

6. The Plan: Initiatives

In order “to create a fully accessible community resulting in improved attitudes and full integration”, the following initiatives are imperative. These initiatives are to be accomplished within 2003/2004:

Development of a Communications Strategy

Communications Division to design and implement a broad-based communication campaign to promote the Accessibility Plan and to increase the community’s awareness of accessibility issues.

Outcomes:

- *Better understanding of the challenges facing disabled residents*

People who are not directly affected by barriers (they may not have a disability or they may not know of anyone with a disability), are not exposed to challenges faced by persons with disabilities on a regular basis. They do not consider the prevention and removal of barriers. We need to enhance their understanding so that this thinking becomes a “way of life”.
- *Appreciation of the impact of attitudinal barriers*

The Coalition for Persons with Disabilities handed out buttons which stated: “Attitudes are the *REAL* Disability”. At times, prevention and/or removal of barriers does not occur because people do not realize that there is a large number of people who are truly limited by barriers. People do not understand what the barriers are.
- *Greater sensitivity to the need for public funding for removal of barriers*

Removing and preventing barriers is the responsibility of many sectors. School boards, hospitals, colleges, universities, public transportation, and other agencies in addition to municipalities are required to develop accessibility plans as a result of the ODA.

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- *Appreciation of the “ability” side of the “disabled” community*

People with disabilities have many unique skills and talents just like the rest of society. Highlighting this positive side aids in improving attitudes and full integration; thus meeting “our vision”.

Development of Accessibility Design Guidelines

Community Services (Facilities and Property Management; Planning and Admin.), Transportation and Works, and Planning and Building to develop design guidelines for City facilities that will be applied to all future capital projects.

Outcomes:

- *Effective guidelines to address physical barriers in facilities/infrastructure*

Many municipalities have adopted their own Accessibility Guidelines to assist all participants in the planning, design, and development process in realizing a barrier-free community. We need to do the same, building on the experience of others.

- *Budget for projects includes barrier removal*

Accurate budgets which include items for accessibility become part of the planning process from the start of planning versus being built in along the way.

- *Consistent approach – take advantage of lessons learned*

Taking the lead by developing these guidelines will demonstrate to other sectors that we are committed to the removal of barriers. Various departments within the corporation and external stakeholders will benefit from having access to these guidelines. Ultimately, places of worship, restaurants, long-term care facilities, offices, etc.... will follow these same design guidelines. Internal staff, external agencies and our customers will benefit from this consistent approach.

- *Ability to assess and compare appropriate and inappropriate physical examples*

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Constant feedback from the AAC (which includes persons with disabilities), the Staff Working Group (as well as other staff) will allow us to make careful decisions about providing the right design.

- *Lead by example by not simply meeting minimal OBC standards*
Adoption of City of Mississauga design guidelines and the use of these guidelines demonstrates that we are leading by example. The AAC has often commented that the OBC is not adequate for full accessibility – if this is what we are striving for, then we must go “above and beyond” the OBC where necessary.
- *Increased revenue due to increased provision of opportunities for the disabled community (recreation programs, theatres, etc...)*
In our community, people with disabilities will have more barrier-free opportunities. The doors will literally open up for them.

Development of a Disability Awareness/Sensitivity Training Program

Human Resources Division to research and design training programs for City staff that heighten their sensitivity to accessibility issues for customers and co-workers in the disabled community.

Outcomes:

- *Heightened sensitivity to customer needs – meeting all customers’ needs*
Providing the right municipal services in a superior way.
- *Greater acceptance of disabled co-workers*
Acceptance of a diverse workforce and all of our similarities and differences is what will make us a better Corporation. Working alongside persons with disabilities keeps us in tune with their needs. Again, the focus is on the “ability” side of the “disabled” community.
- *Attract skilled workers*

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Hiring persons with disabilities with the appropriate skill sets required for a variety of positions within the Corporation would allow us to utilize the untapped expertise in the disabled community.

- *Focus on abilities of individuals*
- *Greater opportunities for hiring applicants with disabilities who overall are the best qualified candidate*

This fits in with the City being an “Equal Opportunity Employer”.

- *Increase in revenue due to increased provision of opportunities for the disabled community (recreation programs, theatres, etc...)*

Increasing staff’s sensitivity towards people with disabilities opens the doors to improved services for this population. Improved customer service will bring loyalty.

Review of Departmental Plans and Corporate Policies in Relation to Accessibility

Individual Departments to review Departmental (Master) Plans as they are being reviewed/updated. Insert language related to improving accessibility for persons with disabilities in the next City Strategic Plan. City Managers Office to include accessibility issues in annual Corporate Policy review program to ensure removal of barriers to persons with disabilities that may exist.

Outcomes:

- *Removal of unintended systemic barriers*

While many organizations attempt to avoid direct, intentional discrimination, there exists a subtle type of discrimination called systemic discrimination – the exclusion of certain groups of people through the application of policies and practices. Systemic barriers are embedded in an organization’s ways of carrying out its business as stipulated in policies, procedures, standards, rules, regulations, and practices (written and unwritten). The removal of systemic discrimination requires a

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systemic approach. Rather than approaching discrimination from the perspective of a single perpetrator and single victim, the systemic approach acknowledges that by and large the systems and practices that we adopt may have a negative effect on certain groups in society³. An example of a systemic barrier may be not offering different ways to complete a test as part of a recruitment process.⁴

- *Demonstrates corporate leadership*

Keeps us in line with the City's Mission: "Leading Today for Tomorrow" by "leading by example".

- *Greater corporate awareness*

Reviewing our policies and plans with an accessibility lens will heighten awareness of accessibility issues.

Examination of Accessibility Issues in Future Directions

Recreation and Parks and Mississauga Library System (MLS) to make special provision for the examination of accessibility issues in their upcoming Strategic Planning project (Future Directions).

Outcomes:

- *Proactive, research based response to special needs in programs*

When requests for segregated and/or integrated programs are made, we will have a process to guide us to appropriately meet our customers' needs. Research will help us to make better decisions in the provision of programs and services for persons with disabilities.

- *Integration of needs of the disabled community with the rest of the community*

³ CPRA, Opening Doors

⁴ Accessibility Ontario: Guide to ODA, 2003

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Full integration is our goal. Providing accommodations when necessary will ease integration of persons with disabilities into our programs and services.

- *Strengthen partnerships with agencies serving persons with disabilities*

There are 25 special needs agencies and associations listed in the Inside and Out Guide (A Guide to Recreation and Parks Programs) - for example: Ontario March of Dimes, Erinoak, Mississauga Parkinson Support Group, Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society. Working collaboratively and cooperatively with these agencies improves services to persons with disabilities – our customers. Identification of gaps and duplication of services among these agencies will result in the provision of streamlined, efficient services. An example of how this can work is with the Next Step to Active Living Program – a daytime program linking adults with physical disabilities to an active lifestyle within the community, operating out of South Common Community Centre. This program has also linked with the MS Society to serve participants with MS in the fitness centre.

- *Set up long-range approach to addressing needs*

With a growing aging population, the demand for services that meet the needs of persons with different types of disabilities (e.g. physical disabilities, hearing and visual impairments) will increase. A specific plan to address these current and future needs is required.

Continue Implementation and Evaluation of Mississauga Transit's Accessibility Plan

Mississauga Transit to continue the implementation of its recently adopted Accessibility Plan. This includes the partnership with Peel TransHelp services and the operation of designated accessible routes/buses.

Outcomes:

- *Increase in the use of accessible routes*

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The long-range plan is that all buses be accessible; it will take many years to implement this. In the meantime, continued evaluation and assessment of the most appropriate routes is recommended.

- *Disabled community more independent – come and go as they please versus advanced booking – normalization versus segregation*

Continually ensuring that bus stops/bus shelters and sidewalks including curb cuts are accessible will improve the independence of individuals using transit services.

- *More streamlined/appropriate use of Peel TransHelp*

With continued improvements in Mississauga Accessible Transit and marketing and education of its use, more people will use it; thereby reducing dependence on TransHelp. Improvements with Mississauga Accessible Transit will allow people who truly require this level of service the opportunity to access it.

7. Administration of the Plan

7.1 Role of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)

The main role of the AAC is to advise Council on issues affecting persons with disabilities within the community. Through its involvement in the development of the Accessibility Plan the AAC has, in fact, provided advice in the form of recommendations on strategic directions and specific initiatives designed to remove barriers to full participation.

The AAC will continue to advise Council about progress being made on plan initiatives and whether the plan is in fact achieving its goals. The AAC will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the initiatives, and through regular contact with the Accessibility Coordinator and Staff Working Group will obtain status reports that will permit it to properly advise Council.