

Town of Whitby Staff Report

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Report Title: Accessibility Plan

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: June 10, 2024

Report Number: CMS 09-24

Department(s) Responsible:

Community Services Department

Submitted by:

John Romano, Commissioner of
Community Services

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,
Chief Administrative Officer**

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1. Recommendation:

1. That Council receive this report as information;
2. That Council adopt the Town's Accessibility Plan 2023-2026 as attached; and,
3. That a copy of the Accessibility Plan 2023-2026 be posted on the Town's website with alternate formats available upon request.

2. Highlights:

- In 2022, 27% of Canadians aged 15 and older (8 million people) had at least one disability and as the population grows older, this number will increase.
- The Town of Whitby Accessibility Plan 2023 – 2026 outlines the initiatives the Town intends to achieve to demonstrate to residents how it intends to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility.

- The Plan also ensures compliance with the Province's accessibility legislation which is the responsibility of the entire Corporation and impacts all employees and all departments.
- Planning ahead and making accessibility a priority in our projects, programs and services provides people of all ages and abilities with opportunities to participate in all areas of everyday life.

3. Background:

As a designated public sector organization, the Town of Whitby is required to have and make public a multi-year accessibility plan. This plan:

- creates a road map for the organization to demonstrate to residents how it intends to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility;
- puts the organization's commitment to accessibility into action;
- includes each accessibility standard (Customer Service, Design of Public Spaces, Information and Communication, Employment, Transportation – Taxis) that has been adopted by the Province; and
- includes procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of accessible elements in public spaces.

Organizations that are required to develop an accessibility plan must post a copy on their website and/or provide a copy to any person who requests one. Posting accessibility plans publicly gives organizations the opportunity to communicate their strategy for meeting accessibility and sets expectations for the public. Organizations must provide the plan in an accessible format, if requested. Once developed, organizations must maintain their accessibility plan.

As summarized on the Province of Ontario's website:

"An accessibility plan describes the actions an organization will take to prevent and remove barriers, and when it will do so. An accessibility plan creates a road map for an organization to increase accessibility. It puts into action an organization's commitment to accessibility and its accessibility policies."

The plan also highlights some of the accomplishments from the previous [4-year Accessibility Plan](#) along with the responsibilities of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Staff Working Group.

4. Discussion:

According to [Statistics Canada](#), in 2022, 27% of Canadians aged 15 and older (8 million people) had at least one disability and as the population grows older, this number will increase. Accessibility planning has been an integral part of the Town of Whitby in all departments since 2003. Whether we are serving our internal or external customers, accessibility must be considered as the project or service is developed and conducted.

In 2021, Council renewed the Town's Corporate Statement of Commitment.

It states:

“The Town of Whitby is committed to:

1. Ensuring that decisions, actions and planning for the community apply the principles of dignity, equal opportunity, independence and integration;
2. Identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to our programs, services, and facilities; and,
3. Providing an inclusive community in which employees, residents and visitors have equitable access for all ages, abilities, and circumstances.

The Town strives to deliver an inclusive and welcoming environment for all community members and visitors.”

Accessibility Plan

The Town of Whitby Accessibility Plan 2023 - 2026 (Attachment 1) has been written and prepared by the Staff Accessibility Working Group, which includes the Accessibility Coordinator and a designate from each Town Department. The plan was brought to the Accessibility Advisory Committee and received their support on at their [May virtual meeting](#). It was also circulated to staff from the LEAD program at the Abilities Centre who gave their feedback as well.

Plan Vision

The Overall Vision of the plan is that the Town of Whitby is committed to delivering an accessible environment for all community members, staff, and visitors; providing people of all ages and abilities with opportunities to participate in all areas of everyday life.

The action items have been broken down by the Provincial Standards:

Customer Service

- Continue promotion and distribution of the Town’s Accessibility Improvement Grant program.
- Foster collaboration between departments and teams to ensure accessibility is considered from the planning stage to through project completion.
- Continue to implement the Customer Service Strategy.
- Profile businesses in Whitby that have excelled in providing accessible products and services.
- Enhance accessibility and inclusivity of all Town programs.

Information and Communication

- Continue to provide training and tools for staff to improve access to Town’s information and communication.
- Ensure platforms for public engagement on Town projects is fully accessible and inclusive.
- Build accessible and inclusive on-line tools to improve access to Town processes for customers including apps, budget information, payments, permits, Council business and applications.

Employment

- Establish a formalized corporate-wide Emergency Prevention and Preparedness Program.
- Streamline the Return-to-Work process for occupational and non-occupational incidents.

Design of Public Spaces

- Strengthen collaboration between Staff and the Accessibility Advisory Committee on Town facility, parks, playgrounds, trails, and capital infrastructure projects ensuring that they prioritize safety and inclusivity.
- Highlight accessibility features and improvements made in natural and built environments in Town communications to the public.
- Implement the Accessible Signage and Wayfinding system.
- Ensure universal design and accessibility is incorporated within all design guidelines and site plan proposals.

Transportation – Taxis

- Collaborate with Region municipalities to help improve accessible taxi services.

2023 Status Update

As part of annual reporting, the 2023 Status Update (Attachment 2) has also been provided to show some of the actions from the plan that are in progress or that have been completed.

5. Financial Considerations:

Accessibility / ensuring that the Town is providing equitable service, programs and facilities has been integrated into the Town budget process. All projects, programs and other corporate initiatives must incorporate full costs, including accessibility features into their overall budgets.

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Through the development of the multi-year Accessibility Plan, public sector organizations must consult with people with disabilities, including their accessibility advisory committee.

The adopted Accessibility Plan must be posted on the corporate website and available upon request to customers. Annual update reports are required each year of the plan to highlight the achievements and acknowledge projects that have not been completed. This report is also to be posted on the Town's website and available upon request in alternate formats or with communication supports.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

Accessibility legislation is the responsibility of the entire corporation; there are impacts to each department and individual staff. These action items are necessary to improve the way the Town provides goods, services and facilities to residents, employees, and visitors to Whitby.

Accessibility Staff Working Group –

Each department has been provided multiple opportunities to provide input and put forward initiatives and actions to this Plan. Each Department representative identified projects planned in 2023 – 2026 budget forecast and work plans. Additional input was incorporated through circulation for comments and recommendations. Modifications to the draft plan have been made as requested by department representatives.

Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) –

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is appointed by Council and is responsible for providing advice to municipal Council to plan for accessibility on a wide range of municipal processes. The Accessibility Advisory Committee has reviewed and provided comments to staff on the Accessibility Plan 2023 – 2026, multiple times.

The following motion passed at the Accessibility Advisory Committee on May 7, 2024:

“That the Accessibility Advisory Committee supports the Accessibility Plan 2023 – 2026, as drafted.”

Abilities Centre LEAD Program

Staff from the LEAD program reviewed and provided feedback to this plan.

Strategic Priorities:

With the support and leadership of Council, accessibility has been moving forward as a part of doing business for the Town for many years. This Plan connects to the following pillars found in the Community Strategic Plan:

- Pillar 1 – Whitby’s Neighbourhoods: Safe, Health & Inclusive
- Pillar 2 – Whitby’s Natural & Build Environment: Connected & Resilient
- Pillar 4 – Whitby’s Government: Accountable & Responsive.

Accessibility benefits everyone. Planning ahead and making accessibility a part of the way organizations do their daily business may tap into opportunities to attract more customers, build customer loyalty and improve services. Ensuring inclusivity to Town programs, services, and facilities by meeting the Council adopted corporate commitment benefits residents, visitors and employees of all ages and abilities.

8. Attachments:

Attachment 1: 2023-2026 Accessibility Plan

Attachment 2: 2023 Update Report