

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 4, 2021 @ 2:00 PM

Minutes

Present: Councillor Ralph Gidney, Chairperson
Councillor Vicki Amirault
Wayne Huskins
Kelly Oxner
Tyler Roy
Elise Johnston, Accessibility Coordinator, Region of Queens
Mike MacLeod, Director of Planning and Development, Region of Queens

Regrets: David Rudderham, Vice Chairperson

1.0 Call to Order

By Chair Ralph Gidney at 2pm

2.0 Changes/Approval Of Agenda

Add 5.2 Schedule a Timeline for presenting the draft plan to Council
Add 5.3 Provincial Community Access-Ability grants open. Priority project?

It was moved by Wayne and seconded by Kelly that the Agenda be approved as amended. MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

3.0 Approval Of Minutes Of February 4th, 2021

It was moved by Kelly and seconded by Wayne that the Minutes be approved as circulated. MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

4.0 Presentations: None.

5.0 Planning:

5.1 Review our Municipal Accessibility Plan. Category numbers 4, 5 & 6 by Elise. Bulleted paragraphs are pulled from the draft plan and then discussion follows.

5.1.a) **Information & Communications.**

- All current municipal office staff will watch some, and some staff will watch all by end of Jan 2021, of the Digital Accessibility Webinars and other relevant training necessary to their tasks. New employees to receive training within their first months of starting work.

This was updated from a previous draft as our link to those webinars is only live for another month or two. Elise will create a more relevant training for future staff. We have been making changes slowly but some habits are hard to break!

Wayne agrees some documents are improved including pdfs, but the PowerPoint presentations are not set up well for headings and structure.

- All municipal documents will be screen readable, using best practices including coded structure to improve navigation. No 'empty' pdfs will be created after March 2021.

Elise admits that a pdf may not be 'empty' but may not be very clear. Wayne notes that columns and complex layouts can be difficult. Elise confirms that our monthly Bylaw Enforcement Reports are now being created as a readable pdf. New templates are being implemented for all regular documents.

- The new website is to follow WCAG2 at minimum and be tested by various assistive technologies. (at least have an Accessibility clause)

Elise says the recommendations made a while ago after Wayne 'tested' the site are not yet made. She has been asking Richard Lane to push the web designers to give a date for the basics that can be expected of them within their contract and if farther edits are required, what agreement needs to be entered into. Specifics include a 'Skip to Main Content' at the top of a page and a cleanup of the rotating gallery that was messy.

- All printed material is to have audio options, at least alternatives online; use of QR codes and/or button-activated speakers on visual interpretation panels or visitor signage.

- A quarter of all business cards have Braille and ASL or CART services are readily available. Assistive hearing device(s) are to be installed in the Council Chamber.

Currently the business cards have been created. Unfortunately we aren't getting the practice on services for deaf and hard of hearing as predicted. There is a request for proposals on a new Audio/Video system for Council Chambers.

- All municipal videos on all platforms have closed captions and or 'described video' where appropriate.

Wayne said he'd been at a meeting in which newsletters were designed in such a way that was hard to read, so how is the Region dealing with things like font colours, etc. Elise confirmed that through the training, design was addressed and that the Queens Branding uses a sans serif font. The region's designers, Heather Cook and Dana Henley have good awareness now and could recognize when there was poor contrast. These issues (and left-alignment over centred, use of all capitals) are incorporated into the new templates for our documents.

5.1.b) **Goods and Services.**

- All public service counters will have a dropped area with knee clearance to allow wheelchair users a comfortable access point.

The Administration building and Queens Place have been assessed for this with recommendations made in the built environment section.

- Establish a fund for accommodations such as Telecoil hearing systems, TTY teletypewriter, CART, Video Relay Services and/or ASL translators.

Elise described Video Relay Services as useful Sign Language translations, which the region needs to have at our fingertips, available when needed. We don't have an idea on a dollar amount, but will collect some information on costs.

- Promote the existing accessible recreational equipment and continue to apply for grants for other assets such as mobi mats at the beach.

Vicki had a complaint about the 'accessible' ramped access to Beach Meadows. A woman was walking with a cane and having challenges with piles of snow and loose sand covering the boardwalks. No way could a wheelchair pass. Elise would like to see one of the entry points have a

paved parking section, with a continuous stable walkway to the boardwalk. Maintenance issues from blowing sand are a concern. The committee can choose this site as a focus for any allotted budget funds or grant proposal (See 5.3)

- Recognising the extra financial burden that wheelchair users typically carry, the Municipality offers free parking to vehicles with accessible parking permits.

We know there is abuse of permit use, such that meters are more about parking control rather than revenue collection, i.e. not to have people in one spot all day. The province realizes that the whole system needs revamping in terms of various permit types and the application process. We will follow this development but propose the 'free metering' in the meantime, with a time limit posted. Elise notes that Liverpool actually has a number of accessible spots that are not metered and that number can be increased.

- Waive or discount entrance fees at leisure activities for those whose role is to provide service to someone with disabilities, care givers and ASL translators. Also consider the needs of service animals such as water and rest areas.

Discussion of service dogs ensued regarding issues with other dogs. Wayne notes that in California, it's a felony to touch a working dog. Mike says the Region gives dog licenses. Elise asks whether there's something we can do in terms of awareness, and Wayne asked about waiving fees at least.

Kelly asked if financial accessibility is in our scope. Elise says it's not exactly in our mandate, but of course it's a valid point. Currently, our Recreation for All does offer 90% sponsorship to (only) regional activities including Queens' Place membership for 3 months. Kelly suggests even an awareness piece to a broader range of sports groups. Also that some folks don't have the support to even know about these kinds of things or ability to apply for them. Elise agrees that there's a communication gap and that she tries to use the department of community services and others to help share information. This is definitely an area to build upon. The Food Bank was mentioned as a good link to low income families.

5.1.c) **Transportation.**

- Support Queens County Transit services with improved parking & drop off zones, sidewalk heights, driveway ramps, and prioritised snow removal areas. Consider designated pick-up and drop-off stops in high-use areas.

Ralph and Elise got a drive up from a Queens County Accessible van that could take two wheelchairs using a back lift. The driver didn't have any trouble spots to highlight but mentioned that many non-chair users enjoyed the back lift if they didn't like stairs to enter. Elise wonders about improving central drop-off and pick-up spots such as the waterfront.

- Ensure that no resident is charged additional fees for accessible transportation or dealing with assistive devices.

It's hard for us to enforce this beyond our own services. This may not be applicable if it's not a problem. Especially as we'll have an accommodation fund to draw from. Remove this from the plan.

- Develop incentives for accessible taxis.

Mike: The region does provide taxi licenses for about 25\$/yr, which isn't really a financial help towards potential \$35,000 van remodeling for a ramp! Elise: Business grants are only 2/3 anyways, so maybe this line is removed, or kept in for the point of it.

- Detail a parking and sidewalk remediation plan with a timeline and budget: access aisles, protected paths, lowered curbs, slopes, etc. in the areas that are within municipal control (Liverpool, some of Milton and Caledonia)

Ask the planning technician to create a parking and sidewalk map on which specific locations are marked for improvement. Kelly wants to keep seeing the curb ramps highlighted with yellow paint. Elise has seen this as a regulation in provincial recommendations, but notes that crossing driveways are still hazardous to wheelchair users who have to lean towards traffic as they cross slopes. Ratio is meant to be 1 in 50, but sidewalks would have to be much wider. The Region will follow the province on this design challenge. Tyler and Kelly agree that it feels safer to be on the road than on the sidewalk.

- Ensure that audible traffic signal stations and crosswalks are safe and helpful with clear instructions for all users.

We know there are problems at Bristol intersection; we have a report and recognise this needs improvement. A new app called Key2Access has been piloted in some cities, but may just be another layer of stress for blind users who may be carrying a cane, a service dog lead and are listening for the sound. Elise mentions the call for tactile elements at crossing edges, as required at stairs, and will look for best practices.

Wayne: Caledonia certainly needs improvements for crossing the highway. The button to trigger a flashing crossing light doesn't have any audio nor do drivers seem to stop. Elise: surely we can apply for a crosswalk or two as these are listed as priorities in the provincial standards recommendations for the Built Environment.

Kelly mentions that snow removal has improved down on the waterfront, where previous frustrations had been noted.

5.2 Schedule a timeline for presenting our draft Plan to Council and Public

Mike: when you are ready to share a draft, presenting to Council is a public release of that document, after which we allow a time frame for public input. Budget isn't really involved here now.

April? Elise: By the end of this month, I'd send my final draft to the committee, then we'd want staff eyes (CAO, Mike, Heather as Info Clerk) to see where I'm unclear or creating un-measurable or un-enforceable recommendations. That way we could still follow the original provincial deadline for drafts to be created.

Some discussion on specific terms of reference for the committee and communications led to agreement that Elise would present to Council. The committee can decide on the length of time we leave it open to the public. The Directorate can advise.

5.3 Provincial Community ACCESS-Ability grants open! Priority?

This has recently opened for this year, and we can apply for up to \$50,000 as 2/3 of a total contribution, with our own labour as in kind value. Elise asked for input on priority ideas for projects.

6.0 Reports/Updates

6.1 Queens Place accessibility grant and front door estimates.

All purchases have been made on the last grant with a new power door to the arena and signage coming in soon.

The estimates for a sliding door system could be \$25,000 whereas a sensor-operator could work for under \$600.

A side story from Kelly was that a lady had a very difficult time getting into the building and discovered she didn't have her mask. At least some masks could be available, but she was so frustrated she likely would've gone home. Likely more people than we know aren't being supported to just coming in to use a facility. Ideas such as telecom, or video, or doorbells all have other issues.

6.2 Contacts with High Schools: Dave White & North Queens.
First contacts have been made, but no real interaction yet. Keep trying.

6.3 Digital media: post all minutes & discuss best options with Heather Cook, Communications Officer for Queens.

Minutes are now posted on our site. Heather will help look at options aside from our ideas about a private chat group and using the Queens Coast Life site. Elise liked Slack as a networking tool but it always comes back to whether one has internet.

6.4 Anonymous survey for regional staff; recruitment strategies.
Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator, Eric Levy

Conversations have started with Eric on an employment diversity survey as well as recruitment and accommodation policies. He's keen to work on this together, along with personnel staff.

7.0 Adjournment at 3:25pm. Next meeting set for Thursday, April 8th, 2pm in Council Chambers, Liverpool.

8.0 To Do:

Find out about getting Crosswalks painted. Provincial Transportation & Infrastructure?

Answers about Recreation for All and masks at QPEC.