

5. Strategic Directions

To achieve consensus on strategic directions and priorities that would prevent and remove barriers to persons with disabilities within the programs, policies and practices of the City of Mississauga, the obstacles to full accessibility had to be determined. The underlying obstacles to an accessible City include:

➤ *Poor Awareness, Education & Understanding blocks Acceptance and Action*

Limited knowledge or experience with the unique needs of persons with different types of disabilities prevents barriers from being removed. When making accommodations for persons with disabilities, those accommodations can vary from person to person and most certainly between different types of disabilities. For example, someone who is visually impaired would have different needs from someone who is intellectually impaired.

➤ *Existing Physical Design blocks Full Accessibility*

Many of the facilities of the City were built prior to the application of accessibility criteria in the Ontario Building Code (OBC). In addition, the current OBC is considered to be a minimum standard, at best. While the design of new buildings can make provision for accessibility at little additional cost, retrofitting existing buildings is often costly and may be of limited effectiveness due to site or structural limitations (i.e. heritage facilities).

➤ *Budget Constraints block Progress*

Limited resources and competition for resources (both human and financial) prevents full removal of barriers in the short term. No new funding for the implementation of the ODA has been provided by the province to municipalities, schools, hospitals, colleges, universities or public transportation providers.

➤ *Competing/Multiple Priorities blocks Focus on Accessibility Issue*

City of Mississauga Accessibility Plan

Many initiatives and projects of the City, as well as directives from senior levels of government compete with accessibility for attention and resources. The expectation of all of these constituencies is very high making it difficult to focus on any one of the Corporation's priorities.

➤ *Lack of Legislation blocks Universal Design*

Weak legislation, absence of concrete incentives and complying with legislation in a minimal manner impedes making our community accessible to all people. Regulations under the ODA to create enforcement mechanisms and to set mandatory standards for removing and preventing barriers has not occurred. Compliance with the intent of the ODA at a municipal level will be insufficient to result in full accessibility for the disabled community.

➤ *Limited Expertise blocks Solutions*

Limited expertise is linked with poor awareness, education and understanding of disability issues. Solutions to physical barriers have been elusive to date and the broadening of the scope of disabilities to include visual, hearing and intellectual limitations will add complexity, making advances even more difficult. Paternalistic remedies, however well intentioned, will have to be abandoned in favour of solutions developed in consultation with and taking advantage of the daily life experiences of the disabled community. Understanding and knowledge about integration/inclusion is also beneficial to ensure persons with disabilities are blended into the fabric of our community.

➤ *Operational Issues block Full Integration*

Operational efficiency is an imperative driving all businesses, both public and private. Efficiency is most often achieved by a strict adherence to operating standards developed to address the main needs of the majority. For example, a transit system schedule allowing for a bus to stop every six minutes will have significant challenges when it can take twice that amount of time to deploy an accessible bus for a rider in a wheelchair.

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In order to deal with these concrete realities facing us, the following broad Strategic Directions were articulated:

Leading by Example

Accessibility must become ingrained as an integral consideration in the way the City thinks about all its activities. Going beyond minimum legislated standards in facility design, public programs and corporate policies will demonstrate a position of leadership to the broader community and assist in the removal of barriers in a shorter period of time.

Allocation of Resources

As in any initiative undertaken by the City, the availability of time and money will be a major determining influence on the speed with which the objectives of this Plan are achieved. If viewed as a separate, stand alone initiative that is layered on top of existing programs and initiatives, the removal of barriers will become onerous, expensive and inefficient. When accessibility issues become integral to budgeting and program development, barriers will fall in a coordinated, systematic and rational manner.

Developing a Communication Strategy

Communication of the Accessibility Plan will provide opportunities to begin the process of education and awareness that are key elements of successfully changing attitudes. Beyond that, however, ongoing campaigns to raise and maintain the level of understanding of accessibility issues in the broader community will be instrumental in effecting long lasting progress towards the achievement of the Plan's vision.

Providing Training

Following the leading by example theme, the role of City staff as ambassadors to carry the accessibility message into the community will be very important. To assist them in this role, sensitivity training to establish a high level of awareness is required so that in their interactions with customers and fellow staff they can model the types of behaviour that will accelerate the removal of barriers.

Hiring Disability Resource Experts

The diversity and complexity of disability issues necessitates the use of experts in the field. Staff, consultants, volunteers and other sources of first hand advice and knowledge about accessible facility design, program and service implications and enabling technologies will promote the removal and prevention of barriers.

Making Use of Skills in the Disabled Community

Persons with disabilities not only have personal experience with the challenges they face on a daily basis but when properly accommodated, offer a wealth of skills and abilities unrelated to their disability. Tapping into this pool of resources will complement education, awareness and training efforts, demonstrate the City's position of leadership and, most importantly, help the City achieve its objectives well beyond those that have been set for the removal of barriers to persons with disabilities.

Appendix G contains a long list of specific actions related to these strategic directions that were developed by the AAC and Staff Working Group. From that list, decisions were required as to an achievable program of initiatives to include in the Plan. The priority was to focus on initiatives that would effect positive and long lasting change and which would make accessibility considerations a "way of thinking" within the Corporation. It was agreed that the need to influence attitudes (as captured in the vision) was a priority before substantial and sustainable progress towards the removal of barriers can occur and, as such, Leading by Example, Developing a Communication Strategy and Providing Training were viewed as the strategic directions with the most potential impact in the short term. The other strategic directions and the initiatives associated with them remain important and have been captured in this document for future reference and consideration at each of the annual reviews that the Plan will undergo.