

# Memorandum

Date: May 18, 2021

To: Members of Council

From: Patrick Trafford, Deputy Clerk, Records & Information Services

Subject: Annual Accessibility Status Report for 2020

In 2005, the Ontario government passed the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*. The purpose of the AODA is to benefit all Ontarians by implementing standards to achieve accessibility by the year 2025. Based on the legislation, improving accessibility includes actively preventing and removing barriers for those with disabilities to ensure access to goods, services, facilities, employment, premises and buildings.

Consistent with the *Integrated Accessibility Standards (IAS)* within the AODA, the Town adopted the 2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) which outlines strategies to improve accessibility during that period. The purpose of this memo is to ensure compliance with the AODA by providing an annual status report setting out the progress in 2020 towards achieving the above noted plan.

## **Service Levels During 2020**

Throughout 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted various Town programs and levels of service. As the Town has made significant strides towards promoting and achieving accessibility requirements in the past, many items within the 2018-2022 MYAP focus on a continuation of existing services. Throughout 2020 key services have been maintained to further advance accessibility throughout the Town as an organization and within the broader community.

For example, the 2018-2022 MYAP set goals to continue training for Town staff on both the requirements of the IAS and provision of accessible customer service. Throughout 2020, onboarding training continued which requires new employees to complete an e-learning module to understand the purpose of the AODA and learn about accessible customer service standards. Staff are required to sign and provide a form to People Services to confirm and track completion. Further, consistent with the AODA, as part of the Town's Procurement Strategy staff continue to consider accessibility features when developing bid documents and any contractors providing goods, services or facilities on behalf of the Town must complete the above noted accessibility training. Finally, as the Town's procurement documents include requirements for accessibility, consultants are responsible to deliver reports and similar items that are accessible especially if intended to be posted on the Town's website.

To ensure that the community becomes increasingly accessible for those with a disability, the 2018-2022 MYAP committed the Town to continue applying the AODA design of public space standards to new construction and redeveloped properties. For example, the legislation includes technical standards for:

- exterior sidewalks, walkways, ramps and stairs;
- recreational trails and outdoor play spaces such as children's parks;
- traffic control signals and accessible parking spaces.

During the past year staff have continued to review all site plan and subdivision applications to ensure these standards are considered. This process has a real and substantial impact throughout the community by adding numerous accessible parking spaces, ensuring sidewalks in subdivisions are traversable and safe for those with disabilities, makes parks inviting and inclusive among other positive impacts. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, crucial services related to accessibility continued throughout 2020 consistent with the 2018-2022 MYAP.

### **Town Website Updates**

While updates and improvements to the Town's website are ongoing, a significant step towards ensuring it is accessible was achieved in 2020. By January 1, 2021, the IAS required that municipal websites and web content meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA standard. Therefore, between 2019 and 2020 all content on the Town's website was reviewed and redrafted by staff throughout the organization. A key goal of this review was to improve accessibility by ensuring that content was formatted in a consistent way to support screen readers often used by those with visual impairments. The updated version of the Town's website was launched in June 2020. Following the launch, training sessions were held in the summer and fall for staff to learn how to create accessible documents for the website. An external consultant was retained, and training was provided to staff in every Division across the organization.

The 2018-2022 MYAP set the goal of reaching the WCAG 2.0 Level AA standard by 2021 and continuing to ensure that all new public documents posted to the website are in an accessible format. Although achieving a fully accessible website continues to pose challenges, staff are making best efforts and the update represents a significant improvement.

### **Accessibility Compliance Audit**

In November 2020, notice was received from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility advising that an audit would be conducted to assess the Town's compliance with the AODA. Staff worked with a Senior Compliance Analyst at the Ministry to compile requested documentation such as:

- Staff Reports and Minutes demonstrating establishment of the Accessibility Advisory Committee;
- accessibility policies including for customer service and elections;
- the 2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and previous annual accessibility reports;
- By-laws and templates related to the Town's procurement process; and
- accessibility policies and reports related to employment and staff training.

The documentation was sent to the Senior Compliance Analyst who completed a review and provided follow up questions which staff addressed for clarification. Ultimately, the Town successfully complied with the AODA as only minor amendments to the Corporate Accessibility Policy were required by the Senior Compliance Analyst. Staff completed the requested updates to the policy and recently brought it forward to the March 30, 2021 Town Council Meeting. Following approval of the policy by Members of Council, the Senior Compliance Analyst was notified and staff received a response on April 7, 2021 that the audit was complete.

This comprehensive audit provided an opportunity for the Town to assess its success in meeting accessibility requirements and further achieve a goal within the 2018-2022 MYAP to regularly review the Corporate Accessibility Policy.

### **Conclusion**

In compliance with the AODA, this Annual Accessibility Status Report has outlined the actions taken throughout 2020 to advance the Town's 2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic posing challenges, several successes were achieved. The Town remains committed to accessibility and creating a community that is inclusive for persons of all abilities. As required by the IAS, this annual report will be posted publicly on the Town's website.