

Advisory Committee of Council Staff Report



To Accessibility Advisory Committee
Date Tuesday, April 15, 2025
Subject **Finding Your Way: A City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy for Guelph**

Recommendations

1. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee receives the information on Finding Your Way: A City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy for Guelph, dated April 15, 2025.
 2. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommends that staff return to provide an update and receive feedback on the Wayfinding Strategy prior to presenting to City Council.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

To provide information, engage on, and receive feedback from the Accessibility Advisory Committee in the development of Finding Your Way: A City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy for Guelph.

Key Findings

- The City of Guelph currently has a modest wayfinding system with investments made by individual departments rather than a cohesive system of signs to support navigation.
- The need for a wayfinding strategy and improved wayfinding systems are identified in several approved strategic and master plans across City departments.
- Cygnus Design Group has been contracted to work with Staff and support the development of the strategy.
- An audit of current wayfinding, review of relevant policies, and a scan for best practices in wayfinding has been completed as a part of a background review phase with increased pedestrian and accessible signage identified as key areas for improvement through this project.
- The project is now in the engagement phase which will inform the design and standardization of the wayfinding system as well as recommendations for installation and maintenance.

Strategic Plan Alignment

[Make it easier to get around](#)

The development of a wayfinding strategy for Guelph aligns with the goal of making it easier to get around and support the objective of improving movement across the

city by implementing the Transportation Master Plan and other strategies that rely on ease of navigation.

[Grow Guelph's economy](#)

The development of a wayfinding strategy for Guelph aligns with the goal of growing Guelph's economy by implementing the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy where a wayfinding strategy is identified to support residents and visitors to navigate Guelph.

[Make downtown a vibrant place for everyone](#)

The development of a wayfinding strategy for Guelph aligns with the goal of making downtown a vibrant place for everyone by fostering a thriving, competitive and safe downtown through collaboration with community partners and supporting navigation to the downtown core.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Report

The City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy is the umbrella initiative for the overall wayfinding portfolio that lives under a shared name, Finding Your Way, which supports the [Future Guelph Corporate Strategic Plan \(2024-2027\)](#)'s City Building objective of making it easier to get around. An outside consultant, Cygnus Design Group Inc., has been hired to work with Staff to lead this project and inform the future design and implementation of all wayfinding projects within the portfolio.

The primary objective of the project is to support the implementation of a future focused and user-friendly navigational system to guide visitors and residents around Guelph by establishing a set list, or menu, of signs and navigation tools to use in city projects.

The key goals of the project are:

1. **User-Friendly Design:** Create a user-friendly system of signs and tools that showcase Guelph's sense of place and help residents and visitors find their way around the city.
2. **Information Access:** Prioritize inclusive and equitable information access through a user's journey by engaging meaningfully with diverse audiences.
3. **Standardization:** Develop a user manual, design guidelines, and a list of sign types that can be used by all City departments in their projects to promote easy navigation and provide helpful and timely information where people are.
4. **Future-Focused:** Outline a reasonable and resource-friendly framework that considers materials, installation, timelines, technology, and financial considerations that can support wayfinding projects on a long-term basis.
5. **Downtown Revitalization:** Support Downtown Revitalization with multi-modal navigation assets for implementation through the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Program.

Current Wayfinding System

The City of Guelph presently has a modest wayfinding system with investments made by individual departments to support program and project work rather than a cohesive system of signs to direct visitors and residents as they navigate from gateways to destinations and points of interest. The most recent visitor-oriented wayfinding project was installed in 2002 and temporary updates to the City's gateway signage were implemented in 2021.

The need for a cohesive wayfinding strategy is identified in several existing strategies and master plans: the [Economic Development and Tourism Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#), the 2013 Cycling Master Plan, the 2017 Active Transportation Network Study, the 2021 Guelph Trail Master Plan and the 2022 Transportation Master Plan. It is a shared goal of all these plans to improve connectivity and accessibility throughout Guelph for multiple modes, abilities and ages.

The City has already commenced work on the [Finding Your Way: Walking, Cycling and Rolling](#) project led by the City's Transportation Planning team. The goal of that project is to design a user-friendly system of signs and other information tools that will help people to easily find their way along Guelph's trails and cycling routes. The project is focused on the type, placement and information to be included on a system of wayfinding signs for active transportation trips in the city.

Background Review and Engagement

Through the first phase of the project, Cygnus Design Group led a review of policies, conducted a current wayfinding audit, and reviewed best practices in other municipalities to support the development of Guelph's Wayfinding Strategy. The outcomes of this review highlight a need for pedestrian-oriented signage and the standardization of materials, naming, and icons. There is also plenty of room for improving the accessibility of the system particularly in the placement of distance markers, the use of high contrast materials and colours, and incorporating standard tactile elements and braille. This is in alignment with the expectations for signs and navigational assets in the City's Facility Accessibility Design Manual (FADM), the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ADOA), and the City's Sign By-law.

Now in the second phase of the project, Staff are working with Cygnus to lead a series of engagement opportunities that will inform the project's user-friendly design and information access goals to help residents and visitors find their way around Guelph. The primary themes for this engagement will focus on establishing a sense of place and identity through the signage system that resonates with Guelph, standardizing navigation and information elements to include in the wayfinding system that reflect the expectations, priorities and needs for all residents and visitors, and establishing the kinds of destinations and amenities that are important to include in a signage system. These could be unique to Guelph or more common needs of users navigating unfamiliar areas such as information centers and public washrooms.

Next Steps

Once the second phase of the project is complete, Staff and Cygnus will work together to develop the strategy and recommended sign types that will be incorporated into the design guidelines and used in wayfinding projects moving forward. The strategy will also include recommendations for fabrication, installation, and maintenance of signage projects once approved.

Financial Implications

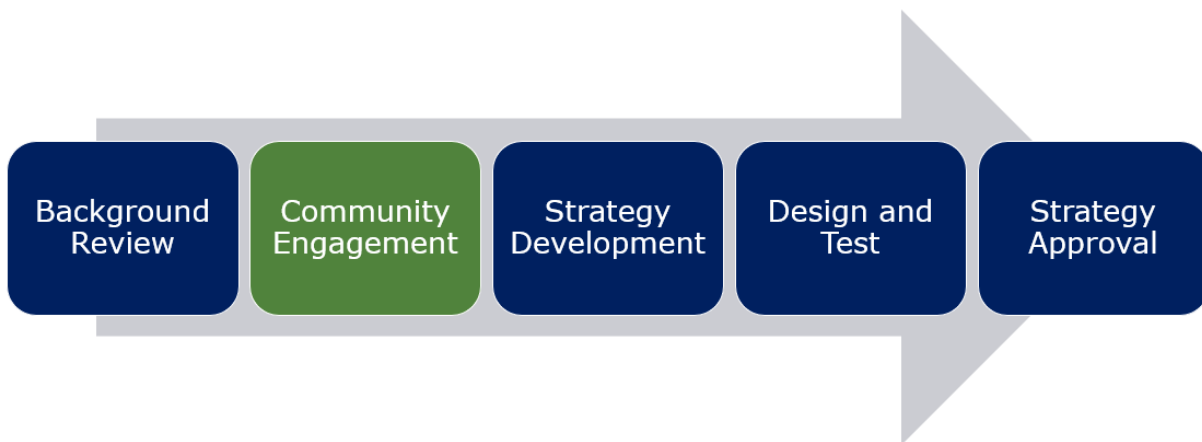
There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Timelines and Consultations

To inform the final strategy, community engagement activities for this project will primarily occur throughout April and May 2025 and include presentations with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and Tourism Advisory Committee, invitations for consultations with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River, public engagement sessions, workshops, City staff consultation, and an asynchronous online survey.

Once more detailed design guidelines and sign recommendations have been developed as a part of the strategy, a public engagement session will be held that incorporates prototypes of signage for further feedback in the Summer of 2025.

Figure 1: Project Phases



Staff intend to return with the final strategy to the Accessibility Advisory Committee prior to presenting to City Council at the end of 2025.

Attachments

Attachment-1 City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy

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Project goals

1. Create a user-friendly system of signs and tools to support navigation.
2. Prioritize inclusive and equitable information access.
3. Develop a user manual, design guidelines, and list of signs that can be used to standardize the system.
4. Outline a reasonable and resource-friendly framework for installing and maintaining the sign system.
5. Support Downtown Revitalization with multi-modal navigation assets.

Engagement goals

The engagement phase of this project will largely inform the first two goals:

- Create a user-friendly system of signs and tools to support navigation.
- Prioritize inclusive and equitable information access.

Questions and discussion

1. What information tools do you most often use to get around? Examples may include maps, landmarks, phone apps, signs.
2. Have you ever had a great experience with navigating an unfamiliar area? What made it great?
3. Have you had challenges or barriers navigating an unfamiliar area from a lack of information?

Questions and discussion continued

4. What information is important to be included on a sign system? Examples may include nearby destinations, distances to destinations, inclines and terrain, or symbols.
5. Are there any amenities that should be prioritized in a sign system? Examples may include public washrooms, information centers, or parking.

Recommendations

1. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee receives the information on Finding Your Way: A City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy for Guelph, dated April 15, 2025.
2. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommends that staff consider [recommendation] in the development of the Wayfinding Strategy.
3. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommends that staff return to provide an update and receive feedback on the Wayfinding Strategy prior to presenting to City Council.