

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, jkramer@cobourg.ca	Meeting Type:	Open Session <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed Session <input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting Date:	July 19, 2021		
Report No.:	Corporate Services-077-21		
Submit comments to Council			

Subject/Title: Inclusive Communities Grant Project Update

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive this report from the Accessibility Coordinator for information purposes, 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

Public engagement is currently in progress for this project and will run for another few weeks.

3. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council an update on the progress of the Inclusive Communities Grant Project.

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 April 5, 2021, Town Council approved the following resolution:

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.

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 received 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

The Town of Cobourg is currently on Phase 2 of the Inclusive Communities Grant Project: Public Engagement. While initially this was anticipated to begin in April 2021, the lockdown and other developments for COVID-19 delayed the process as we were hoping to have in-person sessions. Public engagement launched on July 5th, 2021 and will run through the month of July.

Through the Inclusive Communities Grant, the Town of Cobourg has been able to increase access and accessibility through the following:

- The hiring of a part-time Accessibility Assistant through the Community Living E.A.R.N. program;
- Implementing LanguageLine Video Remote Interpreting Services for immediate American Sign Language interpretation, which will be beneficial as we begin to open to the public during Step 2 and Step 3 of the reopening plan in Ontario;
- Purchase and install ten (10) Smart Door Activators through Keys2Access, which will be installed at the end of July to allow ease of access to Town-owned and operated facilities, especially during COVID-19 protocols;
- Purchase of two (2) foldable and movable ramps for Victoria Hall through Silver Cross;
- Training courses on Neurodiversity and Inclusion in the workplace for all Council, Staff, volunteers, Board, and Committee members through DistinctAbility;
- Training courses on Building Accessible Communities with the Together We Rock! Organization, and;
- Launching and advertising the survey and forum for the Inclusive Communities Grant on EngageCobourg via Facebook, Newspaper Inserts, and Utility Bill Inserts.

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 now run from August 2021 to March 2022.

In the coming months, Staff will be working to:

- Create an audit checklist for assessing Town-owned and operated buildings/facilities;
- Use the Rick Hansen Professional Designation and Certification our standard for buildings (<https://www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/professional-training>);

- Install ten (10) more Smart Door Activators through Keys2Access;
- Purchase more ramps from Silver Cross for other Town owned facilities;
- Increase education and awareness to businesses in downtown Cobourg to provide them with access to the tools and resources to provide heightened levels of service to our Persons with Disabilities, and;
- Improve additional elements of the downtown area based on responses of the survey surrounding the Built Environment, Wayfinding, and any additional updates or upgrades.

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.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/BUDGET IMPACTS

As the Grant provides \$60,000 towards the project, there are currently no financial implications. We will be reporting on the usage of the funding to the Government of Ontario by the end of July 2021.

During the first portion of this funding, we have been thankful to be able to complete projects and provide tools and resources to Staff to assist with the successful implementation of this project and more accessibility in the Town of Cobourg.

While there is adequate funding for most 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 for this and future projects.

We further state the request that when creating the 2022 budget there will a recommended line item to be 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, play, work, 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. As we have started implementing the education, awareness, and physical elements, it has been refreshing to hear more from the residents about other areas that we should address and their thankfulness of the projects we are currently completing.

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.