

DATE: October 12, 1995

SUBJECT: PATHS PRESENTATION- PEOPLE ACCESS THROUGH HARD SITUATIONS

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the following report be received as information.

BACKGROUND

Mr. Keith David Benjamin has written to the Board requesting permission to appear as a delegation before its meeting on October 16, 1995. During the Arts Umbrella's fourth annual Sandcastle Competition on September 9, 1995 at Spanish Banks Beach, Mr. Benjamin and his team laid 1750 linear feet of track to enhance access to the beach.

The initial objective was to provide an accessible path for a team of sandcastle builders representing the BC Paraplegic Association. The end result, according to Mr. Benjamin, exceeded his expectations. He wishes to inform the Board, through a short slide and video presentation, about his unique solution to this access dilemma. He hopes that the Board can encourage this kind of access solution to be repeated for similar events in the future.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Benjamin reports that the linear track system was laid by a few volunteers in 5 hours, and that the path was actually used by three quarters of the estimated 10,000 persons on the beach during the Sandcastle event. It is generally accepted that any path of travel built for persons with a mobility disability will be used by large numbers of the general population, including those using strollers, scooters and other wheeled devices.

B. C. Paraplegic Association (BCPA) staff who were consulted concur that the solution facilitated by Mr. Benjamin actually worked well for this event, and could be used successfully again. The BCPA has the bulk of the raw materials used this August, in the event that other activity organizers should wish to make use of them.

Beach events in the past two years which could have made use of this system, in addition to the sandcastle competition, include the Sea Festival, Bathtub Race, 2-3 English Bay swim races annually, and the Polar Bear Swim.

Staff have been in contact with Mr. Benjamin, but have not had sufficient time to study the feasibility of the system

as described in his letter. Without research and documented evidence, it appears that this path system may be an appropriate short-term, unobtrusive, affordable and environmentally effective access solution. It would not be safe or viable as a permanent access system, as normal wear and vandalism would render it ineffective. There are few formalized alternatives to waterfront access across the sand, none of which are ideal. Two "surf chairs", have been in trial use at English Bay and Jericho Beaches for over a year, and have proven to be quite popular for those who wish to transfer from their own wheelchair to the surf chair. These chairs are made of plastic "plumbing" pipe (pvc), with large soft rubber tires for mobility over soft sand. The chair is then pushed by another person to and from the water. This service is available only while lifeguards are on duty.

This is not an independent access solution, as the swimmer with a disability requires another person to push the surf chair. The community of persons with a disability would prefer independent access to, and egress from any venue, including the beach.

The general public have asked about the feasibility of one or a system of permanent and independent pathways to the water's edge at local beaches. The BC Mobility Opportunities Society has requested such access adjacent to the Jericho Sailing Centre, to extend the path of travel for users of their motorized all-terrain wheelchair.

Staff have reviewed these requests, and are concerned about the extensive capital costs associated with the development of even one single access route to the water. First, an estimate of the capital costs for one asphalt and/or concrete ramp is in excess of \$50,000. It is conceivable to expect that this figure would rise with requests for ramps at other beaches.

Secondly, the maintenance required to ensure the ramp is kept in a useful state clear of sand and debris is an added operating cost of unknown value. The entire amount of money allocated to improved access in the current (three year) capital plan is about \$400,000.

In addition to the capital costs, tidal action on our beaches would create a serious drop-off hazard in the vicinity of any permanent concrete structure.

Waves strike the beach diagonally rather than straight on, which would create a hollow on the ramp's weak side.

This type of structural hazard would pose an element of risk for the public, and a barrier for log movers and sand cleaners.

Plastic "tiles" are available to lay on top of trails which may be difficult to negotiate, as a low-cost alternative to building accessible trailways in parks and marshlands.

This product is mainly designed for existing trail systems, is fairly costly and would be very labour-intensive to install, remove and store. This option has never been considered seriously for an application of this kind.

CONCLUSION

The PATHS presentation may provide an example of a temporary or event-specific method for beach access. Independent beach access at any time of the year is currently not available via any formalized access path or method provided by the Board. The issue and potential solutions require more study.

Prepared by:
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