

For Information

REPORT TITLE: **Accessibility Planning Program Update – May 20, 2021**

FROM: Gary Kent, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Corporate Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update of the activities undertaken by the Region of Peel Accessibility Planning Program and the Accessibility Advisory Committee subsequent to the November 19, 2020 Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Accessibility Advisory Committee and Accessibility Planning Program have been involved in various activities during this period, which are categorized as follows:
 - Consultation and compliance support provided to Regional Programs;
 - Participation in community events.
 - This report also highlights upcoming events and observances.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

The main objective of the Region of Peel's Accessibility Planning Program (the Program) is to ensure that Regional programs, services and facilities continue to be inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities. In order to accomplish this objective, the Program works collaboratively with all Regional departments and the Region of Peel Accessibility Advisory Committee (the Committee).

2. Activity List

a) Consultation and Compliance Support

i) Website Compliance

- The Region of Peel continues its efforts in making our website peelregion.ca compliant in accordance with *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) requirements.
- The deadline to achieve this goal was January 1, 2021.
- As presented in a report to the Committee on November 19, 2020, work related to meeting this timeline was paused to focus on the immediate response brought on by the global pandemic and a request to the Province was made for an extension to the deadline.

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- No response has been received from the Province and the Region continues to work on meeting compliance.
- The following actions have been undertaken:
 - Training of various staff on creating accessible documents.
 - Meeting with various departments to provide alternatives for posting of information and develop inventory worksheets to prioritize online documents.
 - Consultation with information management team to discuss accessible web forms.
 - Ongoing task of removing outdated Council documents from the Region of Peel website (approximately 4500 pdfs)
 - The development of a web accessibility policy (attached as Appendix I) that will ensure all web content and media assets are accessible and compliant moving forward.

ii) Recruitment - Town of Caledon AAC Representative

- Recruitment was held to seek a Town of Caledon non-elected member representative for the Committee.
- Advertisement seeking interest of qualified volunteers was placed in local Town of Caledon newspapers, including the Caledon Citizen and Caledon Enterprise; the Region of Peel website, and social media outlets including Facebook and Twitter for a two-week period.
- A total of four applications were received and applicants that met the eligibility criteria were interviewed by the Interview Panel.
- A report was presented to Regional Council at its meeting on April 22, 2021 for their review and approval of a successful candidate.
- Regional Council appointed Maureen Tymkow as the non-elected member representing the Town of Caledon.

iii) Annual Accessibility Status Report 2020

- As required under the AODA, a status report must be prepared annually outlining the progress made and actions taken to remove barriers and implement the strategies set out in the Region of Peel Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.
- The “2020 Peel Region Accessibility Status Report – Ensuring Accessibility during a Pandemic” details the initiatives carried out in 2020, most of which were focused on the pandemic response.
- A full report titled “Annual Accessibility Status Report 2020” is listed on the May 20, 2021 AAC agenda.

iv) Disabled Road Signs

- The Region of Peel was approached by the Town of Caledon regarding their “Disable Road Sign Program” and the use of such signs on regional roads.
- The use of such signage on local roads is intended to alert drivers they are approaching an area where a person(s) with a disability resides.
- While the Region of Peel supports road safety, it has expressed concerns with the use of such signs including:
 - Such signs are not part of the Provincial standardized signage.

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- Lack of uniformity of signs across all communities to ensure consistency, driver understanding and avoid driver confusion.
 - Privacy concerns on the identification and labelling of an individual within the community.
 - Enforcement – are such signs enforceable?
 - Do such signs achieve the desires of road safety for all members of the community?
 - Monitoring of sign removal should the individual with the disability move to another area or municipality.
- The Region of Peel will continue to work with our local municipal partners to ensure that people with disabilities are able to move around and feel safe in our communities.

v) Courageous Conversations

- In the fall of 2020, the Region of Peel launched its Courageous Conversation series.
- The series provided a forum where Region of Peel employees could come together with a shared goal of increasing knowledge and understanding about experiences, obstacles and opportunities that relate to different dimensions of diversity.
- A session dedicated to Accessibility & Disability was held and employees shared lived experience, including barriers and obstacles that lead to inequities and disadvantages, as well as recommendations to promote an inclusive work environment for everyone.
- Feedback from the series was gathered and recommendations will be presented to the Executive Leadership Team for approval.

vi) Workforce Census

- The Region of Peel carried out its first Workforce Census in the fall of 2020.
- The survey focused on the collection of demographic data and employee sentiments (feelings) to help better understand our workforce and employee experiences with diversity, inclusion, racism and discrimination.
- The collection of this data is an initial first step in understanding the make-up of the organization and workforce representation in relation to the community we serve.
- The data collected will assist in developing evidence-based planning to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion is embedded in everything we do.

b) Participation in Community Events and Observances

i) 2020 International Day of Persons with Disabilities

- The Region of Peel observed International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, 2020.
- The observance built on the crisis of the pandemic and the UN's theme of "Building Better in a Post-COVID-19 World".
- The campaign aimed to highlight to additional struggles persons with disabilities continued to face and how the Region was supporting these needs.
- A story was posted on the Region of Peel website and social media outlets.

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ii) World Autism Awareness Day

- On April 2, 2020, the Region of Peel commemorated World Autism Awareness Day.
- In collaboration with Peel Regional Paramedic Services (PRPS), a campaign was launched to build awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorder, increase knowledge and understanding and invoke sensitivity for those living with autism.
- The campaign included a video of a PRPS employee sharing her lived experience as a person living with autism. The day was also observed corporately and through various social media outlets, including a Twitter message from the Chief and Director of Peel Paramedic Services.

c) Upcoming Events and Observances

i) 2021 National AccessAbility Week

- This year National AccessAbility Week takes place from May 30th to June 3rd.
- In observance of the week the Region will be hosting an event on Wednesday, June 2nd from 9:00 am to 11:00 am.
- The theme for the event is “Today’s Accessibility Experience” and is intended to create awareness and understanding of the new reality that the pandemic has presented and its impacts, both good and bad, on accessibility and persons with disabilities and what we can do as community agencies to continue to break down barriers and promote inclusivity.
- Attendees will include Regional staff and community partners.
- More information, including registration, will be shared as planning gets underway.

ii) Microsoft Ability Summit

- Microsoft is hosting its Ability Summit 2021 from May 5th to 6th.
- This two-day, free digital event bring together people with disabilities, allies, and accessibility professional to *Imagine, Build, Include and Empower* the future of disability inclusion and accessibility.
- More information and registration can be found at: aka.ms/AbilitySummit.

CONCLUSION

This report summarizes the activities and consultations that the Accessibility Planning Program (the Program) has been involved in, together with participation of members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (the Committee) since November 19, 2020. The Committee and the Program continue to engage in activities that support the Region of Peel’s primary accessibility objective of ensuring Regional programs, services and facilities are inclusive and accessible for all persons with disabilities and respond to the evolving community needs, including during times of a pandemic.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – Digital Accessibility Policy

For further information regarding this report, please contact Juliet Jackson, Director, Culture & Inclusion, Ext. 6741, juliet.jackson@peelregion.ca.

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Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner, Division Director and Legal Services.