

Thoughts and concerns on the temporary access ramp pilot program proposal from a downtown regular with physical, cognitive and mental disabilities:

Why is this the issue that Cllr. Klassen picked regarding Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and public accessibility?

While I don't speak for 'disabled people', myself and the other PwDs I've spoken to over the years have never had 'mobile ramp access to gentrified stores [downtown]' on our priority radar for urgent disability needs and accessibility concerns and/or City policy/by-law consideration or enforcement (especially in the downtown core). I feel there are more pressing, related issues for this ward.

Even accepting this at face value is problematic. As a small business accessibility initiative, it still makes no sense. Ramps do not even provide complete accessibility if there are not automatic doors, and don't guarantee the business is accessible once inside those doors. A holistic approach is needed.

Other considerations for the disabled, including accessible parking close to stores, and public safety concerns re: low/zero barrier social service agencies are potentially higher priorities, as is snow/ice removal. They will also prevent people from going downtown in the first place.

Why no broader consultation/request for feedback from all people with disabilities?

The AAC does NOT represent all people with disabilities in Guelph, nor do they consider them when making public statements on city initiatives/by-laws, etc.

Their past political biases have resulted in exclusionary public recommendations/comments on legislation (public space use by-law, e.g.) that is not human rights informed, as they didn't consider all disabled people, and how they'd be affected.

Why are specific requirements already decided with no transparency or consultation?

Given the downtown infrastructure reconstruction, why is the pilot project three years?

That makes no sense given the timeline was originally to include this in the 2026 budget, which would put it smack in the middle of the initial construction. And why would it take this long to assess, regardless?

Why is this particular NGO attached before the project is even approved?

What are the actual accommodation and cost-bearing requirements under the law for business owners vs. landlords?

While no one died and made me a constitutional lawyer, respectfully, the other disabled delegate who spoke on 8 July insisting landlords bear the costs of temporary ramps isn't either, as far as I can tell.

Per the Ontario Human Rights Code, landlords & service providers are required to provide disability accommodation up to the point of undue hardship as a shared responsibility.

Structural building accommodations like permanent ramps, railings, automatic doors, etc. would be the responsibility of the landlord. Anything else, like temporary movable ramps, displays, inventory placement, aisle access, etc is the business owner.

IMHO this is something that should've been addressed before it came to Council, and should be deferred if not resolved by then on this basis alone. A staff report is supposed to be added to the revised agenda per the 8 July Committee of the Whole meeting that hopefully will address it.

[An ironic side note: written delegations are due 10:00 am on the Friday before the next week's meeting, i.e. before the revised agenda comes out. With my disabilities, written delegations are the only way I can participate, so I won't have the access to the report that in-person and telephone delegates will.]

Why is there no reference to the history of disability accommodation downtown?

The initial ramp project referenced by the mayor on 8 July was the result of the efforts of one man, [REDACTED], to [aggressively attempt](#) to integrate the city and downtown for people with disabilities, specifically those in mobility chairs/scooters. His campaign involved structural changes, but the businesses who were scared of being hauled before a human rights tribunal had the mobile ramps as a compromise.

The disabled should be considered in every city project, policy, plan, etc. **by default**. Business owners and landlords should also consider their requirements under Human Rights legislation. That doesn't mean an automatic accommodation, it just means our rights and needs are meaningfully considered and respected, with consultation if warranted. That didn't happen in his case, and doesn't happen now.

The "ramps available on request" window stickers faded, and the ramps disappeared. Mr [REDACTED] died several years ago, and no one has taken his place. Today, the issue is still contentious, and the city, landlords and business owners all seem to be passing the buck. Yesterday I was downtown and only saw one store on Quebec with the ramps—Ms. Meri Mak. While they're not perfect, I appreciated the effort.

Given the flawed nature of this project, and its contentious history, I feel this iteration should be shelved, and a real, inclusive process occur to find ways of accommodation that include all the public, and all disabled as stakeholders. Cllr Caton's motion to include accessible raised sidewalk/road heights is a start, but also needs to be looked at to avoid the devils in the details re: costs, feasibility, etc.

I'd also like to add that my criticisms, while strident and borne of real frustrations at the lack of human rights and inclusive, democratic processes of city, council and businesses is not intended as a personal attack on Cllr Klassen for bringing this forward. While I think she could've done better due diligence and inclusion, I do appreciate that it was well-intentioned.

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