



City of Kingston
Information Report to Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee
Report Number MAAC-21-005

To: Chair and Members of the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee

From: Peter Huigenbos, Commissioner, Business, Environment & Projects

Resource Staff: Colin Wiginton, Director, Arts & Culture Services
Jennifer Campbell, Director, Heritage Services

Date of Meeting: June 3, 2021

Subject: Annual Accessibility Update, Cultural Services Department

Council Strategic Plan Alignment:

Theme: Corporate business

Goal: See above

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide the members of the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC) with an annual update regarding the work of the former Cultural Services Department as it relates to accessibility in various forms. In May 2021, the City announced a restructuring of selected departments that included separating Cultural Services into two new Departments: Arts & Culture Services and Heritage Services. This change does not impact the work described in this report.

As in previous years, accessibility is key to the mission and vision of Cultural Services, which is to organize and leverage the resources, knowledge and experience of the City of Kingston, along with the community, businesses and public institutions, to build cultural vitality within the cultural sector and throughout the community. It is also something that is considered in relation to the delivery of the department's core services that include asset management, programing, sector development and cultural development.

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This report includes updates related to work completed in 2020 as well as information related to work currently being pursued in 2021. It has been an unusual year due to the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted Cultural Services more than many other City departments because of staffing changes, facility closures, program cancellations and service disruptions. As a result, work to implement the 2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan has been affected but staff have worked hard to revise and/or reimagine how to deliver the necessary core services as well as to fulfill Council's Strategic Priorities while keeping accessibility in mind.

Recommendation:

This report is for information only.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Peter Huigenbos, Commissioner,
Business, Environment &
Projects**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Lanie Hurdle, Chief
Administrative Officer**

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Community Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brad Joyce, Commissioner, Corporate Services	Not required
Jim Keech, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	Not required
Sheila Kidd, Commissioner, Transportation & Public Works	Not required

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Options/Discussion:

2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

Since 2018, staff within the Cultural Services Department have been working to address the commitments outlined as part of the 2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan as approved through [Report Number MAAC-18-001](#) that relate to the City's cultural offerings. This includes work across several areas such as Customer Service, Clear and Accessible Communications, and Enhancing Accessibility of Our Public Spaces. Work on the plan continues to progress in meaningful ways; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the ability to provide in-person experiences and programming through the City's cultural venues. For example, the Grand Theatre has remained mostly closed since the start of the pandemic. The MacLachlan Woodworking Museum has also remained closed while the PumpHouse has been open to a limited degree as circumstances have allowed. Many programs have had to be cancelled but staff have developed other ways to deliver experiences and programs online or in-person in modified ways, where possible.

Customer Service

The Cultural Services Department is pursuing the following actions to improve the customer service experience both directly and indirectly through partnership agreements with external organizations, where applicable.

1. Policies and practices, Service Level Agreements:

- Ensure all organizations who enter into Service Level Agreements with the City of Kingston comply with the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.

All partnership agreements continue to be vetted by the Legal Services Department to ensure the organizations the City of Kingston funds meet AODA requirements. The primary partnership agreements that are in place include the [Kingston Arts Council](#); [Kingston Association of Museums, Art Galleries and Historic Sites](#); and the [Kingston Theatre Alliance](#) that includes the annual presentation of the [Kick & Push Festival](#).

2. Policies and practices, Cultural Programming and Pricing:

- Review best practices within the sector and identify community needs related to accessible programming and pricing for the performing arts and cultural programming, and make recommendations specific to the Grand Theatre, Grand OnStage, Kingston City Hall, PumpHouse and the MacLachlan Woodworking Museum.

Removing financial barriers to the performing arts and cultural programming continues to be a priority for the Cultural Services Department. Since 2017, the Kingston Grand Theatre and the City-owned museums have participated in the [Municipal Fee Assistance Program](#) (MFAP). The Grand Theatre and City-owned museums also participate in other

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discount programs including the Impact program, the Newcomer's Access Pass through Kingston Immigration Partners, youth and military discounts as well as discounts with a Kingston Transit Pass. Additionally, the museums participate in the Courtesy Pass program offered through the Kingston Frontenac Public Library. All of these programs have been severely impacted since the start of the pandemic, but efforts will be made to build awareness and use as facilities begin to re-open and programming starts up again.

Inclusive programming at the Grand Theatre and through the City-owned museums continues to evolve to be responsive to the needs of residents and in response to provincial and public health guidelines over the past year. A lot of recent programming has had to be delivered online with some smaller, in-person experiences delivered on site as circumstances allowed. What follows are examples of newly developed programming offered over the past year, primarily related to the Grand Theatre and the City-owned museums.

Arts Programming

Grand OnStage Virtual Presentations: Nearly 3,000 homes enjoyed 11 virtual presentations through the Grand OnStage program that ran from October 2020 through to April 2021. These presentations could be accessed across multiple devices (desktop computer, tablet, mobile phone) and were nearly all offered free of charge with a select few offered at a subsidized rate. The presentations were digitally archived and included closed captioning, where possible.

Mayor's Arts Awards: The annual Mayor's Arts Awards was held virtually in January 2021 and was delivered on the City of Kingston's [YouTube](#) channel with closed captioning. It also included American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation throughout the presentation.

Poet Laureate Mentorship Program: In partnership with the Kingston Frontenac Public Library, the Poet Laureate Mentorship Program has been offered free of charge for local area poets and is a program that fosters sector development, which is a core service of the Cultural Services Department.

Grand Theatre Local Arts Residency: This [residency program](#) launched in the spring of 2021 and will be delivered during the summer and fall of 2021 as circumstances allow. It is also intended to support sector development and provides local professional artists with the opportunity to access the Grand Theatre, its staff and resources to research, rehearse and/or develop new work. Participants will be paid an honorarium and are being asked to give one brief, digital public presentation, performance, workshop or similar event that showcases the work-in-progress developed during their residency.

Heritage Programming

Online Educational Materials: In the spring of 2020, staff responded to the closure of the City-owned museums by developing online museum education programs. These

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offerings included downloadable activity pages that have been developed based on programs that would normally be offered on site at the museums. These activity pages focus on concepts central to STEAM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) and target various age and grade cohorts. They are also being promoted as part of a larger initiative [#YGKMuseumFromHome](#) through the PumpHouse website. Many of the programs are offered in French as well as English.

Civic Collection Website: A new [website](#) that showcases artifacts from the City of Kingston Civic Collection launched in May 2020. This platform was already in development when the pandemic began and provides permanent, online access to the civic collection for the purposes of research, learning and enjoyment. With the museums closed, staff have been able to focus on building out the content online and the website content will continue to be updated over time to include artifact information as well as online exhibitions.

Museum Tours and Walking Tours: The PumpHouse was able to reopen for prebooked, small-group site tours on July 2, 2020. These 45-minute tours were guided by museum staff and offered a personalized experience of the 2020 exhibition, *Collecting Histories*. The site also offered 45-minute guided explorations of Ontario Street based off the 2019 exhibition, *Ontario Street: Brewers, Bakers & Boilermakers*. This walking tour delved into the history of Ontario Street, a space that helped define and form Kingston as a City. The Museum has opened and closed a few times over the past year but similar experiences are planned for 2021 and will be delivered as circumstances allow.

Museum Educational Programs: Following a considerable delay due to COVID-19, onsite programming at the PumpHouse resumed in November 2020 and families were able to book one of two small-group programs at the Museum. In addition to these small group, staff partnered with area educators to offer virtual education programming for remote learners through “learning pods”. These educational programs will continue in 2021 and virtual field trips are also being piloted.

City Hall Tours: Starting in August 2020, and continuing into the fall, City Hall tours were again offered. These small group tours ran from 1-4 pm on Saturdays and followed appropriate provincial and public health guidelines. Saturdays were selected as the building is otherwise closed, allowing the tours to be delivered without impacting regular operations. These tours were also offered to complement the programming offered in tandem with the Love Kingston Marketplace, which was a new initiative designed to promote local businesses impacted by the pandemic.

Market Wing Cultural Space: The re-developed first floor of the Market Wing, located within Kingston City Hall, opened to the public on a limited basis in February 2021. This newly accessible space has been designed to house exhibitions and programs that combine history and the arts to highlight Kingston, and to explore a diversity of histories,

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stories and ideas relevant to residents and visitors alike. The Market Wing Cultural Space will also include dedicated space to showcase Indigenous history and culture with the content being developed by an Indigenous curator and involve ongoing consultations with the community.

Clear and Accessible Communications

The Cultural Services Department is pursuing the following actions to ensure it is delivering clear and accessible communications:

1. Printed materials, Museums and Heritage-Related Programming:
 - Review best practices within the sector and identify community needs related to museums and heritage-related programming; and make recommendations specific to Kingston City Hall, PumpHouse and the MacLachlan Woodworking Museum.

All produced and printed exhibition materials follow accessible guidelines for font size, style and contrast are built into our design briefs and vetted by staff. In 2019, the curatorial team worked with CNIB Kingston while planning the Collecting Histories exhibition. Staff were able to loan a braille bingo plate and include it in the exhibition as a tactile object for all to touch and feel. It was staff's intention to work with a local CNIB member braille translation group to provide PumpHouse visitors with a braille version of core and exhibition text. Unfortunately, those plans were put on hold due to COVID-19. Once it is safe to do so, it is hoped staff can reconnect with the local CNIB group to develop braille text onsite for future exhibitions.

2. Public Art Signage

- Review best practices within public art and continue to consult with the MAAC Public Art Project Team to review options for onsite public art signage.

Prior to the pandemic, staff held a series of meetings with the MAAC Public Art Project Team to review public art projects through an accessibility lens. One of the items discussed was around onsite signage and opportunities for increased accessibility. All signage is currently produced following accessible guidelines for font size, style and contrast, and the placement of public art signage will be in a comfortable viewing zone for both standing and seated people.

Additional work will be undertaken to develop plans for accessible signage and/or interpretive materials to support the public art program that could include providing information in an alternative format. For example, staff are developing an Arts Walk in 2021 that is one of Council's Strategic Priorities. It is anticipated this will be a multi-phase project but will begin by developing an online map accessible using mobile phones that will highlight selected works using a searchable database combined with images and written descriptions that will lead users around the City to discover both existing and new public art installations. This is intended as a pilot project that can be developed over time and consideration will be given to how it can be made accessible.

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Enhancing Accessibility of Our Public Spaces

The Cultural Services Department is pursuing the following actions as it relates to enhancing the accessibility of the venues it manages:

1. Infrastructure Planning and Projects, Kingston City Hall:

- Leverage technology to provide visitors to Kingston City Hall with alternative access to spaces within the building that may be difficult to access using virtual reality tools.

Providing digital access to physical spaces has always been a priority for Cultural Services but has proven even more critical in this moment. A digital tour of Kingston City Hall with a Virtual Reality (VR) enhancement remains available through the Heritage Resource Centre located on site and has recently been made available through the [City of Kingston website](#). The [Accessibility](#) page on the PumpHouse website has been expanded to provide information on different social supports available prior to and during site visits. This page also includes information about what to expect during a site visit and includes resources such as a sensory friendly map and PumpHouse Social Story. The websites for both the PumpHouse and MacLachlan Woodworking Museum also feature virtual tours that support pre-planning for site visits as well as alternative forms of access.

2. Infrastructure Planning and Projects, Public Art:

- Ensure all public art projects comply with the Ontario Building Code's requirements for accessibility in the built environment and align with Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS), where possible.

The public art portfolio continues to gain momentum as several permanent projects near completion in 2021. Staff will continue to work with the MAAC Public Art Project Team, formed in 2019, to support the portfolio. The Project Team has provided valuable feedback to staff in terms of increasing opportunities for accessibility for both the built environment as well as the development and communication processes. Calls for Submission issued by the City also now require that artists must demonstrate their proposals comply with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service under the AODA.

Removal of Barriers to Municipally Sponsored Arts and Culture Life in Kingston

Over the last several years, staff have been providing regular updates related to the 2015 report 'Removal of Barriers to Municipally Sponsored Arts and Culture Life in Kingston' ([Report Number ARCP-15-003](#)). All but two of the recommendations identified have been completed. The work required to complete the final two recommendations was scheduled to begin in the second half of 2019 and continue into 2020. Work has progressed but it has also been impacted by the emergence of other priorities, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, but the following updates can be provided:

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1. **Ensure the City of Kingston Arts Fund reflects best practices in relation to other arts funding programs in the areas of diversity and inclusion** - The need to review the City of Kingston Arts Fund was first identified back in 2017 and, since then, it was also decided the City of Kingston Heritage Fund should be reviewed at the same time. The review of these two funding programs has been delayed several times due to shifting priorities and has been further delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has also impacted the arts, entertainment and recreation sectors more than any other, which means a review of the City's cultural funding programs must also now take into account the need to support sector recovery as well as other issues previously identified, such as increased access. It is anticipated an RFP will be issued in 2021 to hire a consultant to help lead the review process and that public consultation will also be critical to the success of the process to ensure the City's cultural funding programs are relevant, reflect municipal best practices and foster equity, diversity and inclusion.
2. **An accommodations and communications plan will be developed to create and adapt performance, rehearsal & dressing spaces in the Regina Rosen Auditorium and to a lesser extent, the Baby Grand** - As previously reported, staff issued a request for proposals (RFP) in December 2019 to procure consultants to assess the performance spaces within the Grand Theatre in terms of accessibility, with a particular emphasis on the Regina Rosen Auditorium. The intent of this assessment is to seek ways to improve access to the performance spaces within the facility for performers, staff and other users who rely on wheelchairs or other mobility devices. The firm +VG Architects were contracted and, along with DesignABLE Environments, have been leading this assessment work over the past year. The consulting team met with staff, users and members of MAAC in August 2020 and have also completed their own extensive facility assessment process. Conceptual plans have been developed and a range of potential temporary and permanent solutions to improve access will be reviewed by staff, working in consultation with MAAC, to assess their viability and for possible inclusion as part of future capital work plans and budgets.

Update, Corporate Restructuring

In May 2021, the Corporation announced a restructuring of selected departments that included separating Cultural Services into two new departments: (1) Arts & Culture Services and (2) Heritage Services. This change was effective May 10, 2021, but it is not anticipated this change will impact the work covered in this Information Report. The items identified as part of the 2018-2022 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will continue to be pursued as planned, though may expand to include issues relevant to heritage planning processes that now fall under the purview of Heritage Services rather than Planning Services. The members of MAAC will be kept updated as this work evolves and will be notified if the work included in this Information Report will continue to be reported on jointly or if it may be separated out into two different Information Reports in future years.

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Existing Policy/By-Law:

None

Notice Provisions:

None

Accessibility Considerations:

None

Financial Considerations:

None

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Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

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Dianne Zemba, Manager, Grand Theatre, Arts & Culture Services

Exhibits Attached:

None