

UNITED COUNTIES OF LEEDS AND GRENVILLE

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

To the Warden and Members of Council of the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville

Members, We, your Accessibility Advisory Committee, beg leave to report as follows:

The Accessibility Advisory Committee met April 23, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers, 25 Central Avenue West, Brockville.

Members Present: Dana Farcasiu, Chair
Brant Burrow, Evelyn Pott, Jeff Shaver, Claire Smith,
Bill Steenkamer, Calvin Turner, Rob Wright

Staff Present: Geoff Clarke, Interim County Clerk
Andrea Bolton, Deputy Clerk and Accessibility Coordinator,
Recording Secretary

Others Present: Greg Bamber, City of Brockville
Paula Banks, Councillor, Rideau Lakes
Kimberly Brown, Member of the Accessibility Committee,
Township of Rideau Lakes
Tammy Day, Member of the Accessibility Committee,
Township of Rideau Lakes
Sheena Earl, Clerk, City of Brockville
Mary Ann Greenwood, Co-Chair of BMAAC, City of Brockville
Doug Hone, BMAAC, City of Brockville
Janet Jones, Co-Chair of BMAAC, City of Brockville
Lynn Murray, Deputy Clerk, City of Brockville
Chloe Preston, Deputy Clerk, Municipality of North Grenville
Louise Severson, Councillor, City of Brockville
Sharon Steenkamer
Mary Remmig, Deputy Clerk, Municipality of North Grenville
Mary-Ellen Truelove, Clerk, Township of Rideau Lakes
Lorie Truemner, Member of the Accessibility Committee,
Township of Rideau Lakes

1. Call to Order

Recording Timestamp 00:00:01

Ms. Farcasiu called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and welcomes everyone to the United counties of Leeds and Greenville Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting. Ms. Farcasiu requests participants to introduce themselves, their municipality, and any specific roles they hold.

2. Adoption of Agenda

Recording Timestamp 00:06:26

Resolution No. AAC-005-2024

Moved by Evelyn Pott

Seconded by Bill Steenkamer

THAT the Agenda for the April 23, meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee be adopted as circulated.

CARRIED

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest and General Nature Thereof – Nil

Recording Timestamp 00:06:57

4. Presentations - Accomplishments to Date, 2024 Goals, 2024 Challenges

Recording Timestamp 00:07:25

4.1 Municipality of North Grenville Accessibility Advisory Committee

Recording Timestamp 00:08:53

Ms. Preston presented the accomplishments of the North Grenville Accessibility Committee, including the comprehensive renovation of the Municipal Center which has been recently completed to enhance accessibility, including the relocation of the reception hall to the main floor. Efforts also extend to the development of accessible park concepts, such as the addition of an accessible dock. Ms. Preston shared there is active engagement in consultations for Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments, particularly focusing on reviewing the

requirements for accessible parking spaces and considering policy enhancements and expanded Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) training for municipal employees. Ms. Preston shared the successful launch of the North Grenville transit expansion has been achieved, aiming to improve accessibility for both regular and accessible users. There is also ongoing work on a project to develop customized accessibility and customer service training for local businesses and exploring partnerships with AODA sports groups to increase awareness at community events. Challenges included funding, time, and resource constraints of accessible products. Ms. Preston explained the geographic scope and context of the North Grenville Accessibility Committee's work.

4.2 Township of Augusta

Recording Timestamp 00:16:52

Mr. Shaver stated Augusta Township does not currently have an established Accessibility Committee, but he has had discussions with the CAO about developing one.

4.3 Township of Rideau Lakes Accessibility Advisory Committee

Recording Timestamp 00:20:04

Ms. Brown from the Rideau Lakes Accessibility Committee provided an overview of Rideau Lakes, sharing it is home to about 10,000 people. The area includes rural, lake, and college communities, and its population is diverse, including seniors, families, and tourists. Ms. Brown conveyed the Committee has taken several initiatives to support local organizations in finding resources related to topics such as impaired vision and hearing impairment. This includes creating a list of outside agencies on their website. Additionally, they have collaborated with the fire department to develop a "vulnerable sector list," which enables the identification of residents with disabilities and their specific needs. To better understand residents' needs, the Committee designed an accessibility questionnaire. Also, they have conducted reviews and provided feedback on Township-owned properties, evaluating aspects such as paint colors, stairs, and elevators. The Committee has raised awareness about its goals by publishing an article in the local paper. Ms. Brown stated the Committee's goal is to keep reviewing public spaces, updating their multi-year accessibility plan, and increasing community engagement. Ms. Brown shared they have faced challenges in the geographic nature of the Township and communication, especially in

reaching seniors who may not use the internet, various levels of education, and in defining the Committee's role within the broader community. Following Ms. Brown's comments, the discussion emphasized the significance of understanding the diverse needs within the community, beyond just physical disabilities. There was consensus on the need to address the significant challenge of communication and outreach, especially to seniors and individuals with hidden disabilities. Ms. Farcasiu highlighted the importance of recognizing and addressing all types of disabilities, not just physical ones.

Recording Timestamp 00:26:44

Mr. Wright inquired about effective methods the Rideau Lakes Committee has used to gather community input and feedback. Ms. Truelove outlined the Committee's efforts, including distributing a community questionnaire via Facebook, their website, and local libraries and pharmacies, but noted a disappointing low response rate. She emphasized the difficulty in reaching the broader community, particularly seniors who may lack online access. Ms. Truelove proposed partnering with the local health center to gather more data on accessibility needs. Ms. Brown added that even if the questionnaire reached more people than expected, some, especially seniors, might still hesitate to self-identify their needs or disabilities. She explained there can be mental barriers to openly acknowledging and advocating for accessibility requirements. Ms. Brown suggested addressing these challenges through ongoing outreach and education.

Recording Timestamp 00:31:01

Ms. Truelove noted their Accessibility Advisory Committee had previously participated in a seniors' expo, but felt it lacked an accessibility focus. In response, they secured a grant to organize a targeted accessibility event aimed at connecting agencies and organizations that provide resources for seniors and people with disabilities. She proposed expanding this event into a county-wide expo to better serve the broader community. Ms. Brown agreed, highlighting that such an event could also attract summer tourists, emphasizing the need for accessibility accommodations for both residents and visitors. The discussion underscored challenges in communication and outreach, particularly to seniors and those with hidden disabilities, while recognizing the potential benefits of a centralized accessibility event. Ms. Smith pointed out that disabilities are not always visible, noting how perceptions of her changed once her condition became apparent, despite it being the same all along. Ms. Farcasiu stressed that the perception of disability as limited to older adults is inaccurate, advocating for

awareness of the needs of younger individuals with disabilities. She emphasized the importance of empowering young people to advocate for themselves and combatting stigma and bullying.

4.4 Brockville Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee

Recording Timestamp 00:34:33

Ms. Jones invited anyone interested to attend the Brockville Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee's (BMAAC) monthly meetings on the fourth Tuesday of each month. She highlighted the Committee's accomplishments and challenges, noting prior to the building code requirements, the Brockville Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee did a lot of work measuring and assessing accessibility in buildings. They have contributed to several playground projects, including an accessible playground in Hardy Park in partnership with the May Court Club of Brockville. The Committee has also addressed accessible parking and picnic table requirements for wheelchair users and played a key role in transitioning Brockville's paratransit service to in-house operation, advising on necessary vehicle types. Ms. Jones identified providing accessible transit options after hours and on weekends as a major challenge, leaving those reliant on accessible features without transportation when the paratransit service is not operating. While the Committee explored accessible taxis to fill this gap, they found the costs prohibitively high for cab companies. They are seeking government funding or grants for subsidies but have yet to succeed. The Committee is also considering fundraising or partnerships with service clubs to secure at least one accessible taxi per company in Brockville. Additionally, Ms. Jones outlined ongoing barriers faced by the Committee, including difficulties in implementing improvements, attracting new members, and addressing funding and staffing constraints.

Recording Timestamp 00:39:07

Ms. Jones reported that to comply with AODA, BMAAC identified 32 priority locations for bus stop accessibility improvements, focusing on the top 5 this year. The Committee is studying accessibility design standards from Oshawa to potentially adopt or adapt them for Brockville's new developments and renovations. They aim to increase their involvement in reviewing site plans for new construction to ensure necessary accessible features, particularly in housing projects. With the AODA's 2025 deadline approaching, the Committee is committed to overcoming financial and practical challenges to achieve full

accessibility. They are also updating past audits of municipal buildings to address barriers between recommendations and implementation. Overall, BMAAC is taking a proactive approach to improve accessibility through standards, site plan reviews, and updated assessments.

Recording Timestamp 00:55:48

Ms. Preston responded to Ms. Farcasiu's inquiry about available grants for North Grenville Transport, noting that while the initial accessible transit service was funded through extensive community fundraising, the expansion lacked specific funding. She added that sustaining both initiatives will be discussed moving forward. The group acknowledged the lack of accessible transit options after hours is a significant issue not only for Brockville but also for other municipalities, highlighting the need for a coordinated regional approach to address these challenges. Ms. Truelove informed the group about the Inclusive Community Grants available from the province of Ontario, which are currently accepting applications until May 22nd.

Recording Timestamp 01:01:27

Mr. Burrow compared the resources allocated to long-term care with the potential investment in accessible transit, suggesting the latter may offer a more efficient use of municipal funds. He requested county staff to initiate a broader discussion on accessible transportation that includes all municipalities. He also inquired if the Committee has data on the demand for an accessible taxi service in the area. Mr. Bamber shared information on private accessible transportation options in the region, noting that their high costs make them inaccessible for many individuals with disabilities. Ms. Greenwood noted under the AODA, the paratransit fare should be the same as the regular transit fare. However, the facility was telling residents they needed to approach the Township to get the paratransit service subsidized again. This was because the conventional bus service was still allowed to stop at Sherwood Park Manor, but the paratransit service was no longer subsidized for the residents. It prompted Mr. Burrow to commit to following up on the situation at Sherwood Park Manor.

Recording Timestamp 01:06:16

Mr. Turner suggested the fragmented nature of the municipal boundaries and funding sources may be hindering the ability to effectively address the shared accessibility issues across the broader area highlighting the potential need for

greater inter-municipal collaboration and coordination when it comes to accessibility initiatives, especially around critical services like transportation. Mr. Burrow shared although the border between the municipalities may introduce additional complexities, he is committed to gaining a deeper understanding and will keep the Committee informed as more information is found out. Ms. Greenwood suggested Mr. Burrow work alongside the City of Brockville, since a significant portion of Sherwood Park Manor's residents are from Brockville, to find a solution to restore the paratransit subsidy and ensure accessible transportation options for those residents.

4.5 Leeds and Grenville Accessibility Advisory Committee

Recording Timestamp 01:08:23

Mr. Clarke outlined potential next steps and goals. He emphasized the significance of the new Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, compliance with web accessibility standards, efforts related to Limerick Forest, and future programming. He noted promoting National Accessibility Week. Shifting focus to goals for 2024 and 2025, Mr. Clarke emphasized the importance of developing a strategy as they are halfway through 2024. He suggested themes for consideration, including grants and fundraising, improving communication among geographically diverse municipalities, providing guidance for starting Accessibility Advisory Committees, advocating for more resources through Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) or Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) delegations, and addressing transit challenges. He acknowledged that establishing the right goals would require balancing resources and interests among the group. Mr. Clarke offered to facilitate further discussions on these topics and highlighted the need to identify speakers or experts to lead each discussion.

Recording Timestamp 01:13:53

Ms. Smith emphasized the group should leverage its collective expertise in accessibility more effectively. Ms. Farcasiu said the group needs to work on showing the broader community they are here to help. Ms. Pott then suggested a theme for the group could be actively engaging the community to encourage involvement with the Accessibility Advisory Committees.

Recording Timestamp 01:16:33

Ms. Smith asked if the Accessibility Advisory Committees would be allowed to have a presence at home shows and suggested this could be a good venue for Committees to provide information to the public as a means of increasing public awareness and engagement around accessibility issues and solutions.

Recording Timestamp 01:17:32

Ms. Truelove provided context on the Rideau Lakes Committee's plans to potentially host an accessibility-focused expo or trade show. She clarified that the initial idea was to organize a vendor-style event where companies, organizations, and agencies related to accessibility could gather in one location. The goal is for the public to explore different booths and learn about resources and services available to support individuals with disabilities. While the Committee initially referred to this as a "summit," Ms. Truelove emphasized it is more accurately a trade show, allowing direct engagement with accessibility providers. This initiative aims to better inform and connect the public with various accessibility-related supports in the community. Ms. Preston acknowledged the group was discussing two different approaches to the potential accessibility event or summit, one is an internal-facing event, focused on the Accessibility Advisory Committees themselves, where they could share information and collaborate. The other is a public-facing event, where businesses, organizations, and members of the broader community could attend to learn about accessibility resources and initiatives. Ms. Preston suggested these two approaches could potentially be accomplished through the same overall mechanism, just structured differently. Ms. Preston proposed the idea of having one day dedicated to the internal-facing Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting and discussions, followed by a second day which would be open to the public and businesses.

Recording Timestamp 01:19:20

Ms. Greenwood shared some of Brockville's past experiences trying to host accessibility awareness events during National Accessibility Week. Ms. Greenwood commented on the challenges faced with low turnout due to lack of accessible transportation for past Accessibility events and shared her endorsement of the home show idea as a potentially more effective way to engage the broader public and business community.

Recording Timestamp 01:20:51

Mr. Burrow proposed targeting home shows or trade shows could be a strategic and practical way for the Accessibility Advisory Committees to reach a key audience - homeowners and renovators - and start generating interest and awareness around accessibility features and solutions. Ms. Farcasiu suggested municipalities reach out to accessibility vendors to actively participate in home trade show events.

Recording Timestamp 01:22:31

Ms. Jones shared during Accessibility Week, the City of Brockville's Council officially proclaims the week. She also explained BMAC raises the flag they had designed a few years ago during this time. In addition, Ms. Jones said at the meeting of Council, BMAC presents three certificates to members of the community who have been recognized for their efforts in advancing accessibility. She emphasized these Council proclamations and certificate presentations are televised, raising awareness and fostering a greater understanding of the accessibility initiatives in the community. Ms. Jones proposed if other municipalities are unable to organize similar accessibility events for the beginning of June, they could still consider having their Council officially proclaim Accessibility Week and incorporate recognition of accessible champions.

Recording Timestamp 01:23:49

Mr. Turner suggested there appears to be a divisional or disconnected approach between municipalities when it comes to funding and providing accessible transportation services. Mr. Turner suggested improved coordination or cohesion between municipalities when it comes to accessing provincial funding and resources to address accessibility challenges, particularly around transportation.

Recording Timestamp 01:26:18

Ms. Steenkamer highlighted the challenges faced by residents of Sherwood Park Manor, a long-term care facility near Brockville. She proposed that closer collaboration among municipalities could enhance coordination in providing accessibility information and support, rather than redirecting residents based on boundaries.

Recording Timestamp 01:27:06

Ms. Greenwood illustrated this issue by describing how residents of Sherwood Park Manor required physical assistance to cross a highway to reach St. Lawrence Lodge in the next municipality, due to the lack of paratransit services in their own area.

Recording Timestamp 01:27:31

Ms. Farcasiu put forth a suggestion to establish a more formal, recurring meeting structure that would bring together all the various Accessibility Advisory Committees from the different municipalities. This would allow them to share information, learn from each other, and potentially coordinate their efforts in a more unified manner.

Recording Timestamp 01:28:08

Mr. Clarke expressed his support for pursuing both an internal committee meeting and an external public-facing accessibility event or conference. For the public-facing event, Mr. Clarke suggested there could be a conference or trade show, where vendors related to accessibility could set up booths. He then proposed the group could potentially leverage vendors to help offset the costs associated with organizing such an event. Regarding the transit challenges which had been discussed, Mr. Clarke suggested the idea of a "living classroom" concept, where the development of a transit system that works could be turned into an event in itself. Mr. Clarke emphasized the importance of educating and informing the broader community, in addition to the internal knowledge-sharing among the Committees and said he does not think a summit will be as daunting with the association of the agenda and the group should define the desired outcomes.

Recording Timestamp 01:30:49

Ms. Farcasiu inquired about the nature of the proposed summit, whether it would be an ongoing event or a one-time event. Ms. Preston asked if the group should form a working group with representatives from the various Accessibility Advisory Committees to bring back ideas for discussion. Mr. Clarke agreed creating an environment for such a group to germinate was a good idea, leaving the decision to the group.

Recording Timestamp 01:32:32

Mr. Bamber suggested using school buses to transport people to the event and proposed inviting various organizations, such as the Rick Hansen Foundation, and companies which could help with different disabilities. Mr. Clarke agreed and suggested forming a working group to address the summit's logistics and regular meetings for information exchange.

Recording Timestamp 01:33:57

Ms. Farcasiu summarized the meeting's objectives and suggested the first step is to start a working group to brainstorm and find information on organizing the summit. Ms. Farcasiu confirmed if everyone agrees to proceed with the summit by requesting those present to please raise your hand if you are in agreement in which there was unanimous support to move forward.

Recording Timestamp 01:34:24

Mr. Clarke suggested instead of immediately proposing a summit, the group could first recommend a structure by which all the Committees can come together on a regular basis for an information exchange. This process would involve the committees meeting regularly and then having a standalone summit or conference event. He proposed that the working group could first discuss what a regular meeting of this group might look like. Then, in the second half of the agenda, they could investigate the feasibility of a summit, including costs, venues, transit considerations, and other inputs provided during the meeting. Mr. Clarke suggested by presenting a few options, the group may be able to come up with a better hybrid approach they hadn't initially considered.

Recording Timestamp 01:35:05

Ms. Farcasiu agreed with Mr. Clarke's proposal to have a working group and the suggestion each municipality send two members to the working group and encouraged municipalities to inform Mr. Clarke of their chosen members. Ms. Farcasiu asked if the goal was to plan a summit for 2025. Mr. Clarke confirmed the working group would investigate and make recommendations regarding the summit, which would be discussed at future Committee meetings. He mentioned that a summit in fall 2025 is feasible but emphasized the need for reasonable expectations and timelines. Ms. Farcasiu suggested coordinating with North Grenville to leverage their expertise in organizing such events.

Recording Timestamp 01:39:16

Ms. Murray inquired about support and staff resources for the working group. Mr. Clarke said the group would first need to assess its requirements. Ms. Truelove asked whether the group would operate independently and who would provide oversight and resources. Mr. Clarke confirmed his willingness to coordinate the working group and requested municipalities to designate two members to join. He also recommended that the group propose a structure for regular Committee meetings and explore the feasibility of a summit.

Recording Timestamp 01:41:19

Mr. Wright suggested the group submit their top three objectives to be considered for the summit to enable the group to gather input from everyone before the working group's discussions and planning. Mr. Clarke will send out the request.

Recording Timestamp 01:43:20

Mr. Turner said the full group should meet, establish a clear agenda for the summit, and ensure all Committee members are informed and aligned, before moving forward with the more detailed planning of the summit. Mr. Clarke recommended the Committee meet again on October 22nd, as that date already had a scheduled meeting, and it would be a convenient and logistically simpler option for continuing the summit planning discussions.

5. Meeting Dates

Recording Timestamp 01:12:45

6. Summit 2025

6.1 Ideas

Recording Timestamp 01:12:45

6.2 Costing

Recording Timestamp 01:12:45

6.3 Agenda

Recording Timestamp 01:12:45

7. Questions from the Media

Recording Timestamp 01:46:20

There were no questions from the media.

8. Questions from the Public

Recording Timestamp 01:46:32

There were no questions from the public.

9. Adjournment

Recording Timestamp 01:47:04

Ms. Farcasiu proposed that the group write a letter to the province addressing transportation issues for people with disabilities and requesting support for rural municipalities. Mr. Burrow expressed hesitation, noting that the province already has policies and funding for transit, and he was unclear on the specific advocacy focus. Mr. Burrow said the solutions may be more of a local organizational challenge, and the group should work through those first, but acknowledged they could advocate to the province later if clear gaps are identified. He offered to discuss current advocacy efforts with his colleague, the chair of ROMA, who is running for president of AMO, and report back.

Recording Timestamp 01:51:40

Mr. Burrow recommended adding an "information item" category to the group's agendas, allowing automatic inclusion of each Committee's meeting minutes in their agenda packages. This would provide members with access to all

Committee minutes efficiently, enhancing communication and coordination among the groups.

Recording Timestamp 01:52:04

Ms. Farcasiu suggested cross posting the minutes and agendas of various Accessibility Advisory Committees on their websites, along with links to each other's sites and meeting schedules.

Resolution No. AAC-006-2024

Moved by Rob Wright

Seconded by Brant Burrow

THAT the meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee adjourn at 10:57 a.m.

CARRIED

All of which is respectfully submitted this 24th day of October, 2024.