

STAFF REPORT

THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF COBOURG



Report to:	Mayor and Council Members	Priority:	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low
Submitted by:	Jamie Kramer, Accessibility Coordinator, Legislative Services, Corporate Services, jkramer@cobourg.ca	Meeting Type: Open Session <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed Session <input type="checkbox"/>	
Meeting Date:	March 29, 2021		
Report No.:	Corporate Services-040-21		
Submit comments to Council			

Subject/Title: Inclusive Communities Grant Program Application

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive the memo for information purposes from the Accessibility Coordinator, and;

FURTHER THAT Council approve the hiring of a temporary part-time Accessibility Assistant, to be fully funded from the Inclusive Community Grant Work Plan Project and for the timelines as set out in the attached work plan; and;

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to bring forward reports on the progress, as needed, and;

FURTHER THAT Council consider adding funding in the 2022 budget for Accessibility Projects related to this successful grant application to enhance the work that can be completed.

1. STRATEGIC PLAN

- **PEOPLE:** The Town of Cobourg supports and cares for the Social and Physical Well-Being of its Citizens.
- **PLACES:** The Town protects, preserves, and promotes its natural assets, heritage, arts, culture, and tourism.
- **PROGRAMS:** The Town provides efficient and effective corporate, community, and business and recreational services for its residents, businesses, and visitors.
- **PARTNERSHIP:** The Town engages in strong, sustainable public-private partnerships to improve the quality of life for everyone.
- **PROSPERITY:** The Town plans for, markets, and develops assets for economic growth and financial security.

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

There will be public engagement taking place throughout the course of this project.

3. PURPOSE

This report serves to provide an update to Council on the successful application for the Inclusive Communities Grant Program through the Government of Ontario for a total of \$60,000 to improve accessibility in Cobourg.

The project's main goal is to increase public participation in the Town of Cobourg. To do this, we plan to educate all persons, especially seniors and Persons with Disabilities, on how to engage and interact with the municipality through the tools that we are currently using (Bang The Table) as well as understanding other ways to reach these communities. From here, we will pilot the information into creating a public engagement process for accessibility in the downtown area of Cobourg to ensure that all persons are able to access and use the downtown area including the business areas, parks, and Town Hall.

4. ORIGIN AND LEGISLATION

On November 23, 2020, Town Council approved the following resolution:

THAT Council receive the report from the Accessibility Coordinator for information purposes.

FURTHER THAT Council adopt the revised version of the Accessible Customer Service Policy; and

FURTHER THAT Council adopt the revised version of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Policy; and

FURTHER THAT Council adopt the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024 for the Town of Cobourg as required pursuant to Section 4 of Ontario Regulation 191/11 Integrated Accessibility Standards as well as to renew commitment to Persons with Disabilities who live, work, visit, and play in Cobourg; and

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to bring forward status reports to Council Meetings on an annual basis presenting an update on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024; and

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to bring forward reports to Council Meetings on an "as needed" basis presenting status updates and concerns from the Accessibility Advisory Committee; and

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to bring forward accessibility costs on a project by project basis for 2021 for maintenance, upgrades, and new initiatives related to Accessibility as outlined in the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024 with initial budget amounts to be presented at the 2021 Budget review process for Council deliberations; and

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to bring forward annual budgetary considerations for accessibility related concerns during the 2022 budget consideration period.

On October 26, 2020, Town Council approved the following resolution:

THAT Council review the memo from the Accessibility Coordinator for information purposes; and

FURTHER THAT Council review the revised version of the Accessible Customer Service Policy and provide input, as necessary; and

FURTHER THAT Council review the revised version of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Policy and provide input, as necessary; and

FURTHER THAT Council review the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024 for the Town of Cobourg and provide input, as necessary; and

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to begin broad public engagement with residents of Cobourg on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024; and

FURTHER THAT Council direct Staff to bring forward a final version of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024 to a future Council meeting prior to the end of 2020.

On June 13, 2005, the AODA received Royal Assent and is now law. The AODA requires the Government of Ontario to work with the disability community and the private and public sectors to jointly develop standards to be achieved within stages of five (5) years or less, leading to an accessible Ontario in twenty (20) years, or by 2025. The aims of this act were realized through accessibility standards setting items to be addressed.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 was enacted to serve as a framework for the establishment of accessibility in five (5) different areas:

1. Customer Service, to help remove barriers for People with Disabilities so they can access goods, services, or facilities,
2. Information and Communications, to help organizations make their information accessible to People with Disabilities,
3. Transportation, to make it easier for everyone to travel in the province,
4. Employment, to help making hiring and employee support practices more accessible, and
5. Design of Public Spaces, to help organizations make new and redevelopment outdoor public areas accessible.

The standards support the principles of the AODA to ensure dignity, integration, independence, and equal opportunity and each standard has specific timelines for implementation. The AODA is in place for the purpose of ensuring that People with Disabilities are not discriminated against.

Implementation for both public and private sectors is to be phased in over time to achieve the objectives of a fully accessible province by 2025.

While the last pieces of implementation occur before 2025, the legislation will remain as law, with the need for the Town of Cobourg to remain in compliance with the AODA and the Integrated Standards. Further, there may be updates to the AODA and/or the Integrated Standards near 2025, especially as some of the standards are using compliance metrics that have since changed. For example, there is a newer international standard for website compliance (WCAG 2.1 came into effect in 2018 and there is a draft of WCAG 2.2).

In addition, the Government of Canada passed the Accessible Canada Act and is developing the Standards, which may impact how Ontario adapts their understanding of accessibility in the future.

5. BACKGROUND

The Inclusive Communities Grant Program was announced on Monday, November 9th 2020 by the Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA).

Inclusive Community Grants are designed to sustain existing, and create new, Age-Friendly Communities (AFCs) for older adults and people of all abilities by supporting projects with funding of up to \$60,000.

Projects can be focused on assisting:

- small urban/rural communities
- under-served populations
- diverse population of adults including Indigenous and immigrants
- older adults, including those with accessibility needs
- individuals self-isolating and following social distancing due to COVID-19

The grants will help develop programs for older adults and people of all abilities that focus on:

- connecting people with their communities
- making communities inclusive and age-friendly

Applications closed on December 21, 2020 and the Town of Cobourg made an application for the full \$60,000 of funding. On March 11, 2021, the Town of Cobourg receive an email from the Ministry stating that we have been successful in our application. Over 300 applications were submitted for the grant and the Town of Cobourg is grateful for the opportunity to fulfil their project through this funding.

6. ANALYSIS

As a part of the Town of Cobourg's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024, the Town of Cobourg is required to receive feedback from Persons with Disabilities; however, there seems to be a disconnect between the community and how the Town receives feedback currently. The goal of this project is to align the Town of Cobourg's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024 with the Age Friendly Community guide to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all in our community.

To do this, we understand that we need to start by bringing all persons voices front and centre in decisions that affect them. While we have subject matter experts on our team, it is important to make sure those ideas are being best used and suited

to the people who will use the programs and objectives once they are completed. By incorporating traditional ways that people have engaged with the Town and the new ways that the Town is engaging with the community, we can bridge the gap to create more public participation. Working with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, it is clear that the first needs is to create more accessibility in our downtown area, which includes our downtown businesses, our park and beach, and our Town Hall.

The project will be done in stages:

Phase 1: Media Literacy and Information. This Phase will educate all persons in Cobourg about the current tools used for feedback and reporting issues in the community. It will incorporate using the programming software and administration we already have in place through our Community Centre and Library while adding in new social communities and public engagement options. During this phase, we will look to hire a part-time employee to assist with this that is a person with a disability and/or a senior. This funding has been included as part of the project and the position will run from April 12, 2021 to December 31, 2021. This first Phase will be completed by May 2021 with the last round of programming to begin in April 2021.

Phase 2: Public Engagement will be a test of the programming from Phase 1 where we engage the public about the accessibility and use of the downtown core in Cobourg which includes the business area, Victoria Park and Beach, and the Town Hall building. This will include using the public engagement techniques that we have taught the public about through the programming in Phase 1. This engagement's aim will be to create more accessibility in the downtown core. This Phase will start in April 2021 and will be completed in June 2021.

Phase 3: Increase Accessibility will be the longer portion and will include education and awareness campaigns with businesses and improving the built environment in the downtown area through the suggestions from the public. A preliminary budget has been given for this in the project portion of this; however, it has been made note of to Council that there will be a need to invest in accessibility in the future and to bring forward costing on a project by project basis, which will include this project. The Phase will run from July 2021 to March 2022.

Phase 4: Return on Investment will analyze the return on investment, adjust the programming to refresh and start again with a new project in 2022 or continue with the downtown with new projects to increase accessibility or expand to a new area of Cobourg based on the needs developed through the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024.

The attached documents provide a brief overview of the original timeline proposed to the Government for the program and a tentatively revised date for the program, with the aim to have this completed by June 30, 2022. The aim is to have the majority of the public participation completed before the end of the year to ensure that these new aspects are included before summer 2022 in hopes that the downtown area will be more accessible for next summer.

Based upon previous knowledge and discussion with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, funds have been divided into three (3) key categories to improve accessibility for the Built Environment:

1. Barrier-Free Entrances: Having more door actuators and increasing the ability to use these without having to necessarily touch them to prevent spreading of COVID-19.
2. Wayfinding/Signage: Providing more information and ways to determine how to get to specific areas, especially the accessible facilities, by providing wayfinding and signs to assist.
3. Barrier-Free Pathways: Through brickwork maintenance and/or adding in more safe crossing areas, there will be more accessibility for Persons with Disabilities.

In addition to all of these aspects, there is increased communication to allow people to have knowledge of these new enhancements as well as more information about how to use Bang the Table/Engage Cobourg. This will allow people to understand about the projects, the enhancements, and have their say throughout the course of the project to ensure the accessible features we are upgrading are what people need in the community.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/BUDGET IMPACTS

As the Grant provides \$60,000 towards the project, there are currently no financial implications. The hiring of the new part-time employee is funded completely through this grant.

While there is adequate funding for the majority of this project, thanks to the Grant Program and the in-kind contributions from various departments in the Town of Cobourg, there is still a potential for need for further funding. It is the request that when creating the 2022 budget there is a line item added for Accessibility that will assist with not only this project but future accessibility related projects that will increase the livelihood of Persons with Disabilities that live in or visit Cobourg, Ontario.

8. CONCLUSION

Town of Cobourg staff are excited to bring the project that is being funded through the Inclusive Communities Grant Program. This project will bring more avenues of accessibility to the Town of Cobourg and allow for the important Built Environment Standards to be met and exceeded in our downtown area bringing the opportunity for more business and tourism to our downtown core.

Staff are grateful to the Ontario Government and the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility for the opportunity to create more accessibility and continue to work through the actions supported in the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020 to 2024.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	<u>Inclusive Community Grant Information - Corporate Services-040-21.docx</u>
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Mar 22, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Brent Larmer, Municipal Clerk/Manager of Legislative Services - Mar 22, 2021 - 11:46 AM.

Tracey Vaughan, Chief Administrative Officer - Mar 21, 2021 - 1:46 PM