

RICHMOND REVIEW

Do city's crosswalks discriminate against the visually impaired?

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Rob Sleath is hoping to convince the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal that Richmond's crosswalks aren't accessible for the visually impaired.

file photo

Richmond's crosswalks discriminate against the visually impaired, according to a blind Richmond man who has launched a complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal.

Rob Sleath, 55, is seeking an order compelling the City of Richmond to install audio equipment at intersections that would deliver information to visually impaired pedestrians.

Sleath, a longtime Richmond resident who lost his vision in 1992, told The Richmond Review he's negotiated with the city for a decade. Talks came to a head when he learned Richmond installed dozens of special crosswalks—crossings with pedestrian-activated flashing yellow lights—without technology to aid the visually impaired.

Such crosswalks should deliver an audio message to pedestrians other than “chirps” and “cuckoos,” which are reserved for controlled intersections.

“In our mind it was a perfect solution to a challenging problem, but for some reason, the city didn't want to go along with it,” said Sleath, who is also chair of the advocacy group Access for Sight-Impaired Consumers.

Sleath also wants the city to install audio technology at controlled intersections that would announce the street name at a push of a button.

“Any sighted pedestrian has the ability to look up at a street corner and identify the intersection that they're at. A person who is blind or visually impaired in the City of Richmond has no opportunity to do that.”

Simply adding tactile lettering and braille doesn't help all visually impaired pedestrians, he said.

Sleath's case is scheduled to appear before the quasi-judicial body Aug. 23. The hearing is scheduled for five days.

City of Richmond spokesperson Ted Townsend wouldn't discuss the specific claim prior to the hearing but said the city takes accessibility issues “very seriously.”

“We have an international reputation for being a very accessible city. Particularly, we have programs in place dealing with pedestrian access for the disabled, including visually impaired.”

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