challenge, absolutely. We have a lot of conditions that come with street work around the city when a big development comes in, especially if it's a rezoning. That's how the street environment changes and then those existing neighborhoods that maybe don't have the same kind of development activity for zoning reasons don't get the same attention that they deserve. From a financing, budgeting and policy perspective, you've got to be proactive about addressing those neighborhoods as well. I think we're getting better at that now. We've been putting a lot more money into those kinds of retrofitting efforts and addressing a backlog of curb ramps around the city. Legislation also helps us city staff justify that kind of work and justify that when it comes time to figuring out our capital plan.

Karen: I know during the Accessibility Strategy we've been talking to many different departments of the city and they're doing great. There are always improvements to be made but I know one of the big projects is creating a Vancouver Plan. We have many engagements and I would invite you all to be part of the engagement. We need more voices of people who live with any kind of disability to be heard.

Ben: Karen, can you tell us what some of the strategies are for people who may not be that well-versed?

Karen: We have the Accessibility Strategy which is the overarching strategy and we have so many different departments doing their own accessibility work. We've got Dylan doing the Transportation and Accessibility lens, one perspective that the plan was written from. There's an overarching vision that puts together all of the accessibility pieces that we've done as a city and tries to encourage all departments to have a unified accessibility lens in all areas of the community. We have seven different areas that we are focusing that strategy on: Built Environment, Information and Communication, Transportation, Housing, Governance Collaboration, and Capacity. This is the lens that we are encouraging for both internal staff and the community.

Dylan: Karen, that brings up a really good point that I didn't mention. It's such a big city with a lot of staff, a lot of different branches and departments. Every project I work on is a challenge. You've got so many different groups that get plugged into these projects and who's coordinating

all that and bringing all these pieces together. It is so helpful to bring a coordinated lens to the day-to-day work that goes on at the city.

Heather: There needs to be something in between strata and human rights for people to fight for accessibility within their buildings. We have an example from River who says: my building is three steps up to the front door and the strata rejected the idea for ramp, for too little space. If landscaping was reduced, one could be put in. The problem is, when the strata said no, the next level is the possibility of a human rights case. We need something in between where people can go to, provincially. The application for a human rights case is very inaccessible and there should be a way to deal with accessibility, especially when a lot of the strata are non-disabled people who don't understand about accessibility and its importance. Way too often, the fate of people with disabilities is decided by non-disabled people who don't understand the impact of that accessibility. It's really important that there be provincial legislation with teeth that disabled people can use in order to have those rights actually recognized.

Paul: When people with disabilities are working with strata to make something wheelchair accessible, there needs to be a fast-track process within all the city programs. When I purchased my condo unit, it had a six-inch step to get into my front door and I couldn't get into my unit unless we blew out that step and flattened the area. To do that, there's a whole process of getting licenses done, getting the permits etc. but there needs to be a fast-track process for getting this done.

Ben: You've talked about some strategies to help people but what is the strategy that you would recommend to be most effective in terms of advocating for changes?

Heather: The more people within your building you can get to work with you, the better. If you can get parents in the building to talk about how accessible doors would make it easier for them with strollers, if you can talk to anybody who does deliveries. Some buildings may only have one person with an evident disability so it looks like there aren't other people with disabilities. Getting families, older adults, and delivery people to say how much the accessibility would help is one way to pressure them to understand that it's not just one person's need. One person's need should be enough, but unfortunately it isn't. The more people you can get on your side the better. It would be great to have proper legislation, proper bylaws in place. This also has to include older buildings. A lot of the new bylaws are for new buildings but we need older buildings to also be responsible for making sure the entry is accessible for everyone.

Dylan: From the transportation side of things, it depends on the issue. There's the 311 tip and information line and VanConnect service. For those conversations around larger projects or policies, it depends. We try, especially on the bigger projects, to have a pretty wholesome engagement process where we solicit feedback from the public but also work with stakeholder groups. We work a lot with our Seniors Committee and we also have a Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee that we work with, and the Rick Hansen Foundation. We reach out to a pretty broad set of stakeholders on all of these topics so that could be a good avenue for channeling thoughts.

Karen: As far as developing the Accessibilities Strategy, we are right in the middle of the engagement process. We're recommending three different phases and this is only phase one of the Accessibility Strategy where we are doing 10 to 15 really targeted dialogue sessions to give input on the development of the draft strategy. We hope that phase one of the Accessibility Strategy will be going to council by fall of this year. The future phases include a broader engagement as well as an action plan for each department of the City of Vancouver. The final strategy will hopefully be going forth by Spring of 2022. I would invite anyone who wants to be part of the development of it to get in touch with me and I can forward them the information.

Paul: I wanted to ask Dylan to tell us a little bit more about 311.

Dylan: It's basically just a city service to submit your complaint or your congratulations, and it is triaged to the appropriate people. I also use an app on my phone called VanConnect to report complaints.

Dannielle: My background is in architecture and in the 1980s, I worked on a seniors and accessible housing building project. Our building laws have to change so they will include accessibility features in any new building, even if they have to retrofit it. The Burrard Medical Center has no accessible washroom. I think we have to really hit these people with where it hurts, in the wallet. It would just take all those doctors to pull their lunch money and they could easily convert the existing bathrooms every third floor into a disabled bathroom.

Brad: It's certainly the truth. One of the things that happens in the industry is we have these discussions and they're not part of it, we changed codes we increased penalties we do all these things but it's really important to include industry at the table. If we're going to use a hammer on them, we have to include them and make sure they're current. We've tried to address that at the foundation using the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Program. At the end of the day, it needs to be a requirement, but the people who are actually doing it and paying for it have to be at the table.

Dannielle: Can you identify some of those people who should be at the table?

Brad: We work with the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada, but some of the best success we've had is working right at the trades level, getting advice from carpenters and plumbers on the right way to do things. Even something as simple as designing a house so that you can install a variable height sink later was always thought to be a very expensive process. We were talking to a couple of plumbers one day and they said you just bring the standpipes into 12 inches instead of 17 and you're still within code, you don't have to rip the wall out you just have to put a flexi hose on the drain and you're done. It's those kinds of real, practical, everyday solutions that we need from the guys swinging the hammers. We should involve them at the outset instead of just coming to them later and saying "thou shalt...". I want to make sure that people recognize that up until now, they haven't been part of the process. Accessibility Standards Canada is working on involving them more. Access is a management decision it's not a design decision. Architects will build whatever you tell them to build, so we have to get that mandate from the owners and the operators. They have to understand the real needs so they have to be educated and involved, and they have to have a big hammer over their heads

Danielle: How about involving the School of Architecture at UBC and make it a student project?

Brad: Yeah, there's some really nice work going on at Carleton University in Ottawa, and at Dalhousie on bringing that right into the design and architecture courses but it's like pulling teeth. I think you're right it, it should be a national program.

Angela: A question on the topic of air quality and accessibility. She said that air can contain contaminants, allergens, and triggers and when people with environmental conditions live in multi-unit buildings, it can become an issue, especially if ventilation systems are unregulated. Do you have any thoughts on that, both in a home and housing sense but also in a community environment sense?

Heather: This goes back to the registry we were talking about, and having information like that readily available for people to understand. We've got some members who have had to move multiple times because of the air quality. There are units where smoking is still allowed on shared patios, so knowing that in advance really helps. Also being able to check up on maintenance records is really important, to see that the building itself is maintaining what's necessary to have good air quality. There should also be subsidized equipment for people who have environmental allergies. We have some members who are able to buy air filters etc. but a lot who aren't. Those things should be seen as medical equipment because they're necessary for some people to breathe freely. Information is power, and knowing in advance what the air quality is, and having a process in which people can make a complaint if they disagree with what the registry says is important. A lot of the solutions are community-based, like people telling other people where it's good, where it isn't what landlords to stay away from etc.

Angela: I'm going to combine a couple questions from which were related to the idea of compulsory ramps within the city. Maureen was asking if there is a way to approach the city about making it compulsory to provide ramps, and Amy added, if there was an emergency how would a rescue work? Would the individual have to wait to be rescued or have a ramp to be able to rescue themselves? Does anyone have thoughts on how to approach the city about that or the idea of ramps in general?

Brad: This is a huge problem. The building code works really hard to get us into buildings but it doesn't give a rat's butt about getting us out. Accessibility Standards Canada has identified this as a primary pillar that has to be addressed right away and it's engaged CSA and a number of other groups. If it isn't formed now, it's being formed soon and I would encourage people to get on those committees. At that level, there are a number of different solutions currently out there to mitigate it. The big push that we're trying to achieve right now at Accessibility Standards Canada is creating elevators that are fire-safe so you can use them in an emergency. Right now, you just can't. There's a plaque saying: in case of fire use stairs. Where's the little plaque that tells me what to do? There's no little plaque for me, but if we could use elevators in fire conditions, that would be a game changer. There are people working diligently on that aspect of it but there's a lot of work to be done and a lot of other ideas that need to be engaged.

Paul: There have been a lot of people with disabilities really wanting to see buildings with more than one elevator. I've heard it so many times and we need to start looking at changing the policy. If you're going to have an elevator you need to have two of them in case it breaks down.

Brad: The other thing that's really important is that elevators, and any power door that's on an exit route has to have emergency power. That's one of the first questions our team asks when they do their surveys and nine times out of ten the answer is no. I don't know how that's possible, if it's on an exit route. This is all stuff that's covered under the fire code if, they would just include us.

Maureen: I go to a hairdresser on Fraser and there's one step or maybe six inches. The landlord will not provide any sort of temporary ramp or boards, so I bring my own ramp every time because it's only six inches. Paul's Omelettery on South Granville has one step and I can get in there because their staff are all trained. You just let someone know inside that you're there and they bring two boards to place as a ramp, and when you're coming out, exactly the same. It's so simple, yet there's all these buildings that are using some heritage clause or something that they don't have to be accessible when it's so easily resolved. I live in the South Granville area and there are all kinds of shops that I can't access because of one or two steps. I'd like to see that addressed and made it compulsory to provide a ramp.

Brad: It's a big problem, but the solutions aren't as simple as they seem. Some of you may be familiar with StopGap, an operation mostly back east, run by Luke. It was quite successful and he got a lot of buy-in from business. It was just a little ramp over that one step, or sometimes two. He just got sued because somebody slipped and fell on the ramp and the lawsuit was successful. StopGap has completely shut down, so that ramp solution brings with it some liabilities. It breaks my heart because they were doing such great work and such needed work, but you have to be careful when you find a solution that you're not just transferring the problem to somebody else. Creating a solution for a couple of wheelchair users created a bigger problem for a number of people with mobility impairments who walked up this ramp when they shouldn't have. The solution might be to make sure staff understand that they can't leave the ramp there, it's for this one-time use. In Luke's case, the problem was the ramp was left in place and people fell. There are conflicts like this quite often, so finding a reliable way of resolving them is really important.

Maureen: When I had my accident, I wasn't going to sue anybody. It was my own fault, but the insurance companies insist that you at least try to see if there's any way the blame can be shifted. I think it's too litigious, but again, that's out of our control. I'll just carry on my bringing my own ramp, I guess.

Heather: Ben said that the Fish Counter has a ramp they can bring out, but you need to know to ask about it and that's a big problem. That there are quite a few restaurants and businesses that have ramps inside so you either need to know that it exists and send somebody in who doesn't need the ramp. It's not accessible unless you're okay with asking random strangers to go into a store for you. We need that information available at the front door so that people know the phone number to call, and that staff will come out with the ramp etc. That's a lot of the work we do in our accessibility audits is asking businesses to put this information on their websites. Most

people with disabilities do a lot of recon work prior to getting to a business. They want to know that there are accessible routes and transportation and that they can access your business. Don't just have something that is for access, actually advertise it, and let it be known.

Katherine: I have a 14-year-old son who is a below-the-knee amputee on both legs. He wears prosthetics and he's very mobile, but there is always the possibility that he would be completely immobile if his prosthetic legs broke or if he needed surgery. He's in grade eight, finishing his first year. He's in a mini school. It was the right fit for him because he's a bright kid and needs to be challenged. The issue that I'm facing is that that school is not accessible. It does not have an elevator and is almost 100 years old. It's a Vancouver School Board school and I have been in discussion with the school board and various people since we applied get into this school. I'm so deflated. It's a big, important issue to have this, and all schools accessible be accessible, not only for my son but for every child that wants to go to a school in their community, every parent that wants to access their child's school and every staff member, teacher or anybody else. Right now, my son is mobile and he's doing fine but there a high chance that he may need surgery which could mean being in a wheelchair for three months during his high school career. This happened in grade four, and he was completely immobile and completely non-weight-bearing for three months. I helped to make it work for Matteo and I have addressed this with the Vancouver School Board. Their solution is that they're going to move his classes to the main floor. It's a very reactive, temporary solution. What happens if Matteo's prosthetic legs break tomorrow or if he has a wound? He will not be able to access his school. Education is a human right and it is a human right for every child to be able to access their school and receive education. They feel like they have resolved the situation by saying if and when he needs this, they're going to move his classrooms to the main floor, but it's a very piecemeal solution and I'm not happy with it. I feel very alone. I have gone to Inclusion BC and I'm thinking of filing a human rights complaint.

Ben: I'm sorry you're having such a terrible time with this and I totally empathize with your situation. I was curious if the panel had any suggestions for her.

Paul: We need accessibility for all, there's no doubt about it. Good for you to really put the pressure on, and you need to continue to do that. The trouble is that the work you're going to do with regards to this school is going to perhaps help down the road. I'm a realist, and we need to figure out how to solve the problem now. It's really important that all schools are accessible.

Katherine: The reality is an elevator is going to cost \$650,000 to \$800,000. When I first heard that amount, I was like, wow, how do you put a price on education, but there's always a price on everything, right? I think the school board needs to make this a priority as well. It's such a huge issue because right now he's accessing his education, but next week he may not be able to.

Paul: The reality is there are people with disabilities who need it and there are people like myself who have children and we need to know that we're going to be able to access a school. It's not appropriate to tell us that we need to go to another school. We want to grow up in our community where we can support one another and develop our friendships and all those things. As parents, it's important to be able to get support from other parents.

Heather: I admire how hard you're fighting for yourself and for anyone else who needs that elevator, but you shouldn't have to. I have seen so many parents who have spent their kids' entire high school time fighting for changes, and the toll that takes on them mentally, emotionally and physically. Inaccessibility in school is not uncommon, unfortunately, so there should be a way to fast-track these kinds of claims to understand how important that accessibility is and to take some of the expectation of labor, energy and time off of parents and support systems. There are way too many people that are spending valuable time on these issues that are being fixed piecemeal to appease the parent in the situation. As soon as you leave, they probably won't continue to push for that accessibility. How many people who don't have an evident disability would use an elevator if it was installed? There are a lot of people who are using stairs who really shouldn't be using stairs, yet they don't feel they have the right to ask for it because they don't use a mobility device. Those people are missing out as well. Unfortunately, it comes down to money, and disabled people lose out so many times to government, schools, and businesses that just don't want to put in money. We need to think about how many disabled people there are in the population and start having systems to support the people who are fighting for this, and not have it be completely on the disabled person and their support systems.

Brad: On the elevator issue, we get this all the time that it's too expensive, we can't drop half a million dollars. It's a red herring, because it's part of the building they amortize. In some cases that can be 80 years, sometimes it's 20 years. It's not a \$650,000 one-time cost. They want to hide behind that, but don't let them, because they're amortizing that cost. Your child isn't causing that expense.

Ben: Estela would like to connect with you. She's gone through fights with the school board in Calgary, so that sounds like a good potential resource. There was also someone in the chat talking about making human rights complaints.

Katherine: I've written the human rights complaint, I just need to submit it, if I've done it right. I'll fight forever for my son; I am a strong person and I'm his primary advocate. I'll do anything for him but I don't know if filing a human rights complaint is really going for it or not.

Paul: It's part of the overall movement but I worry about the amount of time it will take. I want something that's going to help your situation, but that's going to take a lot of time. It will make a difference in the community of people with disabilities. People have to follow these kinds of things through if they can. If you win the human rights case, it does make a difference down the road, it just usually takes way too long.

Bruce: Listening to Brad reminds me of something that was very meaningful to me a number of years ago: what does meaningful accessibility mean to me or Brad or Paul or any of the other people on the call? Meaningful accessibility is about the connections between the places that we are at, at the moment. A restaurant that's got an accessible door doesn't necessarily have meaningful accessibility if the washroom hasn't been kept in mind. Or when the interior design of a place here in Vancouver results in a restaurant being converted from one brand to another brand and they put in high tops and nothing is wheelchair accessible. Just because the door is accessible doesn't mean the experience is accessible. Brad, I'm addressing a lot of this to you because of what you do with the Rick Hansen Foundation. When we talk about the Beedie

Group, the Polygon Group and the developers around Vancouver, getting in and having the meetings with them. The developers want to maximize their FSR. They don't want to change anything. This is a provincial issue. I know the Cariboo is going through a housing review. The aging people in the outlying areas selling off little farms and wanting to come back to the place they have their connection to; Williams Lake, Cornell, 100 Mile House but there's no inventory for them to move back to these places. The buildings that will be built are following provincial building criteria. A very serious point of this conversation here today is our relationships with the real estate arm of British Columbia. What they're hearing from people is this is what I need because of my health or my abilities. How effective is this conversation? It's presented in a complete plenary way at, say, a UBCM annual general meeting, so we can get the social case out to drive the hard agenda around that it is business.

Brad: The discussion earlier was about how we are not non-market, and they insist that we are. We spend a lot of time with the big players, the concert properties, the Aquilinis, and try to educate them about who they're really selling to. I have a condo in Burnaby, and one of the reasons we bought it for my mother-in-law who is 85 years old, was because they have a really nice little courtyard, about an acre in size. You could walk your dog out there, but it's all fenced and it's secure. I mentioned to the president of the company how the homes are really senior-friendly and he was utterly shocked. He had no idea of the ancillary benefit. So much of this is education and disability awareness training. To have meaningful access, you need three things. First, you need to understand who you actually building and designing for and second is to change the design culture. This is the biggest barrier for people with disability, the attitudinal barrier. We've had great success with that recently and it's almost like the lights went on for a lot of developers. The third thing is you have to professionalize the delivery of accessible design. Have reliable, trained, accepted people in the field, access consultants that are recognized as professional. When we do a design criteria manual, the consultant work that goes into it won't be written off as, oh well they're just advocates, or it's just for a few wheelchair guys. The other problem is we tend to get lumped into one giant group. We're going to deal with sustainability issues, we're going to deal with urbanism, and we're also going to deal with people with disabilities, not recognizing that we're part of all those other concerns. They segment us off and say, okay we're going to deal with access issues once we get all this done and we'll just look after everybody in one fell swoop. If ignorance is bliss, they must be very happy people.

Dannielle: Some advice for Katherine, with the disabled son. If the school is refusing to put in an elevator, an outside ramp to allow her son to get to the second floor is much easier and cheaper to build and could solve that problem. Another thing is to involve the companies that supply our elevators, because they can always claim it as a PR expense or a tax write-off. Go to the Otis company, to the big elevator companies, and tell them this is a really good PR move on your part. I lived near a restaurant called Go Fish, and I told the owner they would increase their bottom line if they built a simple ramp that goes up four inches from the pavement to the deck. Sure enough, they built this ramp and it has increased their business. Not only does it allow us in wheelchairs to go up the ramp but also women with strollers and delivery people to deliver their goods. It just takes a couple of bucks to build a ramp but it makes such a difference, especially when they can increase their bottom line. I covered the Paralympics in 2010 and there was a downhill skier, Lauren Woolstencroft, who was born with no legs and only one arm. She won five gold medals which was the most that any Paralympic skier won during the 2010 Winter

Paralympics for Canada. Toyota used her in their advertising for the subsequent Winter Olympics in Russia because Toyota had changed their advertising policy. Instead of just selling cars and trucks, they were selling movement, so she was the perfect spokesperson for this and they ran it during the Winter Paralympics in Russia.

Estela: The overall theme of today's conversation has been segmented efforts. I think it was Paul who said it needs to be a collaborative effort. It's sometimes not about the solution that is available or the money, it's about the will of the person making the decision. It's up to us to take a different approach. The approach has to be more of a business proposal, going from the angle where if you don't do this, this is what's going to happen. If you do go through the human rights route, it will take a long time. There are three to four different levels that you have to go through to even get to the Ministry of Education. We've gone through all of this in multiple different scenarios, elementary schools as well as in high schools now. The approach that has worked twice for us with transportation accessibility, which was being taken away from the school was putting a parent group letter together and addressing it to every single level of the government and every single level of the school board, with a date-driven consequence. You have to be able to follow through with that statement, and social media is such a powerful tool for parents and advocates as well. My son who has peanut allergies had a situation where he had to go to the hospital, and there was no ramp in his high school. We literally had to carry him to the ambulance and it was ridiculous. That brought me to do a white paper and I basically told the school board the trustee and the principal: here's a white paper for you and these are the things that you need to do and the recommendation. If it's not going to happen, this white paper is going to go public, and let me tell you, things were changed immediately. Sometimes it's about how we're going to address these issues. It sounds like timing right now is your constraint, you need to make it move fast. You're going to end up having additional stress, but we can help you out, just don't lose hope.

Angela: This question is on the issue of transportation, specifically not enough bus stops to access essential services, sidewalks not being very well-maintained, and construction not being advertised.

Dylan: A common thing we deal with is sidewalk heaving from tree roots. It's a constant struggle but we also have a lot of really strong policy in Vancouver to maintain and expand the tree canopy, so we're always trying to find creative ways to build our sidewalks that are more resilient to tree roots. In terms of construction, we're also trying to get better. We're not bad at dealing with temporary pedestrian detouring around construction zones but we still have a lot of work to do to make that information more accessible publicly, and not just around construction zones, to help people get around the city. For someone who has vision loss to know where the traffic signals are that have the chirp and cuckoo sound, or an accessible pedestrian signal, that kind of information. TransLink is trying really hard to keep transit services efficient and sometimes we're getting pushed to remove some stops. We need to bring considerations around accessibility to that discussion. If the stops are on a steep downhill grade, we need to be thinking about that and sometimes we meet somewhere in the middle.

Ben: I'd just like to thank the panelists for their wonderful contributions but also everyone who's attended and all their wonderful questions. I'd like to encourage you to follow up with the

panelists if there was a question that you didn't get answered or a question came to mind that you've just thought of or even think of later. The Disability Foundation is really excited to push some of those ideas forward from your survey responses. Thank you so much to our panelists and to everybody that attended. This was a really great, lively discussion.