

City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan 2024 Update (Resident Facing Report)

Introduction

This is the fourth and final update of the 2020-2024 City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan (COMAP). It includes actions to improve accessibility in information and communications, employment, transportation, design of public spaces, and customer service.

The City is committed to meeting the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA). The City works with people with disabilities, including residents, employees, and visitors, to make Ottawa accessible for all. The City's efforts to achieve these goals over the past year are outlined in this report.

AODA Compliance

As per the AODA, the City completes an accessibility compliance report to the Province every two years. The AODA Compliance Report was submitted in December 2023. City Council also receives an update each year, through the COMAP update report.

In the 2023 AODA Compliance Report, the City of Ottawa reported non-compliance with the Information and Communications Standards and the Design of Public Spaces Standard. Work continues to make the City's websites, web content and applications more usable for all residents, as well as to address the accessibility-related concerns in the built environment.

2023 Highlights

Emergency situations

In 2023, the City responded to emergency events, such as an ice storm, air quality and smoke advisories, tornadoes, and extreme heat events. The Accessibility Office worked with City staff to make sure information was available and easy to understand for all residents. This included live captioning and sign language interpretation in American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) during media updates.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

A new term of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), including some new members, started in March 2023. Recruitment efforts to ensure diverse representation from the disability community and consideration for intersectional identities and perspectives were made. The AAC held seven regular meetings throughout the year, with other consultations and reviews taking place through emails, working groups, site plan reviews, environmental assessment studies, and project consultations. Hundreds of projects are also reviewed as part of the annual duty to consult meeting.

Some of the projects that the AAC were consulted on included:

- On-demand taxi study
- The new Civic Campus of the Ottawa Hospital
- Affordable Housing Capital Plan Overview
- Lansdowne 2.0
- Bank Street Cycling and Transit improvements

Working with the Public

Last year, City staff met with many community groups from the disability community, including people who are blind or have low vision, Deaf persons and people who are deafened and hard of hearing, and the Ottawa Disability Coalition. During these meetings, City staff answered questions and received feedback about City buildings, property, programs and services. These meetings also help inform City staff of trends and new developments, which help set priorities.

The City has a strong relationship with these community organizations and consultations and meetings will continue in 2024. Many of these representatives are volunteers with their organizations and are very generous with their time and expertise. We would like to thank these community stakeholders for their time and effort to help make our City more accessible to all.

Partnerships

The City also partners with accessibility organizations in Ontario, Canada and around the world to work on projects people with disabilities. Some of these partnerships include the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals (ONAP), the Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN), and International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP).

Events

The City held three accessibility related events in 2023: AccessAbility Day on May 31, a Treat Accessibly Halloween event on October 28, and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on November 30.

The AccessAbility Day theme for 2023 was “from possibilities to practice” and included speakers who talked about the role that all levels of government play in influencing cultural transformation related to accessibility policies and laws.

At the Trick or Treat with the Mayor event, the City partnered with Treat Accessibly to help make Halloween accessible and inclusive for all. This event featured non-food treats, accessible lines and entrances, lower sound levels and less lighting effects.

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities event included a speaker who talked about how to design public spaces for everybody.

Supports provided during AccessAbility Day and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities included sign language, captioning in English and French, and French translation.

Information and Communications

The Accessibility Office releases a monthly e-newsletter called, “Accessibility Spotlight.” 15 editions of the newsletter were published last year, including 39 articles, available in English and French. The Accessibility Office also created a Guide to Providing Sign Language Interpretation to help staff in making their meetings, events, and consultations more inclusive.

Employment

Work continues to help staff understand and support the needs of all City employees. Through Count ME In!, a voluntary self-identification questionnaire that all employees are encouraged to complete, there was an increase in representation of employees who identify as having at least one disability from 18 per cent in 2022, to 22 per cent in 2023. This is the highest increase in staff representation from all equity groups included on the questionnaire.

Transportation

By-law and Regulatory Services gives money to Transit Services for accessible transportation improvements. This includes \$115,624 for taxi coupons, \$71,994 for discounted taxi coupons and \$150,000 for rural transportation. Transit Services provides \$856,000 for services to rural seniors and persons with disabilities.

Staff also consulted with both the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the community of persons with disabilities on the findings from the on-demand accessible taxicab service study, which was presented to Council in June.

The recommendations included a central dispatch service for accessible on-demand taxis, as well as financial perks to accessible taxi plate holders and drivers. A three-year pilot was approved by Council.

Design of Public Spaces

In 2023, work continued on the City's Accessibility Requirements in Construction (ARC) project. The goal of this project is to help staff understand the accessibility requirements related to construction projects, and to enhance accessibility and accessible features in construction activities. As a result, staff can better understand when requirements under the AODA must be followed.

Customer Service

Staff continue to offer accessible services that help support people with disabilities and older adults, including the Snow Go and Snow Go Assist programs. In 2023, \$145,568 was given to nine agencies to provide snow removal services to residents, an increase of over \$5 thousand from 2022. Staff also responded to over 1,300 requests from older adults and people with disabilities in the 2022-23 winter season, and nearly 600 subsidies were given to residents to help them with the cost of snow removal.

Ottawa Paramedic Services hosted a training event in partnership with "Sit 'n Stay", an Ottawa-based organization that provides service dog training. This training allows service animals in training to become more familiar with loud noises, paramedic equipment and bright lights from ambulances in the event their handlers ever need help from paramedics. The event also helped paramedics understand how to include service animals into their patients' care plans.

Conclusion

The City continues its work with staff and partners, including people with disabilities and community organizations, to make Ottawa more accessible for all.

While there is still more work to do, the City will continue to lead and share resources and knowledge, while always learning from our partners and residents.