
To: Mayor Ashe
Members of Council

From: Timothy Higgins
Accessibility Coordinator

Copy: Chief Administrative Officer
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Subject: Accessibility Advisory Committee
- 2023 Year End Report and 2024 Proposed Work Plan
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May 27, 2024

The Pickering Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is pleased to submit, for Council's information, its 2023 Year End Report and 2024 Proposed Work Plan.

2023 Year End Report

In 2023, nine virtual AAC meetings were held. The Committee continued to contribute to the goals of Pickering's Five-Year Accessibility Plan for 2021-2025 in the following ways:

A. AAC Membership, Training and Meetings

1. Ten Committee members were appointed to the AAC in early 2023 and two new non-voting elected Councilors were appointed. The Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade (ABOT) also provided a representative as a non-voting member of the Committee. The AAC approved the Committee's Terms of Reference and schedule of meetings to include hybrid meetings, allowing attendance virtually and in-person.
2. Staff Liaison to the AAC presented a continuous learning curriculum to be delivered to Members at future Committee meetings. Training delivered in 2023 AAC meetings included:
 - an accessibility overview of the Ontario Human Rights Code, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*, and the Ontario Building Code;
 - the role of the Pickering Accessibility Coordinator;
 - an overview of the site plan review process;
 - the AAC's role in identifying accessibility barriers and supporting AODA compliance;
 - liaison with Pickering Accessibility Core Staff Team;
 - the AAC's Terms of Reference; and
 - City policies governing Committees of Council.

3. AAC members garnered the following recognition in 2023:

- former AAC Member P. Bashaw received a Regional Accessibility Award
- former AAC Member D. Wysocki received a City of Pickering Civic Award as well as the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Award for his exceptional work on accessibility
- Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade representative to the AAC, J. McLellan was awarded by APBOT for accessibility leadership and was nominated by the City of Pickering for a David C. Onley Champion Award for Leadership in Accessibility

B. Awareness Activities

1. The AAC has continued to monitor local, provincial, national, and international emerging accessibility legislation, regulations, policies, best practices, products and services and has considered adaptations for use in Pickering. For example, the Committee monitored recent accessibility legislation of the Canadian and U.S. federal governments, as well as from Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Manitoba.
2. The AAC fostered/promoted/supported submissions for municipal, regional, and provincial awards and grants to profile Pickering's accessibility investments and achievements. For example, the Committee endorsed the nomination of J. McLellan for a David Onley Champion Award for Accessibility Leadership as well as grant submissions seeking to offer internships to students with disabilities from Durham College and the Ontario Tech University.
3. The AAC delivered a "Tranquility Tent" exhibit at Pickering's 2023 Canada Day celebrations, to offer cool, shaded, relaxing space for guests to unwind given the pandemic's severe impact on mental health, anxiety, and social isolation. The tent provided a calm, quiet place for people to visit, participate in mindfulness, yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, music therapy and similar activities. Partners AMICA and the Pickering Football Club provided support and resources.

C. Plans, Policies, Standards, and Implementation

1. In 2023, the AAC continued to monitor:
 - the City's steps to ensure website accessibility commensurate with heightened (WCAG 2.0 Level AA) AODA Information and Communication Standards
 - provide accessibility advice regarding walkway reconstruction, sidewalk retrofits, new multi-use paths, installation of tactile plates, curb cuts, snow clearing, traffic light timing, parks, playgrounds, special event accessible parking, etc.
 - the City's staff and volunteer training process related to accessibility

Staff Liaison provided an overview of Chestnut Hill Developments Recreation Centre (CHDRC) change room emergency button concerns that emerged regarding renovations at the CHDRC. The City responded to these concerns by having additional emergency buttons/alarms installed in these areas. The Director, Community Services reported that a member of the public has provided a suggestion that an emergency button be installed in the universal/family changeroom. Concerns were raised around the button being potentially pressed by children in the changeroom, causing false alarms, if the button was installed at an accessible height. The City was exploring solutions and obtained feedback from the Committee as part of that effort.

Feedback from the Committee included specifications for a more foolproof alarm switch proven to limit false alarms.

2. The Director, Community Services led a discussion regarding the Memorandum from the Deputy Clerk regarding Amendments to Boards, Committees and Taskforces Staff Liaison, Chair, and Vice Chair Roles - Council Membership. The AAC found Council representation on the Committee advisable and was receptive to amending the AAC's Terms of Reference to include two Councillors, one Regional, and one local.
3. LEAD Canada/Durham Abilities Centre representatives presented information regarding the LEAD Canada Program funded by the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. LEAD (Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery) is a methodology to help governments, public and private sector organizations collaboratively define and embed inclusion and accessibility into strategic planning, daily operations, program environments, and organizational culture. The LEAD process helps organizations to identify opportunities to improve and enhance inclusion and accessibility at all organizational levels. A collaboration of the City of Pickering and LEAD was initiated.
4. The Staff Liaison provided regular updates regarding the ongoing collaboration with the Abilities Centre LEAD program to improve the Pickering's accessibility programs, policies, processes, and services. A series of improvement planning consultation workshops were held on March 30, April 19, and April 26, 2023, resulting in a comprehensive report from the LEAD Canada/Abilities Centre team identifying opportunities for enhancing accessibility and inclusion.
5. The Staff Liaison informed the Committee of the City's 2023 Budget process that was underway and opportunities to provide input/feedback. Staff further explained how accessibility is tracked through the City's budget process and how capital accessibility projects are outlined in the City's Five-Year Accessibility Plan.
6. The Clerk's Office representative solicited feedback from the Committee regarding what kind of solution they may be looking for to secure access to files, share data and create time-saving collaboration and document-sharing. Staff briefly explained the use of ShareFile by the City's Committee of Adjustment and how they use the platform to organize and store information for reference.
7. The Clerk's Office representative explained that AAC meeting captioning has been considered in the past with Information Technology (IT) staff to explore software and YouTube options. Committee representatives advocated for AAC meeting captioning, noting its importance for people who are hearing-impaired and others. AAC Members noted that while accuracy may be an issue, captioning would nonetheless provide a heightened general understanding of meeting discussions.
8. The 2022 Year End Report and 2023 Proposed Work Plan having been endorsed by the AAC, were approved May 23, 2023, by City Council and posted to pickering.ca. Three AAC Members also spoke to the following accessibility concerns at this Council meeting:

- J. McLellan, Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade representative spoke regarding ableism in the workplace and employment barriers encountered by people living with disabilities;
 - C. Rudberg-Chin shared her personal experiences with transit inaccessibility; and
 - M. Thorpe Ross advocated for follow-up to the Service and Support Animal Initiative.
9. The AAC reviewed and endorsed the multi-year Pickering Museum Accessibility Plan 2023-2025 prepared to comply with Pickering Heritage & Community Centre grant funding requirements. The Museum Plan mirrored themes of Pickering's Five-Year Accessibility Plan for 2021-2025 and highlighted the need to preserve heritage characteristics of the Museum, wellness opportunities, employment opportunities and harvesting of green energy.
 10. Following endorsement by the AAC, City Council approved the City of Pickering's 2023 Accessibility Compliance Report. The Report was filed with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility indicating Pickering's full AODA compliance. The Report has been publicly posted to pickering.ca.
 11. The Coordinator, Public Affairs & Corporate Communications provided an overview of Pickering's first Corporate Strategic Plan, sharing the project activities to date as well as the vision and goals. AAC Members provided input and responded to the related survey.
 12. AAC received an overview of the Draft Recreation & Parks Ten-Year Plan by the Manager, Community Services Administration & Strategic Initiatives highlighting Pickering's changing demographics and how the impact of issues pertaining to the pandemic are being addressed. The Community Engagement Plan, including a City-wide survey, five focus group sessions, four charrette's, and a youth engagement partnership was shared with the Committee. Committee Members were asked to complete the online survey, to attend one of the community Charrette sessions, and to encourage community members to participate.
 13. AAC monitored progress with respect to Pickering's Five-Year Accessibility Plan for 2021-2025.
 14. Clerk's Office representatives provided an overview to the Committee regarding recent Policy ADM 040 Revisions and the City's new Lobbyist Registry.
 15. ABOT representative highlighted recent changes to accessibility elements of the National Building Code and the importance of bodies such as the AAC in advocating for these kinds of changes.

D. Consultation & Collaboration

1. The Manager, Landscape & Parks Development provided a presentation regarding the City's efforts to refurbish City playgrounds and enhance their accessibility. Information was also provided regarding the Rotary Frenchman's Bay West Park project and the use of Pickering's Let's Talk platform to consult residents.

2. The Division Head, Operations Services provided an overview of the Pickering Museum Village (PMV) Log House and Log Barn Restoration project, including the replacement of the barrier-free access ramp to the log barn, addition of interior glass barrier-free doors, and the leveling of the building floor space. The AAC endorsed this PMV initiative.
3. The City submitted a proposal to the EnAbling Change Grant regarding Accessibility Internships. The City's proposal to create six internship opportunities with a term of six months for Durham College and Ontario Tech University students was endorsed and a letter of support was approved by the Committee.
4. AAC endorsed recommendations provided by the City of Pickering to the Province of Ontario's 4th Independent AODA Review regarding:
 - policies to prioritize employment of persons living with disabilities
 - policies to encourage development of accessible affordable housing
 - standards regarding accessible recreation programming
 - policy gaps around service and support animals
 - accessible transit standards
 - formal recognition of the network of provincial accessibility coordinators
5. AAC supported the 39th Annual Durham Regional Police Children's Games for disabled youth aged 5 to 18 held November 5, 2023. Pickering has partnered annually with Durham Regional Police, Grandview Children's Centre, and community organizations since 1985. The Games will return to the CHDRC on October 26, 2024, for the 40th Anniversary event.
6. Through its ABOT representative, the AAC regularly exchanged accessibility information and collaborated with Durham Region businesses.
7. The Community Safety & Well-Being Advisor provided an overview to the AAC of the Community Safety & Well-Being Draft Plan, highlighting priorities and action items.
8. AAC liaised and collaborated with the City's Age Friendly initiative and supported the 55+ Aging Well Together, Information & Active Living Fair.
9. Representatives of Digital Advisory, MNP Digital made a presentation to the Committee regarding the City of Pickering's proposed Digital Strategy and received the Committee's input.
10. Through the Committee's Staff Liaison, the AAC was kept apprised of accessibility news from:
 - Pickering's Accessibility Core Staff Team
 - The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
 - The Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals
 - Durham Region's network of Accessibility Coordinators
 - Accessibility Standards Canada
 - Pickering's Age Friendly committees and stakeholders

- Pickering’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team

E. Site Plan Application Reviews

1. AAC continued to work in collaboration with City planning staff through an ongoing site plan application review process. In 2023, the AAC reviewed and provided accessibility advice with respect to the following site plan applications:
 - S 08/22, a sales office for residential development in Seaton
 - S 16/22, auto sales, showroom, and repair facility at 1695 Bayly Street
 - S 17/22, a public elementary school at 2570 Tillings Road
 - S21/80(R23), Vaughan Willard Public School addition
 - S 02/23, industrial warehouse units at 1030 Salk Road
 - S 03/23, building 4 of food manufacturing/warehouse at 745 & 815 Hwy 7
 - S 05/23, long-term care facility at Alexander Knox Road and Sideline 20
 - S 06/23, commercial plaza at Peter Matthews Drive and Taunton Road
 - S 04/90(R23), industrial warehouse at 1920 Silicone Drive
 - S 08/23, mixed use development at 1786 & 1790 Liverpool Road
 - S 10/23, Block 1 & 2 mixed use towers at Pickering Town Centre
 - S 09/23, stacked townhomes at 2610 & 2630 Brock Road
 - 23-009270 – PLAN 40M2625 BLK 291 & PLAN 40M2631 - pre-submission proposal for a Catholic Elementary School at Sapphire Drive, Hibiscus Drive and Burkholder Drive
 - S 11/23, mixed use residential towers at Pickering Town Centre, 1355 Kingston Road
2. As an ongoing concern, AAC held various discussions and hosted several guest presentations to explore issues and identify potential solutions with respect to accessible, affordable residential accommodation. AAC has continuously sought to identify strategies to create additional accessible/affordable residential housing options and inventory.

In 2023, AAC continued to review accessible housing issues raised by Pickering residents and consulted with senior executives of developer, Lebovic Homes. New housing is being built without accessibility in mind and aging residents are growing increasingly uncomfortable in their homes. The accessible housing conversation focused on how to best incent builders to plan developments with accessibility at the forefront of their designs.

The AAC evaluated the effectiveness of its site plan review approach and concluded that addressing accessibility earlier in the application process would be a valuable enhancement.

AAC resolved to build an accessibility orientation style symposium into the pre-consultation stage of Pickering’s site plan application process. Specifically, “That representatives of the AAC meet with the Planning Division of the City Development Department to discuss the methodology around site-planning approval, introducing the idea of a symposium to the pre-consultation phase as well as requiring developers to include early documentation of their accessibility lens.”

2024 Proposed Work Plan

The AAC is pleased to present its 2024 Proposed Work Plan. The Plan, which outlines concrete actions the AAC will undertake to improve accessibility, includes, but is not limited to:

A. Accessibility Priorities

The City of Pickering's long-term vision is to ensure that Pickering is a caring and responsive community known for its commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility as well as its related achievements. With the support of Members of Council, management, staff, the AAC, volunteers and community partners, barrier removal will continue to be a priority in Pickering. Accessibility is everyone's responsibility and will be incorporated by design into the work of all City Departments.

Pickering's 2021-2025 Five-Year Accessibility Plan sets out initiatives to meet Pickering's commitment to an inclusive community where all residents and visitors have access to City services, programs and facilities in an integrated manner that promotes dignity and independence. AAC will continue to comply with Ontario's accessibility standards - the laws that Ontario organizations must follow to become more accessible. Further, the City is committed to going beyond legislated minimum requirements, where feasible, to ensure that barriers to accessibility are identified and removed. Therefore, the City's accessibility journey will also be informed by recent recommendations from Pickering's inclusion partner, the Abilities Centre LEAD Project, identifying potential accessibility enhancements in the following areas:

- Leadership
- Governance & Structure
- Strategy
- Financial Management
- Supplier-Partnership Management
- People Resources
- Program & Service Delivery
- Communications and Marketing
- Facility & Technology Support

Based on Pickering's 2021-2025 Five-Year Accessibility Plan, and informed by best practices, Pickering's areas of priority will include:

- mental and physical wellness, particularly through recreation and sports
- accessible and affordable housing options
- accessible transportation
- community employment opportunities for people with disabilities
- City centre accessibility, to facilitate appropriate/enhanced levels of safety, security and useability
- parks, playgrounds, pedestrian and cyclist corridors, sidewalks, and trails
- accessibility partnerships and collaboration
- service and support animals

- website accessibility
- signage and navigation

B. Awareness Activities

1. Host a third annual “Tranquility Tent” area at Pickering’s Canada Day daytime celebrations, to offer a cool, shaded, relaxing space for people to unwind.
2. Provide input on the Canada Day evening event, specifically on a new proposed Site Plan to improve accessibility and inclusion considerations and to make the event more welcoming. AAC will review and identify past challenges relating to accessible transit arrangements at Kinsmen Park with the intent of limiting margins for error and unplanned barriers to accessibility.
3. AAC will continue to:
 - monitor local, regional, provincial, federal and U.S. networking opportunities
 - monitor local, provincial, national, and international accessibility legislation, regulations, policies, best practices, products, and services
 - foster/promote/support submissions for municipal, regional, and provincial awards and grants to profile Pickering’s accessibility investments and achievements
 - play an active role in Pickering’s community events and celebrations such as Canada Day and the Durham Regional Police Services Children’s Games

C. Plans, Policies, Standards, and Implementation

1. The AAC discussed the Independent 4th Review of the AODA authored by Rich Donovan dated June 5, 2023, and its findings. Mr. Donovan reported that the Province of Ontario is failing to achieve its accessibility commitments by 2025 and declared an “accessibility crisis”. The AAC resolved that:
 - The AAC endorse the Summary of Recommendations as outlined in the Independent 4th Review of the AODA authored by Rich Donovan dated June 5, 2023.
 - The AAC requests that the Council of the Corporation of the City of Pickering:
 - Endorse the Summary of Recommendations as outlined in the Independent 4th Review of the AODA authored by Rich Donovan dated June 5, 2023.
 - Recognize the accessibility crisis in the Province of Ontario.
 - That the resolution of Members of Council be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario and other applicable parties as deemed appropriate.
2. The AAC discussed service changes implemented by Durham Region Transit (DRT) on January 1, 2024, including the standardization of 800-meter distances between bus stops and the reduction of buses serving Pickering. Due to a lack of community consultation by DRT, the City received numerous complaints about this matter indicating that DRT’s service changes had resulted in barriers to elderly and disabled transit users. The AAC resolved that:

- the AAC finds the Service Changes implemented by Durham Region Transit implemented on January 1, 2024, to be in contravention of the Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA.
 - The AAC requests that the Council of the City of Pickering send a letter to the Region of Durham requesting that they reverse the service changes immediately and consult with Pickering residents and key stakeholders including those with accessibility needs on any future services changes.
3. AAC Member K. Sullivan presented exterior lighting concerns with respect to City Hall and the Pickering Public Library. The presentation focused on the adequacy of lighting in these public spaces and the impact of lighting on City accessibility, safety, and security. The AAC resolved that: the Exterior Lighting Presentation by K. Sullivan be received by Council; the AAC requests Council endorse an exterior lighting study of the City of Pickering's City Centre (including City Hall/Library, parking areas, Esplanade Park and the CHDRC); and, the AAC requests that the City undertake similar exterior lighting studies of other municipal facilities across the City.
- AAC Member S. Snyders presented photos highlighting examples of accessibility barriers in Valley View Park/City Hall area. The photos profiled a storm drain in disrepair, with cracks in the sidewalk; and, an old gate piece installation, protruding in the middle of a walkway. Consequently, a walkabout by several key City staff was arranged to confirm accessibility pathway (and lighting) deficiencies, and to plan and prioritize remedial actions.
4. In 2024, the AAC will continue to monitor:
- progress with respect to Pickering's Five-Year Accessibility Plan for 2021-2025
 - progress on implementing recommendations from the LEAD partnership initiative
 - the City's steps to ensure website accessibility commensurate with heightened (WCAG 2.0 Level AA) AODA Information and Communication Standards
 - walkway reconstructions, sidewalk retrofits, new multi-use paths, installation of tactile plates at intersections, curb cuts, traffic light timing, parks, playgrounds, special event accessible parking, etc.
 - the City's staff and volunteer training process related to accessibility

D. Consultation and Collaboration

The Manager, People & Culture and, Senior Advisor, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion provided an update regarding the City's Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and spoke to:

- a. key learnings and themes uncovered through community consultations
- b. the vision, mission, and priority areas of focus for the City's EDI strategy
- c. next steps in the EDI Strategy process

E. Site Plan Application Reviews

1. The AAC will continue to work in collaboration with City planning staff through an ongoing site plan application review process. In 2024 to date, the AAC has reviewed and provided accessibility advice with respect to the following site plan applications:
 - a. S 14/23, DDSB two-story public elementary school and childcare centre in Seaton
 - b. S 15/23, Suncor Energy Inc. Petro Canada gas station at 1800 Brock Road
 - c. S 07/88 (R23), manufacturing and warehouse addition at 125 Squires Beach Road
 - d. S13/23, hotel across from City Hall with access to Pickering Town Centre
2. In 2023, the AAC identified benefits from communicating with developers earlier in the City's submission process and resolved to form an Accessibility Orientation Symposium for developers coordinated by a volunteer AAC subcommittee. The AAC is currently establishing membership for the subcommittee, including, but not limited to determining its scope and deliverables.

Submitted on behalf of the Pickering AAC Members:

- Maurice Brenner, Regional Councillor
- Dave Currie
- Saima Fatima
- Brian Ferguson
- Ayesha Khan
- John McLellan, Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade Representative
- Mara Nagy, City Councillor
- Carla Rudberg-Chin
- Michael Shackleton
- Sam Snyders
- Kevin Sullivan
- Megan Thorpe Ross
- Morgan Wilson

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