

Multi-Year Accessibility Planning: Stakeholder Engagement Report

Community engagement data summary by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Vaughan is currently in the process of updating its **Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP)**. Critical to the MYAP update is understanding the experiences of community members, Council Members and staff.

Between January and April 2023, a multi-pronged engagement strategy – including interviews conducted with community organizations, individuals, and members of Council – was undertaken to reach diverse people with a range of accessibility-related experiences. Community members were also invited to share their accessibility stories through an **online portal**, and a staff survey was conducted to understand experiences in the workplace. The Accessibility Advisory Committee also provided valuable insight. More than 75 people generously offered their time, experiences and ideas.

Several key themes emerged under the five standards of the **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**:

- Customer service
- Employment
- Information and communications
- Transportation
- Design of public spaces

Through the feedback from various organizations and individuals, the project team heard about a range of barriers that exist across all areas covered by the AODA. Participants also shared that they have observed and experienced positive and improved accessibility.

Insights gained from this engagement that are within the City's scope and capacity will inform the 2023-2027 MYAP. The plan will be presented to City Council to seek approval and allocation of resources. Because a municipal government such as Vaughan has a specific jurisdiction which is not always well known by participants, some advice was offered that falls outside of the City's jurisdiction. Feedback will be shared with those other organizations, wherever possible. For example, feedback provided by participants that falls under the jurisdiction of the Regional Municipality of York will be shared with relevant departments from the Region.



SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

The **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)** requires municipalities in Ontario to develop and update multi-year accessibility plans to achieve full accessibility for people with disabilities by 2025. To comply with the AODA, businesses and organizations must follow these five standards that address various areas of accessibility:

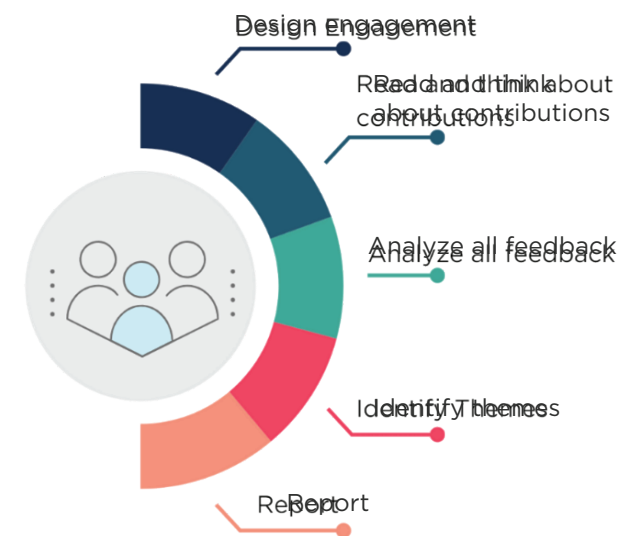
- Customer service
- Employment
- Information and communications
- Transportation
- Design of public spaces

To update its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, the City completed a multi-pronged engagement strategy to reach diverse people with a range of accessibility-related experiences. The strategy included interviews with community organizations and Council Members, an online portal for members of the community to share accessibility stories, a staff survey and interviews, and touchpoint meetings with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

People were invited to participate in interviews through a direct e-mail. Those interested were invited to book a time through a web-based application, and to select their preferred way of meeting: in person, via Zoom or on the telephone. Interviews were conducted through all three formats.

Members of the community were invited to share their accessibility stories on the City's **Have Your Say platform**. The City promoted this opportunity through a number of its channels, including public service announcements and social media.

The general flow of engagement activities is shown in the image below.



By the Numbers

More than 75 participants between Jan. 26 and April 2, including:

- Eight Council interviews
- 14 community member and community organization interviews
- 10 digital storytelling participants (16 stories)
- Eight Accessibility Advisory Committee members

Figure 1 The flow of engagement activities is depicted in the chart, starting with 'Design engagement', followed by 'Read and think about contributions', 'Analyze all feedback', 'Identify themes' and 'Report.'



What We Talked About

During interviews, surveys, touchpoints with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and in the 'Have Your Say' stories, people shared their visions for accessibility in Vaughan, as well identified what was working well and what barriers they have faced or observed. We also asked participants to identify their priority actions so these could be meaningfully incorporated in the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan where possible. Through community conversations, it became evident that achieving a barrier-free Vaughan must be a team effort between all levels of government, community organizations and residents. Each has specific roles, yet all share responsibility and interest in an accessible Vaughan.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the community organizations, community members, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, Vaughan Council Members and staff for taking the time to share their experiences, wisdom, stories and guidance. Their insights are being utilized by the project team to inform development of the City's next Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

We acknowledge the following community organizations, and encourage ongoing partnerships so that together, the shared vision can be achieved.

- Bridge North
- Clarico Place
- Bruno Haché, Autism Advocate
- Creating Alternatives Day Program
- Canadian Hearing Services
- Dani's Place
- Dignity Transportation
- Flex For Access
- Hanging Out Together
- Jaffari Community Centre
- Joe Baker & Co.
- Sandgate Women's Shelter
- Viability
- Vita Community Living Services

The next section of this report summarizes the insights and priorities shared by more than 40 external stakeholders. The detailed input provided by staff regarding workplace accessibility is being considered internally.

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF THEMES

This section identifies the themes that emerged across all engagement activities, related to accessibility matters within the City of Vaughan’s jurisdiction. More detailed accounts of stakeholder interviews, stories contributed by the public and advice offered by the Accessibility Advisory Committee are provided in Appendices 2 and 3. Additional stakeholder insights that are outside the scope of this project have been excerpted and included in Appendix 4.

In this section, contributors are referred to as “stakeholders” to acknowledge that everyone in the community is impacted by, or has a stake in, accessibility.

Vision for Accessibility

Stakeholders describe an accessible city as one with no barriers and accessible to all that can be experienced by everyone. Several stakeholders expand this definition adding that an accessible city needs to include safety, belonging and inclusion. Stakeholders highlight the need to look at accessibility broadly and include invisible disabilities, such as mental health and hearing loss, so everyone has opportunities to thrive. Policies, processes, procedures and people must be flexible to meet individual needs. Effectively sharing meaningful information is critical to achieving this vision.

Keywords that were used by participants included:

- barrier-free
- for all, everyone
- health and safety
- belonging
- inclusion
- flexible
- sharing information
- leads by example
- understanding
- genuine striving
- ongoing reflection
- accessible viewpoint

The stories shared during the public engagement process represent the community’s vision for a person-centred approach to accommodating people with disabilities within the areas of civic life that fall under the City’s jurisdiction. These stories are based on first-hand experiences and observations of the current state of accessibility. While some improvements have been made, there are still areas where gaps exist. For instance, the presentation stage for the Accessibility Champion Award ceremony was inaccessible to some participants, sending a mixed message. People with disabilities should have a voice in determining how they are included, rather than having decisions made for them.

Given the diversity of people and the accommodations required to ensure their full participation in civic life, the update process presents an opportunity to re-evaluate existing practices and consider a more comprehensive approach with adequate resources. It was proposed that the City establish an Accessibility Office to prioritize accessibility throughout all aspects of civic life. This office would provide a dedicated focus on creating a fully accessible city for everyone and could serve a pivotal role in co-ordinating efforts across various departments.



Strengths and Barriers

Lived experience with accessibility is quite diverse. Some stakeholders acknowledge and appreciate steps the City has already taken. Many describe a range of barriers that still exist including specific physical, attitudinal barriers or information and technology barriers.

STRENGTHS

Many stakeholders noted positive enhancements across the city, including physical infrastructure such as more automatic doors or additional curb cuts on roads. Stakeholders acknowledged that new buildings and developments are more accessible.

Offering multiple ways for someone to get information or participate, such as online options for engagement (online voting or virtual meetings) is appreciated. Many stakeholders also highlighted they feel the City is open to learning from and working with staff and community partners to become more accessible, emphasizing that the City does listen.

Furthermore, there was recognition of the diverse work being carried out by the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team at the City.

BARRIERS

While stakeholders identified positive achievements, several barriers still exist. These have been grouped according to AODA standards. An additional category, City Services, was also added to capture ideas that do not neatly fit into other categories, but are within the City's jurisdiction.

Information and Communications

- There is a lack of awareness about where to access information about accessibility. For example, stakeholders were not aware of information currently available on the City's website and felt that it should be centralized and promoted.
- There are barriers for people who are deaf or hard of hearing in accessing information both in person and online. More generally, a range of accessible formats are necessary to support neurodiversity, and the specific needs of different disabilities.
- City's updated website presents challenges for users.

Transportation

- Many of the stories shared by community members were focused on transportation-related challenges.
- Scheduling and timing of specialized transit is often not meeting needs.
- There are no cross municipal border public transit options available.
- There is a lack of accessible on-street and lot parking.
- There is a lack of announcements/notifications on YRT buses.

Design of Public Spaces

- There is concern about safety of sidewalks and crosswalks (uneven walkways, lack of curb cuts in some areas, not enough time to cross intersections, uncleared sidewalks during the winter).
- Push button, automatic doors are found to be non-existent or malfunctioning in public and private buildings.
- There is a lack of Hoyer lifts in community centres.
- Acoustics at City Hall can be a barrier for people who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- Fully accessible washroom facilities in some public facilities.



City Services

- There is a necessity to clear snow in a timely way from sidewalks and paths so people can move freely around the city.
- There is not enough direct engagement with vulnerable populations.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Stakeholders identified overarching opportunities to improve accessibility in Vaughan, including:

- increase engagement with people with lived experience.
- reduce and eliminate attitudinal barriers and stigma that exist about disabilities.
- take concrete actions to make a substantive difference in accessibility.
- establish a dedicated Accessibility Office and promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- advocate to the Province for an updated strengthened AODA.

There was also a suggestion to develop a robust communication plan and implementation plan, with goals that were measurable for the next MYAP.

Opportunities for action related to specific AODA standards relevant to the City's jurisdiction were also identified.

Information and Communications

- Improve ability to communicate with people who are deaf and have hearing loss (i.e., use of technology at customer service counters, sharing information on website).
- Identifying required accommodations in advance can ensure full participation in committee processes.
- Expand methods for distributing/sharing information (i.e., use of videos).
- Strengthen communication tools for community members to notify the City of accessibility issues.
- Use inclusive language in communication materials and on website.
- Create a central location on the City's website for information and for questions/requests (for community). This should also include a central telephone number to call for answers and information.
- Explore options for Hearing Loop Systems at City Hall and for sign-language interpretation at public events.

Employment

- Create more employment and volunteer opportunities for people with disabilities at the City. Consider partnership with the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce.
- Ensure policies and procedures consider invisible disabilities as well as visible disabilities.
- Develop policies should be person and equity centred.

Transportation

- Support and advocacy by the City for transit enhancements to York Regional Transit. Opportunities for advocacy include:
 - » Promote provision of cross-border public transit options (i.e., option to travel from Vaughan to Toronto at no additional cost).
- Identified need for information about the public transportation system and specialized on-request transportation options such as Mobility Plus. This could also involve directing people to information sources at York Region.

Design of Public Spaces

- Continue upgrades/enhancements within buildings and spaces across the city, in particular older buildings:
 - » Ensure accessible entrances and pathways (including ramps)
 - » Consider long push button bars and automatic doors versus smaller push button door openers
- Ensure parks and playgrounds are accessible for diverse abilities.
- Reduce barriers on sidewalks such as snow piles or cracks to ensure safety.
- More crosswalks and sidewalks are needed for pedestrian safety and to reduce the distance to cross a roadway.
- Actions are needed to accommodate people with vision loss and blindness.
- Ensure accessible washrooms in all City buildings and spaces. This comment was more broadly given regarding washrooms in private buildings as well.
- Enhance/revise accessible parking strategy.
- Conduct community accessibility audits.
- Increase signage in City facilities and outdoor spaces.

City Services

- Create additional programs for people with disabilities (e.g., sewing/knitting, other clubs, extended day programming).
- Provide discounts and/or free programs for people with disabilities.
- Increase conversations/education on diversity of accessibility needs by creating opportunities for engagement with people with lived experiences.
- Increase wayfinding in City facilities and outdoor spaces.
- Champions at all levels are needed to lead by example and include accessibility in the design of city processes.
- Neighbours can play an important role in the lives of people with disabilities, and the City could assist by conveying information about being mindful of their needs.

These themes provide important direction for the City in updating the MYAP. The themes, however, should be read alongside more detailed feedback in the appendices, which give a more nuanced view of accessibility experiences, positive and challenging, along with priorities of the people who graciously contributed their ideas.



SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS

Through this engagement effort, community organizations, individuals, staff and Council Members provided their insights and ideas about how Vaughan can continue to improve accessibility across all five areas of the AODA. While some of the comments are outside of the City's jurisdiction, they were also captured and will be shared with the Region or other organizations, as appropriate.

The next steps are for the staff team to integrate these findings, connect them to specific actions with priorities and seek approval through Vaughan Council. Providing feedback to all who have been involved about how their guidance was utilized is also critical to building interest and partnerships to achieve the comprehensive vision shared during this engagement.

Any questions associated with the insights provided by stakeholders can be directed to Tracey Ehl, Principal, Ehl Harrison Consulting at tracey@ehlharrison.com or 925-825-9870.

Appendix 1: Community Stakeholder Interviews

A total of 14 interviews with external community stakeholders were completed. Of 14 interviewees, five self-identified as people with disabilities.

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION RESPONSES

- 1. Thinking about all the AODA categories for accessibility (customer service; employment; information and communications; transportation; and the built environment, including indoor and outdoor spaces), what does an accessible community look like to you? Please provide your vision in one or two sentences. Similar to other stakeholder groups, external stakeholders envision a community without barriers for people with disabilities, where safety and freedom of movement are guaranteed. Additionally, they desire a community that is fully accessible and inclusive, allowing everyone to participate and be heard.**

It's worth noting that for these stakeholders, accessibility extends beyond physical structures to include equality, acceptance and freedom from bias. They emphasize the importance of accommodating invisible disabilities, such as mental health and neurodivergence, and creating a community that is free from discrimination.

To achieve this vision, stakeholders used terms like appreciation, equality, respect and inclusion, emphasizing the need for people to feel comfortable and free to participate in the community without feeling ostracized. Overall, stakeholders hope for a community that is accessible and accepting for all individuals.

- 2. How does your experience in the City of Vaughan compare to this? What would you say are Vaughan's strengths that you have seen or experienced when it comes to accessibility?**

According to many stakeholders, the City is actively working to improve physical accessibility. They cited examples such as widening of sidewalks, incorporating accessible features into new buildings/spaces, and enhancing community centers, housing options and the City's website.



Overall, stakeholders felt the City strives to meet its AODA requirements and expressed a positive sentiment towards the City's willingness to learn and collaborate with residents and partners to make the city more accessible. One stakeholder even praised the City's receptiveness, stating that "they (Council and staff) do listen."

Some stakeholders believe the City is already doing well in terms of accessibility. A service provider representative mentioned they are receiving an increasing number of inquiries from staff seeking information on how to eliminate barriers, indicating a proactive approach.

Additionally, stakeholders acknowledged the value of York Regional Transit (YRT) as a community asset frequently used by their program participants. Another stakeholder recognized the City's by-laws and enforcement teams as an asset in improving accessibility.

3. What would you say are the barriers that you have seen or experienced to accessibility in City programs, services, policies, facilities right now? Who experiences them?

During consultations, several stakeholders identified persistent physical barriers in accessing public and private buildings across Vaughan, including examples such as steep or poorly designed ramps, snow not being cleared from bus stops, non-flush building entrances, malfunctioning automatic doors, and lack of accessible washrooms and wider aisles. One stakeholder emphasized challenges experienced by the deaf community in communicating at service counters and accessing information on websites, while another highlighted the need for subtitles on videos and screen reader friendly website designs.

Several stakeholders identified issues with the Mobility Plus service, including scheduling difficulties, limited cross-border transportation options and difficulties in navigating the transit system. Transportation barriers were also noted as a primary hindrance for clients with physical disabilities accessing programs and services.

Other barriers identified include the need to improve accessibility in recreation spaces, reduce the cost of support workers and program space rentals, increase engagement, reduce stigma, and hire people with disabilities. Additionally, some stakeholders identified the lack of regulations safeguarding survivors of sex and human trafficking and the scarcity of affordable and supportive housing as significant barriers.

4. Do you feel that people with disabilities in the City of Vaughan have meaningful opportunities to engage in City policy-making, planning, and programming? How? Where? Strengths? Improvements?

According to some stakeholders, people with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to engage, including through the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee. These stakeholders feel the City is listening to their concerns, although more action is needed. They also noted more opportunities to engage virtually.

However, many stakeholders expressed there are not enough opportunities for people with disabilities to engage meaningfully. They suggested more community roundtables, better outreach to advocacy groups and hiring people with disabilities to help change policies. Some stakeholders acknowledged they were not sure of the opportunities that exist. One stakeholder suggested improving communication through more visual materials and having a centralized location for accessing program information.

5. Do you feel people with disabilities in the City of Vaughan have opportunities to share concerns or issues as they relate to accessibility? How? Where? Strengths? Improvements?

The stakeholders' perspectives on opportunities for people with disabilities to share concerns or issues related to accessibility varied. While many stakeholders acknowledged the existence of such opportunities, some noted the process may not be widely known, and there is a need for more effective communication. Additionally, some stakeholders suggested that opportunities to share concerns may be limited to organizations rather than individuals. Suggestions for improvement included a central location on the website and a central contact number for raising concerns. Some stakeholders also expressed doubts about the impact of feedback, with input and feedback not actively sought out or not leading to changes. Finally, three stakeholders reported being unsure about the existence of opportunities for people with disabilities to share concerns or issues related to accessibility.

6. With all of this information in mind about the way things are today, let's shift to thinking about what the future could look like. What are the top three ways accessibility can be improved in the City of Vaughan? What should we build on or do more of, and what changes do you suggest?

Stakeholders provided various suggestions on ways to improve accessibility in Vaughan, which have been categorized under AODA Integrated Standards. Here are some of the key suggestions:

EMPLOYMENT

- Create more employment and volunteer opportunities for people with disabilities in partnership with the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce.
- Provide disability training as part of onboarding for new City staff.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Increase the accessibility of the City's website by using videos with subtitles and ensuring plain and inclusive language in materials.
- Explore increased interpretation at public events and use technology like on-demand interpreters to assist people who are deaf or have hearing loss to communicate with City staff.

TRANSPORTATION

- Support/advocate for enhancements to York Regional Transit, including cross-border transportation and more routes.
- Ensure all spaces are accessible by public transit.
- Develop additional information about the transportation system, including how to use it, routes and options.

DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACE

- Enhance the physical accessibility of the city by providing safe and even sidewalks, sufficient lighting, Hoyer lifts, adequate space in changerooms, accessible washrooms, accessible housing and accessible parks.
- Examine older buildings, including the theatre.
- Consider a Loop system at City Hall and other community spaces where people gather.
- Consider community audits of public buildings and spaces to have a baseline and goals to work towards.

CITY SERVICE

- Create more programs for people with disabilities, such as sewing and knitting clubs, as well as educational programs like digital literacy.
- Provide discounts and/or free programs for people with disabilities.
- Enhance communication of available programs and services for persons with disabilities.
- Provide more education about various disabilities, mental health and the diverse needs of people with disabilities.
- Ensure meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities and provide them with a voice at a community leadership table and all places where decisions are being made on their behalf.

Additional suggestions were offered that do not fit neatly into AODA categories, relating to a focus on gender-based violence/human trafficking relating to groups at high risk for acquiring life-changing injuries. There is also a growing need for housing options and support across communities, with a focus on accessibility for people with disabilities and an aging population. The community also wants to see more specific recreational and educational programming for people with disabilities, as well as discounted or free programming to promote accessibility. Finally, stakeholders advocate for an updated and enforced AODA.

Although not all of these suggestions fall under the City's jurisdiction, the feedback received from the community regarding regional government and services will be shared with the relevant parties. The priorities expressed by community members are crucial in guiding the City's future planning.

7. Which communities/people should we be reaching out to so we can create the best plan possible?

Stakeholders had several suggestions on communities and people to engage:

- People with lived experience**
- York Regional Police*
- Reena*
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
- Ontario Association for the Deaf
- City's Diversity Equity and Inclusion Officer
- 360 Kids
- Autistics 4 Autistics
- Community Living
- Sara Elizabeth Centre
- CAMH
- Children's Treatment Centre
- Vaughan Fitness
- Tourist attractions/businesses (Art Gallery, Pioneer Village, Vaughan Mills)
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Family Support Services
- Safe Haven
- March of Dimes
- Housing providers
- Kayla's Children's Centre (KCC)

Asterisks (*) are placed after suggestions that were made multiple times.

8. We will be bringing all of the responses together to develop some themes. Would you like to be kept in the loop about this project?

All stakeholders expressed they would appreciate being kept in the loop about this project. Most emphasized they would be happy to continue to be engaged and "to be a resource to the City." Two stakeholders asked to be credited within the report for providing input into the City's MYAP update.



Appendix 2: Council Interviews

This appendix contains a summary of the information provided during the interviews with Council Members or their written submissions.

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION RESPONSES

1. Thinking about all of the AODA categories for accessibility (customer service; employment; information and communications; transportation; the built environment, including indoor and outdoor spaces), what does an accessible community look like to you? Please provide your vision in one or two sentences.

In general, Members of Council agree an accessible community should be barrier-free, providing access to all individuals regardless of their abilities. They envision a city that can be enjoyed by everyone, with policies in place to ensure equal treatment and accessibility as a fundamental right. One interviewee emphasized the importance of removing negative stigmas associated with disabilities. Additionally, there was recognition that an accessible community should be multicultural.

While there was a consensus on the vision for an accessible community, some Members of Council pointed out the challenge of finding a balance between funding and accommodations. It's important to strike a balance between financial considerations and the need to provide necessary accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

2. How does your experience in the City of Vaughan compare to this? What are you hearing from your constituents, particularly those who are people with disabilities (PWDs) or caregivers and family members of PWDs (thinking of accessibility issues broadly, so including seniors, those with temporary disabilities, etc.)? Who experiences barriers and challenges and what are they experiencing?

In general, Members of Council reported they do not receive a lot of concerns or complaints regarding accessibility, with one interviewee noting a significant reduction in concerns over the years. However, when concerns are raised, they tend to focus on sidewalk and crosswalk safety, such as insufficient crosswalk timing, uneven sidewalks and snow-covered pathways. These concerns are particularly relevant for seniors, and accessible parking availability also raises issues, such as not being able to park on the street with an accessible parking permit.

There are concerns about transportation and accessibility issues for constituents crossing borders from York Region to Toronto for appointments.

3. Can you point to two things the City does well to ensure accessibility? (Think about policy, physical infrastructure, communicating about accommodations, problem-solving, etc.)

Members of Council acknowledged the progress made in improving accessibility within City facilities, citing changes such as the installation of more automatic doors, ramps and enhanced safety measures on stairs. They also highlighted the City's efforts to ensure new buildings are accessible, which has been successful.

The City has also received positive feedback for its communication with the community, offering a wide range of programs for individuals with disabilities, examining policies to reduce barriers to adult day programs, developing design guidelines with a focus on accessibility, introducing new technology for individuals with visual impairment, adding more curb cuts on roads, improving signage and establishing the Accessibility Advisory Committee. These efforts have been well-received by the Members of Council, and the City is seen as making significant strides towards creating a more accessible community.

4. Can you point to two things the City must do differently to ensure accessibility for all? (Think about policy, physical infrastructure, communicating about accommodations, problem-solving, etc.)

Members of Council identified several areas where the City can improve accessibility, including:

- improve accessibility into and within older buildings.
- ensure everywhere is accessible (hotels, restaurants, businesses).
- enforce standards and regulations.
- reduce barriers on sidewalks and increasing walkways throughout the city.
- ensure pathways are connected and accessible (e.g., from parking lots to facilities/buildings).
- design and enforce ramps (many are too steep and do not have enough space for a wheelchair to turn).
- continued improvements to winter operations.
- use long push button door openers (rather than smaller button-style).
- increase number of public washrooms.
- enhance accessibility parking strategy.
- consider use of scooters when planning roadways, sidewalks.
- keep people informed of accessible features, and how to inquire or make requests.
- ensure good signage.
- consideration beyond physical accessibility (e.g., for people who have hearing loss or are deaf, people who have vision loss).
- include additional supportive housing models.
- provide more programs during the day for adults with disabilities (potential for City programs as well as working with community partners).
- include an evaluation or tracking mechanism within MYAP implementation plan so the 'accessibility status' is known.
- minimize barriers to communication.

5. How can the outcomes of this process be most useful to your constituents or to you and your team as you serve your community?

Members of Council recognized the MYAP could serve as a powerful tool for improving communication with residents and providing information on City events and activities for individuals with disabilities. They suggested using social media platforms to disseminate this information and recommended including a communication plan as part of the MYAP.

Members of Council suggested conducting an accessibility assessment of the City could be helpful, providing a status report on current initiatives and identifying areas where more efforts are needed. They also noted the MYAP could bring more attention to current issues and vulnerable individuals in the community.

Members of Council emphasized creating a more accessible community would provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to contribute to the local economy, leading to a more vibrant and inclusive community overall.

6. Are there any specific community members we should talk to about accessibility? Would you provide their contact information or an introduction?

Members of Council had some suggestions on community members that could be contacted for the purpose of this engagement including Accessibility Advisory Committee members, seniors and people with lived experience, Reena and the business community. All specific contacts were followed up on by the engagement team.



Appendix 3: Stories Contributed by Community Members

LIVING WITH PROGRESSIVE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

"I am a person living in Vaughan with Progressive Multiple Sclerosis with my wife and adult children in the New Westminster and Clark community. I don't use public transit as it is not available to me. I could use transit and combine it with accessible public transit in Toronto, but too much of a process to complete (doctors). The traffic lights do not give enough time to cross the road and not pushing the signal on Fridays and Saturdays because I follow Shabbat. and so on!"

SEATING AROUND THE CITY

"Years ago, I was struck by a car when I was a pedestrian. This left me with (sometimes extreme) lower back pain. I'm often looking for a seat while trying to enjoy a walk outside or even indoors at places such as Vaughan Mills mall. I need to sit for a brief period before I can continue enjoying my walk. Benches are very lacking considering the aging population of many citizens in Vaughan. I'm in my early 60's but unfortunately this has been my lifestyle for many years now. Hoping something can be done to accommodate many of us. Thank you."

IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A DISABILITY, PLEASE DON'T PARK IN THIS SPOT

"I have Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis and at this time I am still capable of driving. What upsets me the most is when I see fully capable drivers who do not have any disability park in the handicap spots so they can save time to go into a Tim's or a convenience store just for a minute to buy lotto tickets or a coffee or whatever. I have been with our members who use walkers and powered wheelchairs waiting for a spot for these inconsiderate drivers to return to their vehicles. I have confronted these drivers, asked what their disability is other than being inconsiderate and ignorant. On a few occasions I have parked very close to their driver's door so they could not enter their vehicle. I wish there were enforcement on these illegal parking with heavy fines. These fines in turn will be used to make improvements on sidewalks, parking lots, accessible ramps for those who use accessibility vehicles to get around the city."

ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL!

"I personally have been affected physically because of my MS (multiple sclerosis). I have had numbness in my extremities due to my MS since the age of 16 years old. At the age of 19 my right hand was completely paralyzed for 4 months. I was unable to write, hold small change or even doing usual things using my right hand. I unfortunately was unable to go to university that year which was 1985 so I worked as a cashier initially at McDonald's in the drive through and my colleagues would assist me writing grill slips for orders that had exemptions and then once my hand improved (about 4 months) I worked at Shopper's Drug Mart and eventually was the head cashier. Going to university was my dream to become a teacher.

Summer eventually arrived and my hand totally improved. I then worked at Sears warehouse in Rexdale fulltime over the summer and then continued working there for saving my money for the following school year again to actualize my dream of becoming a teacher. I never focused on my disability and just worked towards making my dream become a reality. I took two buses to get to Sears warehouse from where I lived.

I was very fortunate as my right hand improved and was able to get to university the following year. So I applied to York University as an undergrad for the first year and then applied to the concurrent program in the faculty of Education and was able to actualize my dream.

I was not even thinking about my disability and just needed to go forward and do well in school because eventually become the teacher I dreamed about. I continued taking the bus to York University which was close to where I was living with my parents.

It took me 5 years in the Faculty Ed in the concurrent program. I could take the Pioneer Village bus which was a 10 min was from my house to get to York University. I continued working at Sears part time while at school and then got full time summer hours to make money for tuition.

Today, I am close to retirement and am still dependent on TTC to get around. I did drive when I worked as a high school English and French teacher and then eventually as a Guidance Counsellor but my MS has progressed, so I no longer drive. I am dependent on wheel trans now with may connecting buses. I no longer have balance due to my MS. I am very dependent on my trans help connecting buses and do require benches to sit on in the transit areas as well as public washrooms.

MS is a progressive disease for which they do not know the cause so of course they cannot work on a cure. In the meantime, at least I can get around with buses for which I am most grateful.”

YORK REGION MOBILITY TRANSPORTATION

“I had to cancel 3 trips to Sunnybrook Hospital last year for testing. Going to and from the Toronto hospitals from Vaughan is a day full of anxiety, frustration, and a whole day wasted. For a 1-hour appointment with a specialist it takes roughly 7 hours between YRT Mobility and Wheel Transit. Maybe for a normal person that is not bad but for a challenged person that is frustrating. YRT Mobility should be able to go across the border and simplify our trips and give us back some dignity.”

THE AODA

“There are many establishments in Vaughan that take could easily be made accessible, but because of the Grandfather Clause in the (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act) some establishments have no respect for the disabled and I have a very hard and frustrating time visiting them. These establishments are the closest to my residence and therefor have no other choice otherwise I would not give them my business. The AODA should be reviewed and updated to ensure a better quality of life for the challenged not only in Vaughan but throughout Canada.”

DOCTOR PRACTICES

“I cannot go to my family doctor and get a full physical or to any walk-in clinic because their examine tables do not have height adjustment. Incredible, we can go lightyears away in space but not 4 or 5 inches up and down on earth. Most hospitals that I visited have the same problem.”

BUS TRIPS FOR THE DISABLED

“I have been a member of a Woodbridge Seniors Club for many years. Never was I able to join the group on any of their outings because when the time came to decide if they should use a bus with washrooms or an accessible bus, washrooms was chosen.

I volunteered for a camp in Parry Sound for three months each year and on my day off I was able to get on an accessible bus to go to Casino Rama in Orillia. Why is it that in a small town of approx. 6,850 citizens can accommodate the disabled and a city such as Vaughan with approx. 400,000, cannot accommodate?”

ACCESSIBLE EQUIPMENT IN OUR COMMUNITY CENTRES

“One way to encourage our disabled community to become more active, to exercise on a daily routine, to free us from our anxiety, become more fruitful, fulfilled, and have a sense of belonging our community centre gyms should be first of all accessible, more affordable and accessible equipment that are easy to get on and off safely.

All our community centre pools should also be equipped with lifts to easily access the water. Swimming is the best exercise for the whole body.”

MOVING THE DISABLED AROUND VAUGHAN, TORONTO AND THE GTA

“My son Anthony is 46 years old, disabled and needs a wheelchair. Currently I drive him to his therapy appts, usually in Toronto area. I am a widowed senior (73 years old) who wants to stay living in Vaughan, but when I can't drive anymore, Anthony will not be able to go to these appts. To go from my home to the 404 & Finch, it would take almost 4 hours, accessing YRT & TTC Wheel-Trans.

I am requesting: a) allowing the YRT to take him into Toronto & the TTC Wheel-Trans to bring him home. OR b) open up the blockade at Steeles Ave. and allow the disabled to travel freely, amalgamate the accessible travel.

It would take less time and energy to use only 1 bus to destination and only 1 bus to go home. I have hoped for years that this amalgamation would happen but we are still at the starting gate.”

SNOWBANKS BLOCKING ACCESS TO SIDEWALKS

“The snowbanks and piles of snow that are blocking each intersection have made stepping out of your home impossible. Those with a cane, a walker, mobility issues or mothers with strollers can not get around. I am so disappointed in those responsible for clearing snow in Vaughan and their lack of consideration for those who have mobility issues. Please revisit the way snow is cleared to ensure accessibility is maintained on our streets. Do better Vaughan.”

ACCESSIBILITY & PARKING

“In response to this subject, as a senior with some days of very bad arthritis when all joints are highly inflamed, I wish something was in place, for public parking as well as in shopping malls for spaces dedicated to seniors.

Many are already in place for mothers with young children but they are way more mobile than seniors with arthritis on very bad days. I was a young mother with three young children and managed regular parking just fine.

Also there should be service gasoline stations available in Maple (and elsewhere) for people who have difficulty getting out of their car to gas up. On bad arthritis days, even pumping gas is a challenge when one has no strength in their hands.

Please consider your seniors with physical challenges at all levels which will demonstrate respect that is so important to model to our young generations.”

ALL NEW BUILDS SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE

"I spent time in a wheelchair unable to walk and was brought out to dinner to try and cheer me up after my first few days of rehab. We went to a new plaza who didn't do a final paving of the parking lot and we couldn't safely get me and my wheelchair over the ledge. I had to cling onto a post while my partner moved the wheelchair onto the sidewalk so we can proceed inside. The struggle, embarrassment... it did a number on my mental health... I understand that roads aren't taken over and construction is still occurring but if the city allows occupants (homes / business) and sidewalks are built then there shouldn't be gaps / ledges or any obstacles at crosswalks or in parking lots. We should be allowed to access our community mailboxes, parks, stores etc. and shouldn't have to wait years (it's been 9 years and counting in my "new" 2014 neighbourhood) before the roads are assumed and these issues corrected."

ACCESSIBLE PARKS AND SWINGS FOR KIDS TO PLAY!

"My daughter has a cerebral palsy but is very active! She loves walking to the park and using the playground and swings. Unfortunately, she is now 4 years old and does not fit into the baby swing seats. She does not have enough core strength to stay on the 'big kid seats' and will easily fall off. Our dream is to make our local 'Crofter Park', in Woodbridge an accessible park for her to play in with foam floors instead of wood chips and to at least have an accessible swing for her and other children with disabilities to use and enjoy at the park."

DC

"I am a 78-year-old wheelchair user. I am unable to use any bathroom in any of Vaughan's bathrooms as well as many other establishments that have the accessibility sign posted. I have met with the city's management and was told that beside other reasons, one was that they are afraid that the kids might fall off and get hurt. Wow so much for really caring for the disabled of our community. Here is the City of Vaughan's commitment. Really, I guess they are telling me to take my business somewhere else. The City of Vaughan is committed to treating all people in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. The City believes in integration and fair access for residents, visitors, and employees with visible or non-visible disabilities. The City promises to meet the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility, and supporting the goals of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)."



Appendix 4: Opportunities Outside of the City's Jurisdiction

Community engagement activities are an essential aspect of any project or initiative that seeks to involve the public in decision-making. During these activities, participants may sometimes offer comments or suggestions that are unrelated or outside the scope of the project or initiative. It is important to acknowledge these comments and express appreciation for the input while ensuring careful consideration is given to project scope.

There are several reasons why comments from community engagement activities that are out of scope are separated. Firstly, it is essential to maintain a clear focus on the project's objectives and goals to ensure the initiative stays on track. Incorporating out-of-scope comments in the body of the report may dilute the project's core objectives (i.e., to update the City's MYAP according to the Provincial mandate) and confuse stakeholders.

In addition, incorporating comments outside the project's scope may create expectations the project cannot fulfill, and can lead to unnecessary delays and costs, leading to disappointment among stakeholders. It is essential to communicate clearly with stakeholders about why certain comments were not included, and to ensure all participants feel heard and valued. Below are comments that were either too vague or out of the jurisdiction and influence of the City.

Customer Service

- Cost barriers are presented when there are additional fees for caregivers to accompany individuals to programs, appointments, services and other outings in Vaughan.

Transportation

- Ensure broad coverage of accessible by public transit.
- Identified need for information about the public transportation system and specialized on request service.

Additional Information

- Enforce accessibility regulations and standards within private buildings.
- Explore options for more affordable, accessible and supportive housing models.
- Lack of protection of vulnerable populations such as survivors of sex trafficking.
- Lack of supportive housing.
- Inaccessible equipment, such as examining tables, in health care facilities.
- People experience a lack of accessible washrooms in restaurants, health centres and other buildings.
- Some ramps to private buildings are too steep and/or do not provide sufficient space for a wheelchair to turn, or in some cases, are inaccessible.





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