

2023 Accessibility Plan Status Update

Introduction

This report provides an annual update on the progress made and work completed by City staff in 2023 to meet the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR), Ontario Regulation 191/11.

Under the IASR, the City of Kingston is required to develop a multi-year accessibility plan, which outlines, over a maximum five-year period, the actions and steps the municipality will take to remove barriers to accessibility. This report acts as a companion to the City's 2023 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

The 2023 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is based on best practice research, and input from City employees, the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC), and Kingston residents, including persons with disabilities. The 2023 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, and this report, are organized around the five standards contained within the IASR and the general requirements of the AODA.

The five standards of the IASR are:

1. Customer service;
2. Information and communications;
3. Employment;
4. Transportation; and
5. Design of public spaces.

The general requirements of the AODA include:

- Procurement; and
- Training.

Introduction

2023 was the first full year of the 2022 – 2026 term of Kingston City Council. Throughout the first half of 2023 Council worked with City staff to create the [Kingston Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026](#). The Strategic Plan sets Council's overall vision for the term, which City staff work towards implementing. The Strategic Plan also provides Kingston residents with an understanding of the priorities established by Council.

Considerations of accessibility can be found throughout the Strategic Plan. One of the five foundational principles identified to help staff deliver on its strategic priorities is “Advance Indigenization, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IIDEA) in the corporation.”

Within the five pillars of the Strategic Plan, the following actions can be found related to accessibility:

3. Build an Active and Connected Community

- In Section 3.1.2, evaluate opportunities for innovative adaption and reuse of aging buildings, there is an action to develop a City-wide plan that identifies existing inventory, and strategy to increase accessibility, in playgrounds as part of park renovations and new park development;
- In Section 3.3.2, prioritize pedestrian connections and dedicated cycling lanes, there is an action to design and construct 31 pedestrian crossings by the end of 2026; and
- In Section 3.4.2, identify strategies to improve road safety and continue to implement Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, there are actions to review all neighbourhood speed limits by end of 2026 and develop an education program for pedestrian crossings and pedestrian safety at intersections by the end of 2024.

4. Foster a Caring and Inclusive Community

- In Section 4.4.1, lead the implementation of the Community Safety and Well-being Plan, there are actions to create a new City service area focused on the implementation of the Community Safety & Wellbeing Plan and to update the Age Friendly Plan;
- In Section 4.1.3, advocate for increased provincial funding to address mental health and addictions issues;
- In Section 4.3.1, explore innovative approaches and partnership opportunities to attract healthcare professionals to the city; and
- Section 4.5.2 contains several actions to advance Indigenization, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IIDEA) in the community.

Staff will work towards accomplishing the above priorities throughout the remaining term of Council. Progress updates will be included, where appropriate, in future Accessibility Plan status updates.

Achievements and Successes

Customer Service

- Held the 13th annual [Celebrating Accessibility Awards](#), recognizing two community members (Amber Potter and Eva Carlin) and two community organizations (Bloom Skills Centre and Extend-A-Family Kingston), for their contributions beyond legislated requirements to improving accessibility for persons with disabilities in Kingston.
- Completed the Kingston Music Strategy that included IIDEA as a foundational principle to the Strategy and applied to all recommendations, such as spaces and types of venues, promoting diverse genres, policies, and audience access.
- Initiated a large-scale review of the City of Kingston Arts Fund that includes in its scope providing greater access to arts funding, and to prioritize artists, arts workers and residents who are part of equity deserving groups, including the deaf and disability arts sector, in the public engagement process.
- Continued to offer discounted tickets for Grand OnStage shows through the Municipal Fee Assistance Program and the Pay What You Want program. Program evaluation included goals and key performance indicators on improving access to discount ticket offerings.
- Facilitated accessibility accommodations for students/young people during Grand OnStage shows such as creating quiet/relaxed spaces in the theatre, selected shows for the season that focus on disability, accessibility, and inclusion themes, and supported community partners who work in developmental services to provide access to Grand OnStage shows.
- Continued community partnerships for summer arts programming being made available to long-term and extended care facilities, including a fully accessible performance by Erin Ball and Kingston Circus Arts.
- Partnered with Bloom Skills Centre by providing space within the Centre 70 Community Centre for a community café where individuals with intellectual disabilities learn employment skills to expand their job opportunities in the community.
- Continued to incorporate and expand upon accessibility considerations into City-held special events. Highlights include:
 - accessible access points and the inclusion of a sensory friendly zone at the Inter-Cultural Arts Festival;

- American Sign Language interpretation for opening ceremonies and presentation of the Civic Awards;
- a sensory friendly skate with reduced sound and lighting during K-Town Countdown on New Year's Eve;
- accessibility seating area at Rockin' the Square; and
- accessible parking and drop-off areas along with accessible portable washrooms at the Sheep Dog Trials.
- Acquired new assistive listening device technology for use in Council Chamber, as well as a portable system for use at City events.
- Launched an online pass renewal portal for Kingston Transit. The portal allows riders to renew monthly or weekly passes or add funds to multi-ride cards without being required to visit a physical storefront location. Renewals will also be processed instantly as compared to the previous 24 to 48 hours renewal process.

Information / Communication

- Completed a review of the Accessible Consultation Process Policy, with the updated policy approved by Council in February 2024. The purpose of the Policy is to ensure that the City complies with the requirements under the AODA and IASR for consultation with MAAC, persons with disabilities, and the public. The Policy also recognizes that achieving the highest level of inclusion with respect to consultation on City decision making is to the benefit of all community members.
- Conducted a public education campaign during Accessibility Awareness Week focused on service animal etiquette. The primary focus of the campaign was sharing etiquette tips for the public when interacting with service animals and their handlers. A [video](#) was produced and promoted through social media, along with messaging in City facilities. An additional focus of the campaign was sharing information on the rights and responsibilities of businesses with respect to serving customers with service animals. An information post card was sent via Canada Post to all Kingston businesses.
- Continued work on the redesign of the City website to be highly accessible from design and content perspectives. This includes reduced reliance on complex PDF content and a shift to simpler web-based content, including a shift from PDF forms to web-based forms.
- Incorporated accessibility as an integral component of the development of the MyKingston portal. This process includes accessibility as an acceptance criterion before any feature is moved into production.

- Began a pilot project called Welcoming Streets. In collaboration with Downtown Kingston BIA and Addiction and Mental Health Services Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington, the aim of the program is to communicate directly and support vulnerable individuals who may be experiencing homelessness, addiction, or mental health difficulties, treating them with respect and supporting them in accessing the services they may need.
- Received the final report from Age-Friendly City Working Group work, the recommendations from which will be reviewed by the newly established Community Development and Wellbeing Department in 2024.

Employment

- Participated in Disabilities Mentoring Day. City staff members volunteered to act as mentors to persons with disabilities who were seeking access to workplace contacts, environments, skills, and human resource processes. Through participating in the day, the City corporately, and staff individually, learned about accessible employment in a real world setting and are exposed to an often-untapped pool of employee talent. The City also provided sponsorship funding for Disabilities Mentoring Day.

Transportation

- Received feedback from MAAC regarding accessible parking requirements focused on time limits, fees, and availability. Feedback received will be incorporated into a review of City parking fees and fines to be conducted in 2024.
- Completed installation of two new accessible transit bus stations. The new model of station includes increased turning radius within the shelter, vision strips on glass walls and edges, tactile warning surfaces at entrances, bariatric seating, and enhanced lighting.
- Continued public consultation on the Williamsville Transportation Study. Goals for the project, which is defined as east of Princess Street at Bath Road and Concession Street to Division Street, include reconfiguring the right-of-way to improve pedestrian experience with wider sidewalks and amenities and prioritizing transit travel times throughout the corridor.
- Held an Open House to begin identifying alternate locations and designs for a pedestrian and cycling crossing over John Counter Boulevard and the CN Rail tracks to create a north-south connection for the K&P Trail between Division Street and Elliot Avenue.

- As part of construction work at intersection of Queen Mary Road and Bath Road, upgraded intersection to all ages and ability intersection, enhancing safety for both pedestrians and cyclists.
- Sought feedback from community on improvements to Montreal Street and John Counter Boulevard intersection. Project scope includes new lighting, traffic signals, signage, the addition of a multi-use pathway, and transit stop features.
- Hired 17 winter control staff, tasked with providing winter maintenance for sidewalks and bus stops.
- Developed a winter maintenance bus stop map containing information to ensure bus stops are cleared appropriately and to allow adequate room for riders to enter and exit buses.

Design of Public Spaces

- Completed repairs to accessible entrance to City Hall.
- Completed renovation of Richardson Beach Bathhouse. Renovations included installation of power door operators, universal washroom with adult change table, widened corridors, accessible change rooms and washrooms and contrasting finishes on floor, walls, and doors.
- Installed graspable handrails on main staircase in City Hall.
- Worked in partnership with The Inclusive Play Project, a community-led fundraising initiative working towards the creation of Kingston's first highly inclusive playground. Staff received Council approval to continue working with community partners and have offered City park space for the future location of the park.
- Met with the Public Art project team and reviewed plans for upcoming public art projects including Rideau Heights Community Centre and Kingston East Community Centre.
- Completed construction on Gerard Hunt Memorial Park. Features include accessible pathways, playground equipment, splash pad, and shade shelter.
- Began work on first phase of Bayridge Drive active transportation improvements. The project connects Cataraqui Woods Drive to Woodbine Road with a protected, off-road route for pedestrians and cyclists and includes upgraded signalized intersections along route.
- Constructed sidewalks on McMahon Avenue, Lancaster Drive, Wise Street, and Westbrook Road to fill gaps in current sidewalk network as part of Active Transportation Master Plan.

- Received feedback on construction of new parks in Creekside Valley and Westbrook neighbourhoods, and renovation of Rodden Park, Compton Park, and Garrigan Park. Projects involve upgrades to equipment at existing parks, along with new bench seating and accessible pathways and safety surfacing.
- Began construction on 32 accessible and affordable housing units spread across six different housing projects.
- Completed a full sidewalk inspection with over 400 trip hazards being removed and 1,100 meters of sidewalk in poor condition being replaced.
- Increased the capital budget by \$1,000,000 for 2024 to continue work to replace or repair damaged sidewalks as part of a multi-year project to improve sidewalk conditions.
- Upgrade the intersection crossing at Sydenham Road and Unity Road to improve accessibility for students attending Elginburg Public School.

Training

- Several departments held independent training sessions for staff focused on de-escalation and destigmatization.
- New staff hires, including members of City Council, received training on the AODA, IASR, the Ontario Human Rights Code and accessible customer service.
- Continued to offer training on accessible document creation and remediation to City staff members.

Conclusion

2023 represents the first year of the 2023 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for the City of Kingston. Coupled with the Kingston Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026, the City of Kingston will continue its progress towards increasing accessibility and inclusivity in all City facilities, services, and programs. Staff are also committed to not creating any additional or new barriers to accessibility.

Staff wish to recognize the contributions of members of MAAC through their service on the Committee and in providing their feedback and advice directly to City staff on projects.

Information regarding accessibility at the City of Kingston, including the 2023 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and Annual Status Reports, can be found on the [City website](#). This information is available in hard copy and alternate formats upon request.