

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, October 31, 2023

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2023-2027

FROM:

Michael Coroneos, Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, City Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

This report seeks Council's approval of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) for 2023-2027, which outlines the City's strategic approach to advancing accessibility and inclusion for all residents, visitors, and businesses in Vaughan.

Report Highlights

- This report presents the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) for 2023-2027, outlining the City's strategy to improve accessibility and inclusion for everyone in Vaughan.
- The MYAP was developed through extensive community consultations and staff engagement, ensuring diverse perspectives were considered.
- The plan's implementation will require collaboration across departments and regional partners, sharing knowledge and resources to enhance accessibility initiatives.
- By approving and implementing the MYAP, the City of Vaughan will demonstrate its commitment to creating a barrier-free environment for all residents, visitors, and businesses.

Recommendations

1. That the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2027 be approved for implementation;
2. That staff be directed to monitor progress and provide annual updates to Council;

3. That necessary resources be allocated for the effective execution of the Plan;
and
4. That relevant departments and community stakeholders be engaged in the implementation process.

Background

The City of Vaughan is committed to fostering an accessible and inclusive environment for all individuals, regardless of their abilities. The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan was developed to ensure compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and demonstrate the City's dedication to going beyond compliance and envisioning a truly barrier-free community.

The MYAP outlines various strategies, goals, and initiatives that aim to enhance accessibility within the city. Consultations with individuals with disabilities, community stakeholders, and accessibility experts have informed the plan's development. The proposed plan offers the most comprehensive and effective approach to addressing accessibility barriers and fostering an inclusive environment.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Internal Audit – Accessibility Audit Report 2022.](#)

[2019-2022 City of Vaughan Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.](#)

[Annual Accessibility Status Report 2021](#) (PDF).

[Annual Accessibility Status Report 2020](#) (PDF).

Analysis and Options

The evolving population of Vaughan requires the City to adapt to meet the needs of all residents, including those with disabilities. It is a common misconception that disabilities are typically present from birth; however, approximately 80% of disabilities are acquired after age 16. As people age, the likelihood of experiencing visible or invisible disabilities grows, affecting their vision, hearing, speech, cognition, or mobility. By 2031, one in five residents in the Regional Municipality of York is projected to be over 65 years old. Additionally, an estimated one in 10 children lives with some form of visible or invisible disability, mental health challenges being among the most common.

According to the Canadian Survey on Disability (Statistics Canada 2017), out of a total population of 253,850 people in Vaughan, 54,450 have disabilities. This means that more than one-fifth of the population in Vaughan has a disability, and this proportion is increasing. It is likely to be a low estimate due to different definitions, stigma, and gaps in awareness. Vaughan has the highest proportion of people with disabilities among all nine municipalities in York Region.

To support the growing and aging population, especially those with disabilities, it is crucial to ensure that they can age in place in their homes and neighborhoods, and are engaged in local communities and economies. Creating healthy, active, and inclusive communities is essential, and planning toward an enabling environment for people with disabilities is the best guarantee of improved outcomes for everyone, including those with disabilities and their families and friends.

A crucial element in the development of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) was the extensive community consultation process and staff engagement. This process ensured that the voices of individuals with disabilities, community stakeholders, accessibility experts, and City staff were heard and integrated into the plan's strategic approach.

Development of the MYAP

The development of this MYAP has been shaped by a more extensive range of internal, community, and sectoral consultations than ever before. The consultation process has involved individuals with disabilities, organizations focusing on disability and inclusion, and associations representing people with disabilities in Vaughan, York Region, and beyond.

The City has accomplished this through community mapping and outreach to local and regional groups and networks with specialized expertise, community leaders working on advancing accessibility and inclusion, and the Vaughan Accessibility Advisory Committee. Consultation methods included surveys and one-on-one interviews conducted by a third party, ensuring candid and open feedback by guaranteeing anonymous reporting. The consultation process also provided opportunities for staff to respond through surveys and interviews, informing aspects of the MYAP that focus on the AODA's employment standard. Broader public engagement involved community mapping and a digital storytelling platform (Have your say!) that utilized digital tools to expand our reach and collect a more diverse range of inputs.

Throughout this rigorous 8-month process, the City of Vaughan has ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives with respect to the consulted individuals with disabilities, as disability is itself a broad and often misunderstood category. For example, common stereotypes suggest that disabilities are primarily congenital (from birth) or visible to others. However, most disabilities are acquired, and the majority are invisible. Disabilities can also be temporary due to accidents or injuries, may be related to aging, or may involve chronic conditions or sensory or neurological differences that are not always apparent to others, but significantly impact inclusion and accessibility for a significant number of people.

Another pillar of the current MYAP is the City's past work on advancing accessibility and inclusion to achieve the AODA's goals. Activities span every department and portfolio of the municipality. Assessing the City's current state and working towards developing, implementing, and reporting on policies, programs, and processes to enhance accessibility requires the engagement of a corporation-wide Accessibility Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC). The Accessibility TAC has representation from all portfolios. This internal technical committee, along with the public Vaughan Accessibility Advisory Committee and the City's staff in 'inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility' (IDEA) functions, all contribute to informing the annual status reports that are part of the regular MYAP review process, under City Council oversight.

Municipalities aim to fully embody the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) but creating a fully accessible province or city is a complex task. The world was designed with a narrow demographic in mind, making it difficult to adapt. Therefore, establishing and mainstreaming review and governance processes with a reasonable, achievable, yet forward-thinking approach is crucial.

A pillar of the City's next MYAP is to meaningfully engage and consult with the municipal AAC and beyond, including disability advocates, leaders, organizations and networks in partnerships and pilots that inform empowering and impactful inclusion practices. This will help position Vaughan as a model for other municipalities by 2027.

The consultation process involved the following steps:

Identifying Key Stakeholders:

The first step was to identify key stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, organizations working on disability and inclusion, associations representing people with disabilities in Vaughan, York Region, and beyond, as well as City staff from various departments. Community mapping was used to identify local and regional groups and networks with specialized expertise.

Engaging Stakeholders and Staff:

A variety of engagement methods were used to gather feedback and input from stakeholders and City staff. These methods included surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and public meetings. A third party was engaged to conduct the surveys and interviews to ensure anonymity and encourage open, candid feedback.

Digital Storytelling Platform:

Broader public engagement was achieved through a digital storytelling platform called "Have Your Say!", which allowed community members and staff to share their experiences, insights, and ideas related to accessibility and inclusion. This platform leveraged digital tools to increase reach and collect a diverse range of inputs.

Ensuring Diversity of Perspectives:

The consultation process aimed to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives with respect to people with disabilities and staff members. Special attention was given to acknowledging the various types and degrees of disabilities, including invisible disabilities, temporary disabilities, and those related to aging or chronic conditions.

Interdepartmental Collaboration:

The process also involved collaboration with other City departments to ensure alignment with their respective goals and initiatives. This collaboration helped identify potential operational impacts and facilitated the incorporation of relevant strategies into the MYAP.

Reporting and Feedback:

The feedback and input gathered during the community consultation process were analyzed and incorporated into the MYAP. A summary of the findings and recommendations was presented to the Vaughan Accessibility Advisory Committee and City Council for their review and input.

The community consultation process and staff engagement played a vital role in shaping the MYAP, ensuring that it is reflective of the diverse needs and aspirations of the City of Vaughan's residents, visitors, businesses, and employees. This inclusive and collaborative approach has resulted in a comprehensive plan that will guide the City's efforts in creating an accessible and inclusive environment for all.

Financial Impact

The MYAP will require allocation of resources for its effective implementation. Funding will be sourced from the existing budget, and any additional costs will be identified and included in future budget and business planning process.

Operational Impact

The plan's execution will necessitate consultation and collaboration with other departments to ensure alignment with their respective goals and initiatives. Potential operational impacts will be identified and addressed throughout the implementation process.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The MYAP's implementation will contribute to the accessibility and inclusion efforts within the broader York Region. The plan recognizes the importance of collaborating with neighbouring municipalities, regional partners, and relevant organizations to create a more cohesive and integrated approach to accessibility in the region. This

collaboration will foster the sharing of best practices, resources, and knowledge, enhancing regional accessibility initiatives and strengthening the collective impact.

The MYAP's alignment with the broader York Region Accessibility Strategy plays a crucial role in fostering a more accessible environment across the entire region. By implementing initiatives and strategies that contribute to this regional vision, the City of Vaughan enhances accessibility and inclusion throughout the area.

Cross-jurisdictional collaboration between the City of Vaughan, neighbouring municipalities, and other levels of government facilitates the development and implementation of joint accessibility initiatives. This cooperation leads to more effective and efficient use of resources, resulting in significant and lasting improvements in accessibility and inclusion.

Active participation in regional forums, conferences, and networks focused on accessibility and inclusion allows the City of Vaughan to share experiences, best practices, and lessons learned with other municipalities and organizations. This knowledge-sharing contributes to the ongoing improvement of accessibility initiatives across the region.

The City of Vaughan can enhance its accessibility initiatives by leveraging partnerships with regional organizations, service providers, and advocacy groups. These partnerships provide additional resources, expertise, and support to help the City achieve its accessibility goals.

Engaging in advocacy efforts at regional, provincial, and federal levels enables the City of Vaughan to promote progressive policies and legislation that support accessibility and inclusion for all Canadians. By actively participating in these efforts, the City can influence decision-makers and help shape the broader accessibility landscape.

The implementation of MYAP will contribute significantly to broader regional impacts and considerations. By actively engaging in regional collaboration and partnerships, sharing knowledge and best practices, and advocating for progressive policies and legislation, the City of Vaughan will play a vital role in fostering a more accessible and inclusive environment across the York Region and beyond.

Conclusion

The approval and implementation of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2027 will further the City of Vaughan's commitment to accessibility and inclusion. It will help ensure that residents, visitors, and businesses experience a barrier-free environment

where individuals of all abilities can thrive. Upon approval, staff will begin executing the plan and provide annual updates to Council on its progress.

For more information, please contact: Zincia Francis, Diversity and Inclusion Officer

Attachments

1. 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.
2. 2023-2027 MYAP Engagement Report.

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