

CITY OF PORT COQUITLAM

ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2023-2026



Table of Contents

MESSAGE FROM COUNCIL	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF CONTRIBUTORS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	6
THE ACCESSIBLE BC ACT	6
WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY?	7
UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS	8
THE CITY'S ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT	9
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	9
THE ROLE OF THE ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE	10
GOALS AND ACTIONS	11
FOCUS AREAS	11
SERVICE DELIVERY	11
BUILT ENVIRONMENT	15
TRANSPORTATION	18
EMPLOYMENT	20
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION	22
MONITORING & IMPLEMENTATION	214
FEEDBACK MECHANISMS	24



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MESSAGE FROM COUNCIL

Council is pleased to share the City of Port Coquitlam’s Accessibility Action Plan.

The City of Port Coquitlam recognizes that planning for accessibility helps us create a more inclusive City for all residents to enjoy. That is why it is so important for us to continue to move forward on creating an accessible City and to ensure that we meet our goals.

We continue to work hard to remove barriers that limit the full participation of all those who live, work, play and visit Port Coquitlam. Council appreciates the commitments made by staff and the Accessibility Committee to ensure Port Coquitlam is a leader when it comes to accessibility. We look forward to implementing this important plan and are committed to ensuring accessibility is a priority for the City.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF CONTRIBUTORS

The City of Port Coquitlam acknowledges the contributions of City staff and community organizations including Kinsight and the Community Integration Services Society. Members of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Roundtable formed the Accessibility Committee and provided important contributions to this Action Plan:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Accessibility and inclusion benefit everyone, especially people with disabilities. The City of Port Coquitlam is committed to providing accessible and inclusive spaces, services, programs and opportunities for all members of our community. This Accessibility Action Plan aims to build on the City's previous and ongoing work to identify, prevent and remove barriers to accessibility, involve those with diverse abilities, promote inclusion, and foster a positive and respectful community through the City's actions and services.

The City of Port Coquitlam has created this Accessibility Action Plan in accordance with the requirements of the Accessible British Columbia Act, which came into force for municipalities on September 1, 2022. This requires the City to establish an accessibility committee, develop an accessibility strategy, and implement a public feedback mechanism. This Action Plan provides the opportunity to align the City's accessibility work with the Province - bringing together diverse efforts from across the City to build a culture where the City is actively seeking to identify and remove barriers to accessibility.

The Action Plan was developed with input from the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Roundtable, City staff, and community serving organizations.

This Action Plan provides an overview of the Accessible BC Act and outlines a definition of accessibility. To support alignment with the Accessible BC Plan, 6 guiding principles are outlined to support the City's actions related to accessibility. The main body of the Action Plan identifies five focus areas of action as follows:

- Service Delivery
- Built Environment
- Transportation
- Employment
- Information & Communications

For each focus area, there is an overarching goal and series of objectives, a summary of what was heard during the engagement, and a series of actions that are either underway or suggested as part of this plan. In addition, highlights of actions the City is already taking to enhance accessibility are included. The Monitoring and Implementation section outlines key implementation considerations including the City's feedback mechanism.





INTRODUCTION

Centrally located in Metro Vancouver, the City of Port Coquitlam has earned national recognition for being one of British Columbia's most livable cities and has a reputation for progressive governance, and a strong sense of community spirit. The City is home to a growing and diverse population of over 61,000 residents. The 2022 Canadian Survey on Disabilities indicates that 20% of residents age 15 and over in the Greater Vancouver area reported experiencing limitations in their day-to-day activities that led to their identification as a person with disabilities. While limited in its local details, this is on par with the reported national average and translates to over 12,000 Port Coquitlam residents that could be living with one or more disabilities. Seniors are a sub-set of the population that are often greatly represented as persons with disabilities.

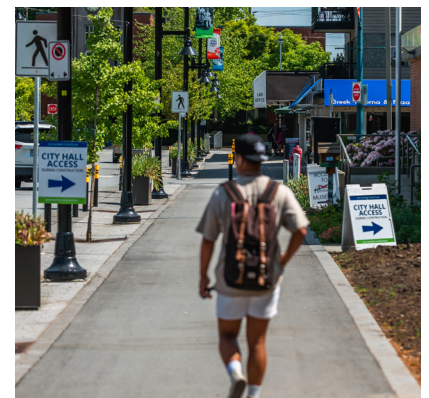
THE ACCESSIBLE BC ACT

This Accessibility Action Plan has been developed in accordance with the Accessible BC Act. In 2021, the Government of British Columbia passed the Accessibility BC Act. The new legislation is designed to empower government, persons with disabilities and the broader community to work together to identify, remove and prevent barriers to full participation in society by persons with disabilities. The Act creates a requirement for several types of prescribed organizations (including local and provincial governments) to establish an Accessibility Committee, create an Accessibility Action Plan, and ensure there is a mechanism for the community to provide feedback related to accessibility. The Act also allows the Lieutenant Governor General to create, through collaboration with persons with disabilities, standards for accessibility that may apply to government, public institutions, private businesses, and others. A central idea that animates this Legislation is that all persons, including persons with disabilities, have inherent worth and dignity and that it is a function of good government to safeguard and advance that dignity.

The Accessible BC Act is just the most recent legislation to protect and advance the rights of people with disabilities. In 2010, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requiring the government to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities including full equality under the law. In 2019, the Accessible Canada Act came into force with the goal to reach a barrier free Canada by 2040 and applies to federally regulated entities. According to the Accessible BC Act, all municipalities must have fulfilled their requirements by September 1st, 2023.

WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY?

As outlined in the Accessible British Columbia Act, 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 and increasing inclusion and independence for everyone.





UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS

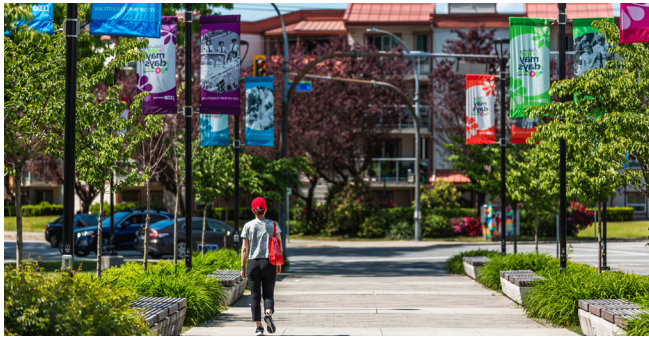
The social model of disabilities recognizes that disability emerges as result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with barriers. Barriers are anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with a disability and are (a) caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies, and (b) affected by intersecting forms of discrimination. A disability is therefore an inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction of an impairment (including physical, sensory, mental, intellectual or cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary or episodic) and a barrier.

Barriers to accessibility evolve over time and take a variety of forms. As part of achieving its vision of a happy, safe, and vibrant community, the City recognizes the need to build on its previous and ongoing work to identify, prevent and remove all types of barriers to accessibility to ensure that everyone can fully participate in and benefit from the City's many opportunities.

This includes¹:

1. Attitudinal Barriers – When people think and act based upon false ideas;
2. Physical Barriers – When obstacles make access difficult;
3. Information or Communication Barriers– When communication methods do not reach people with disabilities;

¹ Accessible BC Plan: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/about-the-bc-government/accessible-bc/accessiblebc-plan.pdf>



4. Systemic Barriers – When an organization’s policies or procedures aren’t inclusive;
5. Technology Barriers– When technology can’t be accessed by people with disabilities; and
6. Sensory Barriers– When lights, sounds or smells prevent participation in the environment.

THE CITY’S ACCESSIBILITY COMMITMENT

The City of Port Coquitlam is committed to building a community where all individuals can participate, navigate, and thrive. Through continuous improvements across city spaces, services, programs, infrastructure, and operations, we strive to eliminate barriers and develop a welcoming, inclusive and safe community. By fostering a culture of accessibility, diversity, and inclusion, we aim to empower every citizen to fully engage in all the opportunities our community has to offer.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In alignment with the Accessible BC Act, this Action Plan is grounded in the following six core principles:

- **Inclusion:** Inclusion is a dynamic state of feeling, belonging, and operating in which diversity is leveraged and valued to create a fair, healthy, and high-performing organization or community. An inclusive culture and environment ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It also enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, heard, engaged, motivated, and valued for who they are.
- **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. The City recognizes the intersectionality and diversity within the disability community.
- **Adaptability:** Disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.



- **Universal Design:** The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as “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.”
- **Self-Determination:** Each person can make their own choices and manage their own lives. The City recognizes the invaluable knowledge and perspectives of people with lived experience of disability and commits to ensuring that people with disabilities are an active part of the decision-making.
- **Collaboration:** Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. The City aims to create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

THE ROLE OF THE ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

To meet the Accessible BC Act requirements, the City convened an Accessibility Committee. The committee was required to have at least half of its members:

- Be persons with disabilities or
- Represent a disability-serving organization

Membership includes members of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Roundtable, as well as organizations representing people with disabilities and reflects the diversity of British Columbians. Indigenous perspectives are included through ongoing consultation.

The EDI Roundtable enables a deeper understanding of lived experiences and promotes community dialogue and action. The main function of the EDI Roundtable is to act as a resource for the City on priorities concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion to help remove barriers and develop welcoming, inclusive, equitable, and safe policies for the City’s diverse populations. The City is committed to ensuring the voices of people with lived experience of disability are heard and considered in accessibility initiatives and the committee will meet regularly to advise the City on its accessibility work as described in its Terms of Reference.



GOALS AND ACTIONS

FOCUS AREAS

To develop the focus areas, the City considered the focus areas and standards of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) and the Accessible BC Act (ABCA), alongside consultations with staff, the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Roundtable and community serving organizations. There is a recognition that accessibility is an ongoing journey and priorities will evolve over time.

The five areas of focus are:

- Service Delivery
- Built Environment
- Transportation
- Employment
- Information & Communications

SERVICE DELIVERY

Goal: City programs, services, and events are accessible, and staff exhibit accessibility awareness and competency.

Objectives:

- Lead in collaborating and advocating for accessibility support.
- Work with partners to increase recreational program opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Increase customer service support across all City public service counters to serve people with visible and non-visible disabilities.
- Support training opportunities for staff to build understanding of accessibility.



Highlights in City's Accessibility Approach to Service Delivery

The City's Financial Assistance Program supports individuals and families to access recreation opportunities at a reduced cost. It is well received and utilized by the community, including by individuals with disabilities who are disproportionately represented as low-income. The Recreation Support Program provides support for children and youth in registered activities through collaboration with families to build strategies, adaptations and support needed to create a positive experience for children and youth. Personal Assistants are offered free admission when providing 1 to 1 support to an individual with disabilities attending recreation programs and activities. The City is continuing to expand its accessibility at City events through robust partnerships with organizations from the Tri-Cities. Highlights includes quiet sensory zones, American Sign Language (ASL) and an all abilities route for the Terry Fox Hometown Run.

What We Heard During Engagement:

- The City provides opportunities for one to one staff support for children and youth with disabilities. There is an increase in demand for this support for camps and year-round programs. This demand is not currently being met by City and community resources. This results in children with disabilities not being able to participate in recreation opportunities
- There has been a large increase in the number of resident's accessing the City's Financial Assistance program to participate in programming (increase largely seen post-pandemic).
- There is an opportunity to work closely with the Tri-cities to share resources for adapted programming for children with specific needs.

- There are long waitlists for families accessing accessibility resources through community waitlists, and there are opportunities to provide clearer processes for those wanting to access resources.
- There is need to expand staff training opportunities related to access, diversity and inclusion, including contractors to the City, such as security services and others who provide services at City events and facilities.
- There is opportunity to continue to partners with organizations and neurodivergent people to increase offerings of programs that are innovative and culturally safe, such as adaptive swim lessons, STEM classes or relationship building.





Key Actions:

1. Maintain the City's Financial Assistance program to continue to offer inclusive recreation programs and services at reduced costs for individuals.
2. Create an accessibility checklist to guide recreation program planning.
3. Continue to offer the Personal Assistant Access Program and build upon the Recreation Program Support Program for children and youth to support individuals attending recreation programs and activities.
4. Support increased availability of accessibility programs through partnerships with community organizations and neighbouring municipalities.
5. Develop an accessibility checklist to guide planning of City events and external permitted events taking place on City property.
6. Continue with and review opportunities to expand the offerings of ASL and sensory friendly spaces during City events and within City facilities.
7. Continue to offer City-wide anti-bias training for staff and explore options of extending this to contractors who interact with customers. Expand staff development offerings to incorporate specific accessibility and neurodiversity training.
8. Build on opportunities to educate and inform the City's residents, visitors and businesses about accessibility, inclusion, and potential barriers to access.
9. Review customer service and frontline staff supports to identify opportunities for increased training, and other accessibility accommodations to support greater access for residents.



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Goal: The City will prevent and remove barriers from public spaces, parks, and facilities to provide welcoming spaces for all.

Objectives:

- Conduct a review of all municipal buildings to assess accessibility, including amenities, wayfinding, and surrounding areas such as parking. Develop a prioritization process for accessibility upgrades.
- Improve the accessibility of public spaces in the City, including parks, playgrounds, and trails.

Accessibility Highlights within the City's Built Environment

The City has completed numerous accessibility upgrades at City facilities, including accessible parking, ramp and elevator access and accessible features in the pool at Hyde Creek Recreation Centre, and the Port Coquitlam Community Centre which is Certified Gold by the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Program (RHFAC). Ongoing playground upgrades throughout the City strive for inclusive play where all children, youth and parents can actively participate. The recently upgraded Routley Park playground, for example, was rebuilt with accessibility at the fore front of planning and procurement with ground level components, accessible seating, and shade purposely integrated.

What We Heard During Engagement:

- Currently the City is undertaking many actions to remove barriers within the built environment, all funded through grants. Projects are currently determined more by grant availability than priority. There is a need for the City to assess and prioritize accessibility projects.
- Specific barriers exist related to accessible parking in the downtown, consistent accessible wayfinding, sidewalk width and materials, service counter heights, door weights, and sensory experiences in playground and public buildings.
- Snow removal on sidewalks and in construction areas does not consistently accommodate individuals with mobility barriers.
- The City has upgraded a number of playgrounds with accessibility included in the planning process and will continue to plan for ongoing playground upgrades.
- Parks and trails are regularly assessed for eliminating barriers and incorporating accessibility considerations into upgrades and projects, including hazard removal, proper let downs, inclines, landings, and tactile warning strips on stairways.
- There is a need for more inclusive, accessible housing. New developments are required to have at least 30% adaptable housing units. However, the City is only able to retrofit its own buildings to conform to universal design guidelines, and there is a need to collaborate with property owners to implement accessibility features throughout the existing housing stock City-wide.



Key Actions:

1. Continue regular building accessibility assessments through the Rick Hansen Foundation in all City facilities.
2. Use the accessibility assessments to develop a prioritization and funding process for accessibility upgrades throughout City facilities.
3. Include short-term retrofits and infrastructure updates for accessibility into budget cycle.
4. Complete the Official Community Plan building design guidelines and practices to support additional accessibility considerations and community needs.
5. Continue to include accessibility considerations when planning for parks, along with the upgrade and improvement of playground features throughout the City.
6. Continue to monitor and improve the results of the City's new accessible features at City intersections, pedestrian signals, and tactile domes.
7. Develop a consistent wayfinding approach throughout the City through the use of an accessibility checklist and increased accessibility features.
8. Create awareness of accessibility features that are currently available at City facilities, parks and playgrounds through public advertising and signage.
9. Partner with the Terry Fox Library to implement accessibility considerations into its building, programs and events.
10. Assess the Snow Removal Program to identify what needs to be adapted to provide accessible access to sidewalks and facilities during snow and ice events.
11. Educate owners of private residences on accessibility measures and the benefits to the community.

TRANSPORTATION

Goal: The City's pedestrian, bike, and transit networks are accessible for everyone.

Objectives:

- Improve the availability and accessibility of transportation services, mobility options and parking infrastructure for people with disabilities.
- Ensure people have safe, direct and comfortable routes to walk or wheel to key destination points in the city.
- Provide safe, comfortable and attractive cycling/rolling facilities that encourage people of all ages and abilities to cycle/roll through the city.
- Encourage the use of transit with attractive and accessible stops and road improvements that support efficient and reliable transit service.

What We Heard During Engagement:

- There is an opportunity to enhance sidewalks in front of seniors living facilities.
- Currently any accessibility features provided at crosswalks and intersections are being accommodated within existing budgets (i.e. provision of tactile strips). Accessibility features would benefit from dedicated budgets.
- The material used for sidewalks is too bumpy for wheelchairs.
- Sidewalks are too narrow to allow someone to walk beside a person using a wheelchair.



Key Actions:

1. Reference and align the Accessibility Action Plan with the new Master Transportation Plan, including for mobility related to walking, wheeling, and rolling.
2. Utilize insights from the 2022 Older Adult Mobility Survey to address the transportation needs of Port Coquitlam's aging demographic.
3. Continue to invest in sidewalks and pedestrian safety improvements (including for example filling in gaps on the sidewalk, creating multiuse pathways, expanding sidewalks).
4. Continue to outfit transit stops with pedestrian landing pads and wheelchair loading areas.
5. Continue to equip frequent transit stops and major intersections with tactile indicator surfaces.
6. Continue to rectify orphan sidewalk connections.
7. Implement additional accessible parking for on and off street spaces.

Highlights in City's Accessibility within Transportation

Investments in sidewalk and pedestrian safety are underway consistently, and transit stops are being outfitted with pedestrian landing pads and wheelchair loading areas. As well, the City is regularly addressing sidewalk connections.

EMPLOYMENT

Goal: The City is an accessible and inclusive workplace.

Objectives:

- Provide opportunities for people of all abilities to work and advance in their careers with the City.

Highlights in City's Accessibility Approach to Employment

The City provides training in the areas of equity and inclusion with the goal of supporting an inclusive workplace, including unconscious bias training and active bystander training. Effective December 2016, the City of Port Coquitlam became a 'Living Wage Employer.' As a living wage employer, the City demonstrates its commitment to supporting healthy, thriving communities by paying employees and contracted services employees a living wage.

What We Heard During Engagement:

- There is a desire for the City to create inclusive employment opportunities.
- It is recognized that people with intellectual disabilities face multiple barriers to meaningful, sustainable paid employment.
- Recruiting and hiring strategies typically create barriers for people with disabilities to obtain and maintain paid employment.
- Successful working environments for employees with disabilities includes identifying barriers and building accommodations.
- Include how the City is going to support, promote success and retain employees with disabilities.
- Consider visible, but also invisible disabilities of employees.

Key Actions:

1. Undertake a review of recruitment and hiring processes and materials to understand how the City might receive more applications from people with disabilities.

2. Update job posting templates to improve access for people with disabilities, including format, language that welcomes all abilities, a clear description of the position requirements, and whether adaptations are available.
3. Continually review human resources policies and guidelines to consider how to best support the success of current and future employees with both visible and invisible disabilities in their roles and careers.
4. Continue training for staff, including leadership training for managers and supervisors, on breaking down conscious and unconscious bias as it relates to disabilities.
5. Provide an overview of disability resources available to employees and education on how to access.
6. Consult with employment program service providers who specialize in supported and customized employment, for input on hiring, supporting and retaining job seekers with all types of disabilities in city jobs (ie. Kinsight, Neil Squire Society).



INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Goal: All City communications are inclusive and meet accessibility standards.

Objectives:

- Increase the accessibility of the City website, closed captioning, online resources and engagement platforms.
- Staff understand basic accessibility communication guidelines.
- Provide easy access to all residents to provide feedback on accessibility successes and barriers related to municipal facilities, services, programs, events and public spaces.

Highlights in City's Accessibility Approach to Information and Communications

The City has begun to update its communications materials with more visuals, better contrast, and colourful, brighter images to improve understanding by all members of the community. The City website is currently under redesign, and as part of the process accessibility will be considered and incorporated. As well, the City is continuing to invest in technology to actively communicate with the community using different languages (i.e. through Google Translate on devices).

What We Heard During Engagement:

- As a growing and diverse City, there is a need for residents to access information and services in different mediums across all distribution channels (i.e. print, online, QR codes, voice/radio).
- The City is investing in technology to actively communicate with the community using different languages (i.e. through Google Translate on devices).
- A variety of opportunities to improve communications process were suggested, particularly related to people who have invisible disabilities. These include expanding the number and type of communication channels available, the availability of interpretation services, the size and contrast of printed and online materials, and the sensory experiences of those communication inputs and outputs.

- There is a desire for better coordination among the City and other community organizations related to communicating available accessibility services and resources.
- The City has updated some of its communications materials with more visuals, better contrast, and colourful, brighter images (i.e. sorting waste pamphlet). There is a desire to do this across all communications materials.

Key Actions:

1. Continue to invest in technology and training for staff to reduce language and communication barriers with members of the public.
2. Complete the City website redesign to meet recognized accessibility standards in communication.
3. Increase the use of visuals to communicate service information.
4. Partner with outside organizations to increase awareness of services, resources, and information about accessibility throughout the community.
5. Consider increasing the availability of language interpreter services.
6. Explore accessible communication and engagement tools that can be used regularly or when needed by participants with disabilities.
7. Ensure information is presented in a variety of formats including audible and in print and that all videos include subtitles (where possible) or captioning.
8. Develop an internal accessibility working group and communication plan for sharing information with staff.
9. Develop a feedback mechanism to get public input to inform accessibility issues in the City and the next revision of the Accessibility Action Plan.
10. Train all staff to understand basic accessibility communication guidelines and internal processes for achieving them.

Monitoring & Implementation

- The City is committed to listening to residents to inform, develop, and refine priority action items to ensure the Action Plan reflects the accessibility needs of people living with disabilities.
- This Action Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every three years in accordance with the Accessible BC Act.
- Updates to the Action Plan will be informed by feedback from the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Roundtable, community serving organizations, staff engagement, and ongoing input provided through the City's feedback mechanism (see below).
- Each year the City will identify, implement, and integrate accessibility through its annual service planning, capital planning, and project management processes. Implementation of this Action Plan and reporting on accessibility accomplishments will be included in annual City reporting cycles.
- The City will continue to collaborate across departments through regular meetings of a working group.

Feedback Mechanisms

The City of Port Coquitlam provides several ways for individuals to provide their feedback on accessibility. The methods ensure that people who communicate best in a variety of ways can offer comments in a way that matches their primary communication method. The City offers the following options:

- An online feedback form with video, voice recording and infographics:
portcoquitlam.ca/accessibility
- Telephone contact: Community Services Coordinator: 604-927-5371
- Email: accessinclusion@portcoquitlam.ca
- Mailing Address:
Port Coquitlam City Hall - Access and Inclusion
2580 Shaughnessy Street
Port Coquitlam, BC V3C 3G3
- PoCo Sort and Report App

All feedback is responded to so that residents are heard and input is recorded to inform accessibility plans.



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