

Information Report



Service Area	Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
Date	Friday, February 2, 2024
Subject	2023 Annual Accessibility Advisory Committee Report

Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To update Guelph City Council on the activities of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) during 2023.

Key Findings

The AAC serves as a valuable resource, offering the City insights and recommendations to prevent potential barriers in services, programs, and facilities.

Although mandated consultation obligations have led to a greater number of City staff interactions with the AAC in 2023 than in prior years, the frequency of meetings on specific topics has also increased due to City staff's recognition of the committee's expertise in identifying current or potential barriers to inclusion.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requires consultation with the AAC and the public on the following themes:

- Recreation trails and outdoor play spaces
- Accessibility plans and policy
- Transit and taxis: conventional services, bus stop design, taxis
- Rest areas on exterior paths of travel
- On-street parking
- Site plans

The report provides details of the work of the AAC and the recommendations the AAC provided during 2023. A summary of work and recommendations is presented related to the themes and projects below.

Recreation trails and outdoor play spaces:

- Project introduction: Emma Street to Earl Street Cycling and Pedestrian Bridge
- Silvercreek Park: washroom renovations & picnic shelter
- Draft design for trail curb cut standard
- South End Community Centre (SECC): recreational trail and design
- Draft Parks and Recreation Master Plan including the playground rubber surface strategy
- Riverside Park: bandshell renovations and new trails
- Margaret Greene Park - new splash pad

- Annual Play Equipment Lifecycle Project
- Complete Streets Design Guide: Proposed Pedestrian and Cyclist Crossing

Transit and taxis: conventional services, bus stop design, taxis

- RideCo partnership
- Standing order list
- Review of bus stop with shelter design

On-street parking

- Downtown Guelph Parking Master Plan
- Complete Streets Design Guide Project
- Seasonal Patio Program

Site Plan Internal Review Report

- Regular reports on the number and type of plans reviewed

2023 Staff consultations that were not required by the AODA included:

- AAC engagement on voting methods for the 2026 municipal election
- Design principles of the Community Engagement Framework
- Vehicle For Hire Program
- College Avenue protected cycling infrastructure
- Solid waste letter to the federal government
- Central Station: new construction

Strategic Plan Alignment

The work of the AAC includes consultations with staff and increases trust and transparency through their advice to remove barriers in public discussions. This report is a good example of how the work in one year of this committee aligns with the organization's strategic plan, Future Guelph.

Future Guelph Theme

Foundations

Future Guelph Objectives

Foundations: Lead with accountability

Financial Implications

None.

Report

The AAC, mandated by the AODA, plays a crucial role in ensuring the City of Guelph continues to contribute towards Ontario's goal of becoming an accessible province by 2025. Addressing a spectrum of barriers, from physical to systemic, the AAC advises City Council and staff on identifying and eliminating current or potential barriers.

Recognizing that everyone may experience disability at some point, the AAC underscores the dynamic nature of abilities, which can change over a person's lifespan. AODA guidelines prescribe the composition of the AAC, stressing majority representation by individuals with disabilities. While one seat allows someone keen on understanding the lived experiences of people with disabilities, this position is rarely filled, as the committee prioritizes engaging those with lived and firsthand experience for optimal organizational benefit.

Individuals' disabilities can share commonalities, yet each person's experience is unique. People may identify with one or more protected rights groups, and the intersection of these identities can lead to marginalization. Achieving equitable access to City services is complex, prompting the AAC and Accessibility staff to seek advice from individuals in protected rights groups from time to time. This diverse input helps the committee navigate potential conflicts and informs its advice, aiming for an equitable experience for all customers of the City.

At the beginning of 2023, the AAC stressed the importance of providing proactive advice during the planning stage of projects while recognizing the positive influence this change would have on meeting outcomes for staff and the committee members. Early engagement in projects enables the AAC to share insights on potential barriers. Further, by working with staff to create standardized approaches, the committee enhances its effectiveness in addressing the numerous topics it reviews each year.

Staff consultations that were required by the AODA

Recreation trails and outdoor play spaces

The following projects were introduced to the committee at the planning stage. In some cases, the committee highlighted potential barriers and opportunities to avoid these barriers and in other instances, the committee reviewed the information with staff as they prepare for further engagement in 2024:

- The Emma Street to Earl Street Active Transportation Bridge Project, and the design for trail curb cut standard reports were positively received by the committee with no recommendations at this stage.
- In support of staff's concept for the Silvercreek Park washroom renovations & picnic shelter, the AAC supported accessible seating within the picnic shelter and at the picnic seating outside of the shelter. The AAC recommended that the adult change table be installed during the building stage rather than roughing in the support and electricity for the table.
- Recommendations for the South End Community Centre (SECC) trail and design update included the addition of accessible seating along the trail.
- In support of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan draft, the AAC agreed with the rubber surface strategy and the adoption of a geographic distribution of playgrounds with rubber surface within 2.5 km of residential areas, as well as two new rubber surface playgrounds to fill distribution gaps in the central and north-west areas of the City.
- While in support of the Riverside Park bandshell and washrooms renovations and new trails, the AAC inquired if the entire stage could be made accessible. However, in considering this request, staff found that the middle level of the

stage is not large enough to be made accessible. The other two levels of the stage will be accessible.

- Complete Streets Design Guide: Proposed Pedestrian and Cyclist Crossing was supported by the AAC, including the intersection crossing design, highlighting the importance of a smooth transition at the ramp. Further, it was requested that staff receive feedback on the design from Canadian Nations Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and to follow up with the AAC.

Staff will return to the committee in 2024 to consult further when the above plans are more developed.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 the AAC reviewed the designs for the new splash pad at Margaret Greene Park. The committee supported the final concept.

Finally, the AAC and staff reviewed the Annual Play Equipment Lifecycle Projects to be constructed in 2024, focusing on enhancing inclusivity in Dovercliffe Park and Howitt Park playground designs. The AAC expressed concerns about limited accessibility, prompting staff to revisit the designs with the committee's recommendations in mind. Together, they identified opportunities for additional ground play elements to maximize inclusion. Additionally, the committee endorsed the proposed University Village Park playground design following a joint review.

Transit and taxis: conventional services, bus stop design, taxis

Transit and the AAC reviewed the bus stop with shelter design and expressed a willingness to support Transit in prioritizing locations for new shelters. Additionally, the committee recommended ongoing engagement with staff each time there is a review of this design.

Engaging the AAC with processes such as the Guelph Transit Mobility Service's Standing Order List allows Transit to consider the committee's valuable perspective. The AAC advised that Guelph Transit maintain the process as they have been offering it, prioritizing medical (including mental health) appointments. They suggested a first-come-first-serve approach for other standing order appointments and recommended ongoing collaboration on managing the list.

Staff will collaborate with the committee in 2024 for further consultation.

On Street Parking

The Downtown Guelph Parking Master Plan saw collaborative engagement between project staff and the AAC, resulting in the following valuable recommendations:

- Form a working group to assess the redistribution of on-street parking spaces.
- Enhance sidewalk accessibility, particularly to and from accessible parking.
- Ensure a sufficient supply of sheltered accessible parking spaces.
- Establish accessible electric vehicle charging and parking spaces.
- Develop a mobile app to identify available accessible parking spaces.

The AAC endorsed these priorities and expressed support for the overall Downtown Parking Master Plan study. Project staff and the AAC's commitment involved working collaboratively towards a parking system that prioritizes safety and equitable access, with a particular focus on improving how accessible parking is provided.

In the development of the Complete Streets Design Guide Project, there was a collaborative effort between staff and the AAC. The committee endorsed the draft vision, objectives, and recommendations and contributed by advocating for the prioritization of the needs of individuals who rely on or require cars for accessibility. This collaborative approach ensured a more inclusive and considerate design guide.

Over the past years, staff and the AAC engaged in collaborative efforts for the Seasonal Patio Program. Staff, in preparing the 2024 Seasonal Patio Program Guidelines, integrated the two recommendations from the AAC. These focused on ensuring turning radius and accessible paths within patios and emphasizing operators' awareness of the importance of vehicles for patio access. Additionally, the AAC, through this ongoing collaboration, brought forward two staff-focused suggestions:

- Highlight to the City the potential barriers for people with disabilities posed by road closures.
- Emphasize the need for vehicle access in pedestrian areas, recognizing cars and other vehicles as mobility devices for some individuals. This sustained collaborative work ensures a more inclusive Seasonal Patio Program.

Site Plan Internal Review Report

The AAC regularly reviews site plan applications as part of the internal site plan review process. The AAC typically reviews all site plan applications excluding single dwelling and demolition applications. In 2023 the committee reviewed 21 unique applications.

Staff consultations that were not required by the AODA

AAC Engagement on Voting Methods for the 2026 Municipal Election

Staff and the AAC met throughout 2022 and 2023 to collaborate on voting methods for the 2026 Municipal Election.

To accommodate independent voting for all residents of Guelph, the AAC recommended that the City offer online/internet voting, remote accessible vote by mail (RAVBM), vote by phone, vote by mail, and door-to-door vote from home options for upcoming municipal elections. The AAC indicated that leaving any of these options out will leave some people with a disability without access to a confidential and independent way to mark their ballot. Providing all options will help the City meet their duty to accommodate those individuals under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The AAC highlighted the importance of specifically RAVBM and internet voting as the most universally accessible options, which would solve significant service gaps that have been present in the past two elections for many people with a disability who have not had access to independent voting.

In November 2023, the AAC attended a facilitated meeting as staff were interested in gathering all of the AAC thoughts and recommendations in one meeting. The recording of this meeting is available online and is a thorough portrayal of the committee's recommendations.

Design Principles of the Community Engagement Framework

The collaboration between staff and the AAC was evident as the committee expressed support for the Community Engagement Framework principles. During the engagement the members noted that the information gathered by the City from AAC members has value and that it seems appropriate to reimburse advisory committee members for their time and valuable lived experiences.

Vehicle for Hire Program

The collaboration between staff and the AAC in developing the Vehicle for Hire Program reflects a commitment to addressing accessibility challenges. Companies like Uber and Lyft, classified as vehicles for hire, often lack accessible vehicles. Consequently, the City collects fees from non-accessible vehicle-for-hire services, and the AAC plays a pivotal role by offering recommendations on how to allocate these funds. The City actively sought the AAC's input in 2023 to determine the best use of these funds, leading to the enhancement of the TaxiSCRIP program. The TaxiSCRIP program allows registered mobility passengers to purchase a book of scripts, like a book of vouchers, specifically for accessible taxi services.

Guelph Transit implemented the AAC's recommendation, providing passengers the option to purchase an extra TaxiSCRIP booklet resulting in increased access to transportation services. Looking ahead, in alignment with the AAC's guidance, Transit plans to delegate the review of fund allocations to the in 2024. This ongoing collaboration demonstrates a commitment to addressing evolving accessibility needs within the community.

College Avenue Protected Cycling Infrastructure

Staff sought input from the AAC on the new protected cycling spaces, particularly regarding potential impacts on pedestrians with disabilities.

While the AAC expressed support for the project, they requested additional information, including considerations for year-round weather maintenance, yielding protocols for cyclists to pedestrians and bus users, and details about people using disability aids navigating the protected intersection safely.

The AAC recommended a site visit to the completed project with staff to discuss potential improvements for future projects.

Finally, recognizing the additional work involved, the AAC proposed compensating its members for their efforts during the site visit. This collaborative engagement ensures that the project aligns with accessibility needs and provides valuable insights for future endeavors.

Solid Waste Letter to the Federal Government

The AAC partnered with Solid Waste who drafted a letter supporting the Single-Use Plastics Prohibition Regulations. In addition, the AAC advocated to the Director of Plastics Regulatory Affairs Division, Environment and Climate Change Canada that there be an exclusion of plastic straws and that shopping bags be required to have two handles. The AAC identified that both items will have a negative impact on some people with a disability.

Guelph Central Station: New Construction

The committee recommended that the design of the potentially new Guelph Central Station include adult changing stations, and that access to the washroom focuses on dignity and equity for all individuals. Staff will review a more developed drawing that notes the City's Facility Accessibility Design Manual requirements with the committee in 2024.

Financial Implications

None.

Consultations

This report was made possible through extensive consultations with departments across the organization as part of the AAC meetings.

Attachments

None.

Departmental Approval

Alex Goss, Manager, Equity and Community Investment

Report Author

Leanne Warren, Accessibility Project Specialist

This report was approved by:

Jodie Sales

General Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Intergovernmental Services

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

519-822-1260 extension 3617

jodie.sales@guelph.ca

This report was recommended by:

Scott Stewart

Chief Administrative Officer

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

519-822-1260 extension 2221

scott.stewart@guelph.ca