

# 2020-2024 City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan annual update report



## Introduction

The 2020-2024 City of Ottawa Municipal Accessibility Plan was approved by Council in November 2020. This is the City's first report on the 2020-2024 Plan. The plan includes our actions to improve accessibility at the City of Ottawa, under the five Standards of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005, AODA)*: Customer Service, Information and Communications, Employment, Design of Public Spaces, and Transportation. The City is committed to meeting the requirements of the AODA and making improvements in other areas of accessibility. These improvements support the inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities in Ottawa, including residents, employees and visitors.

In 2020, COVID-19 brought new challenges for the way the City does business. It also created new barriers for people with disabilities. Throughout the year, the City remained a leader in accessibility across the Province. The City was able to quickly respond to the community to provide sign language interpretation for emergency communications, to create the Human Needs Task Force, to continue to engage with our Accessibility Advisory Committee through accessible, virtual meetings, and continuing to meet the requirements of the AODA.

The City is proud of its response to COVID-19 and the improvements made to accessibility in the last year. This report highlights of our work in 2020.

## AODA Compliance

The City completes an AODA compliance report for the Province every two years. The next compliance report is due by the end of 2021. In 2019, the City reported non-compliance with the Design of Public Spaces Standard for one accessible parking space.

The City has also reported non-compliance for the Information and Communications Standard, for accessible websites and web content, in 2015, 2017 and 2019. The City continues to work towards meeting this requirement. Though we are non-compliant, we are still a leader in web accessibility in the Province. The City has a compliance plan agreement with the Province and will continue to work towards compliance with the requirements of the AODA for accessible websites and web content.

## 2020 Accessibility Highlights

### Impacts of COVID-19

In March 2020, the City of Ottawa entered into a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This had a big impact on the City's planned business for the year, including our accessibility Plan. While some of the things we planned were put on hold, other accessibility initiatives were created to reduce barriers created by the pandemic. Some of the City's initiatives to support people with disabilities during COVID-19 are:

- The Human Needs Task Force, to support people who are at-risk of the effects of COVID-19. This group:
  - Distributed masks to people who need them;
  - Checked-in on isolated and vulnerable residents and provided support;
  - Offered respite centres, physical distancing and isolation centres; and
  - Set-up portable toilets in central neighbourhoods of the City.
- Sharing information through Ottawa Public Health (OPH) for people who can't wear masks, for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing and for people who are blind or low vision.
- Including American Sign Language (ASL) and *Langue des signes québécoise* (LSQ) in all COVID-19 related media, town halls, and other virtual events. Videos on the OPH website were translated in ASL and LSQ, to make sure the

Deaf community had access to emergency health and safety information. The cost of these services in 2020 was \$74,200.

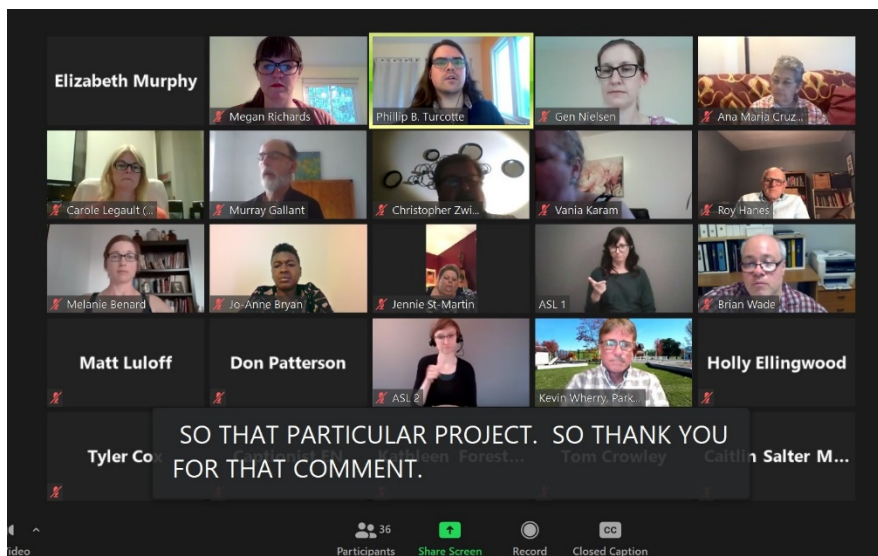
These initiatives continue in 2021.

## Accessibility Advisory Committee

The City held 7 meetings with its Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) in 2020. This volunteer group provided feedback on 35 different city projects, including:

- The Confederation Line and Stage 2 Light Rail Transit (LRT);
- The new Central Library;
- The City's e-scooter pilot;
- Expanded patios during COVID-19;
- The new rental Housing By-Law;
- Accessible street furniture; and
- Para Transpo online services.

Ottawa was one of the first municipalities in Ontario to hold an AAC meeting virtually. These meetings included captioning in English and French and interpretation in ASL.



## Public Engagement and Partnerships

Throughout 2020, the City engaged external stakeholders, to gain their feedback, and to create partnerships with community organizations.

In seeking community feedback, meetings were held with disability organizations to discuss City projects, such as Stage 2 of the LRT. Consultations were held online

through Engage Ottawa for projects such as the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, the Ottawa Public Health Engagement Survey, the Winter Maintenance Quality Standards Review and the Transportation Master Plan. People with disabilities were also consulted in the development of a Technical Bulletin to the City's Accessibility Design Standards for pedestrian, cycling, and transit facilities.

2020 partnership development initiatives included:

- Sharing information and resources with staff at the Federal government;
- Sharing information on best practices in accessibility with other municipalities across Canada;
- Preparing to join Carleton University's Canadian Accessibility Network (CAN) to advance accessibility for persons with disabilities through Research, Design and Innovation, Education and Training, Policy, Employment, and Community Engagement;
- Hosting a conference with the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals; and
- Joining the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP).

## **Events**

The City celebrated two key events in 2020: AccessAbility Day on May 28 and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3. AccessAbility Day featured social media promotion including a video proclamation by Mayor Jim Watson, highlights of the City's accessibility achievements, and a photo of the City's AAC members holding up signs spelling out, "Disability is an essential part of human diversity."

The virtual International Day of Persons with Disabilities celebration on December 3 had over 100 attendees. The event included a proclamation by Mayor Watson, and many speakers including the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, the AAC Chair, Phillip Turcotte, Marnie Peters, an accessibility consultant with the City, and representatives of the Canadian National Institute of the Blind (CNIB), the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB), and the Alliance for Equality for Blind Canadians (AEBC).



## Customer Service

The City's Accessibility Office publishes a monthly Accessibility Spotlight newsletter about accessibility initiatives. You can sign-up to receive the newsletter [here](#).

For more information, the City's Accessibility Policy can be found [here](#) and you can provide feedback by email at [accessibilityoffice@ottawa.ca](mailto:accessibilityoffice@ottawa.ca) or through 3-1-1.

The City of Ottawa is pleased to announce that Canada Video Relay Service (VRS) is available for residents wishing to use their service to access our general phone line in ASL or LSQ by calling 613-580-2400.

## Information and Communications

The City continues to improve the accessibility of our public facing applications, websites and web content to comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)'s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). By the end of 2020, the City had improved the accessibility of 78 per cent of over 7,800 public facing PDFs.

Accessible formats and communication supports are available to all residents through the [Accessible Formats and Communications Supports Procedure](#). This Procedure helps staff to determine how to best meet the requests of the community.

## Design of Public Spaces

- In May 2020, all AAC members voted to pass a motion on multi-use pathways and their impacts for people with disabilities. This motion recognizes that there may be conflicts between pedestrians and people with disabilities on shared

paths of travel, such as multi-use pathways, and makes suggestions for the City to maintain safety for people with disabilities.

- The City's Technical Bulletin ISTB-2020-03: Revisions to City of Ottawa Accessibility Design Standards gives direction on the design and installation of accessibility measures where a cycle track or multi-use pathway approaches an intersection, to achieve accessible design. It addresses several areas including: delineation between the sidewalk and cycle track; application of tactile walking surface indicators; straight path of travel; and accessibility measures at multi-use pathways approaching a signalized intersection. It also includes some general information on how people with vision loss negotiate a road right-of-way.

## **Transportation**

The Vehicle-for-Hire Accessibility Fund collects a percentage of revenue from Private Transportation Companies, like Uber Canada, to improve accessible transportation in the City of Ottawa. In 2020, \$69,166 was allocated for the taxi coupon program, \$41,250 for discounted taxi coupons and \$150,000 for rural transportation.

In 2020, the Stage 2 LRT preliminary station design reviews were completed, and we consulted with the City's AAC and other community stakeholders. Accessible features of these stations include: tactile directional wayfinding; dual elevators serving station platforms; tactile/Braille signage; and fully accessible public washrooms at six stations.

The O-Train Ambassador program continued through 2020 to provide ongoing assistance to customers. In 2021, this program will transition into a new permanent Station Attendant program where staff will move between different stations to provide additional customer service.

The Para Transpo online booking web form was available to all customers in February 2020 which allowed customers to book next-day rides. The full suite of online services, My Para Transpo, will support booking, cancelling, scheduling recurring trips, tracking trips and vehicle arrivals, and automated reminder messages. This will undergo testing and launch in 2021. A working group of cross-disability stakeholders is engaged in its development.



## Conclusion

COVID-19 changed many things for the City in 2020, and this continues in 2021. The City is committed to ensuring an inclusive City for all people during COVID-19 and into the future. The City is proud to be a leader in accessibility in Ontario and the steps taken to eliminate barriers caused by the pandemic. There are many successes to celebrate in 2020, but there is also a lot of work to be done to become a fully inclusive and accessible City. We look forward to collaborating and learning from others as we continue to contribute to a barrier-free Ontario.