

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, May 5, 2022 @ 2:30 PM

Zoom online

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Ralph Gidney, Chair,
Councillor Vicki Amirault,
Wayne Huskins,
Janine Stewart,
Tyler Roy,
Mackenzie Colp,
Kelly Oxner,
Elise Johnston, Accessibility Coordinator, RQM
Amanda Gallant ASL interpreter

Regrets: Mike MacLeod, Director Planning, RQM

The meeting had been set without an official Agenda, with 2 discussion points:

1) The new role of **Accessibility and Inclusion Coordinator**, and 2) the location of the ramped entry to the Astor Theatre.

- 1) Due to operational shifts in staffing at Region of Queens Municipality, the position of Accessibility Coordinator was broadened to include much of the 'diversity and inclusion' focus that the Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator had been working on. A new job description was approved by Council, offered to and accepted by Elise Johnston on 20 April, 2022. Some of the diversity and inclusion aspects for more in-house issues like policies, training and employment were pulled into the new position of Municipal Clerk and Diversity Coordinator.

Elise explained that she would be guided by the Diversity and Inclusion Action Team for input and prioritizing directions. While she hopes that the accessibility work will not be thinned, she sees value in expanding the

concept of improved access to ALL, regardless of identity. Public awareness is growing but real appreciation of how deep systemic barriers run is a challenge, especially in small and rural communities that are typically not very diverse.

Ralph felt that this was a good move and trusted that the Coordinator could learn quickly as she had to date. Kelly also supported this and was happy to have a co-worker from QASL (Penny Lane) as a member of the DIAT.

- 2) All members described their experiences of the theatre building and all look forward to increased accessibility in various ways. Having discussed details for the Astor Theatre in the development of the Municipal Accessibility Plan and provincial grant applications, minimal background discussion was required. This meeting follows a site visit by the Accessibility Coordinator with the Directors of Planning and Engineering as well as the CAO, after which the AAC was asked to give their input and feedback with first person voice to the current options being considered.

Elise gave a recap of the first option that was costed and proposed: running a long, low sloped ramp from the back parking lot alongside the entire building to a new entry in the side gallery, which would become a lobby extension. A lift in the condemned old fire escape would allow visitors access to the upstairs community rooms from this same entry point. Circulation would flow from this side of the building, through the central lobby, past the box office and around to the seats.

Considering the impact of maintenance to an exterior path as well as the possibility of feeling like a 'back' entry, another option was suggested by the Director of Engineering. This is to bring visitors around to Gorham Street and enter at the existing side exit doors. The ramp would be constructed indoors, with the removal of floor space, the little concession counter and internal wall. There would be no issue of additional snow clearing or slippery surfaces. A budget issue is that unionized labour is quite expensive during off-hours, such as weekends when there is a show after snowfall.

Kelly Oxner maintains that the "old budget restricted model needed a new lens which accepts the cost of accessibility." She'd always hoped that the municipality could be a "Champion of Change".

Janine Stewart emphasized that RQM is to take responsibility for maintenance of accessible buildings as it holds liability if any accidents. Elise agreed, saying this is why an interior option was proposed.

When given a ballpark figure of \$20,000 annual budget for snow clearing, Wayne said he would come do it for that price!

The concept that operational costs might deter an easier and more comfortable solution from the user's perspective was frustrating for the committee members. It was felt that a new mindset was required to accept a slight cost of improving access for all.

Janine asked if it could be made with concrete. Wayne asked if it could be enclosed. Elise mentioned that some constraints existed due to the heritage status of the building and also the proximity to property boundaries.

Elise asked if the Astor Society could arrange for a more cost effective arrangement for snow removal, with Penny Lane for example, similar to the current interior cleaning solution. Kelly said that the administration of it feels heavy to QASL at this point but there was certainly a way of partnering to benefit both parties. Janine, as accountant for the Astor Society, was wary to take on more of an unknown arrangement when this first one was yet to be ironed out. Wayne asked if any details on cost breakdown could be shared as it seemed unreasonably high.

A formal recommendation from the committee for the RBC side entry will be made with the following points:

1. Keep visitors away from traffic on Gorham Street. This improves safety of all visitors.
2. Allow for visual connection from the parking lot to an entry door. This is important 'wayfinding' for anyone with memory, cognitive and visual challenges.
3. Maintain a simple run with lots of room for multiple landings, as opposed to multiple switchbacks and a single landing. This *efficiency* of energy reduces stress and fatigue, such that enjoyment increases and participation is encouraged.
4. Prevent congestion and conflict of internal movement especially at the door to the theatre seating. The anticipated aggravation of opposing

circulation is expected to cause stress for all users. The point is to improve one's experience not just "tick the box for 'ramp' ".

5. Avoid loss of usable floor space inside for worthwhile other possibilities.
6. Minimize disruptions to current programming due to construction.

Members emphasized again that the Region must support the needs of *all* residents, not by offering a cheaper solution, which is often a lesser service, but by accepting, even advocating for and *defending* the increased demand on resources.

The next meeting set for June 2nd, 2:30, location to be determined.

Adjournment at 3:30 pm