



Administrative Report

Office of the Deputy Clerk

To: Warden McNamara and Members of Essex County Council

From: Katherine Hebert
Deputy Clerk

Date: Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Subject: 2021 Annual Accessibility Report

Report #: 2021-1215-CCS-R012-KH

Purpose

To provide County Council with an update on the status of initiatives in the Essex County Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2018-2022 and an update of the activities of the Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee for 2021.

Background

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Essex County Council adopted a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for the years 2018-2022. This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan included a provision that annually, a report would be provided to County Council on the status of the accessibility initiatives identified in the Plan that were undertaken in the previous year. The Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee (ECAAC) works year-round to promote accessibility and inclusivity in Essex County and often helps to realize many of the initiatives outlined in the above-mentioned plan.

Additionally, the County of Essex is required to ensure compliance with the [standards and deadlines for municipalities](#) mandated by the Provincial Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

Discussion

Essex County Multi -Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) (2018- 2022)

The Essex County Multi-Year Accessibility Plan was completed in 2018 and is effective through 2022. The MYAP Status Update is outlined in Appendix 'A' to this report.

AODA Compliance Audit

On the first of December of 2020 the County received notice from the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility that it had been selected for a Desk Audit – Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). The audit information was submitted by the December 16th, 2020 deadline. The audit was focused on the seven regulatory requirements as follows:

1. Accessibility Advisory Committee
2. Accessibility Policies
3. Multi-Year Accessibility Plan
4. Procurement and Self-Serve Kiosks
5. Training
6. Accessible Feedback
7. Accessible Employment Policies

The results of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Desk Audit were received in May of 2021. The report concluded that the County of Essex was in-compliance with the requirements under the Act.

The Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee

Continuing on the theme from 2020, 2021 has been an unusual year for everyone, including the Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee. Virtual meetings have been continuing, including access to the meetings for the public, via livestream on the ECAAC Facebook page. There was a need to recruit for a new member, to fill a vacancy left by a member resignation during the pandemic.

In 2021, the ECAAC launched a new initiative, partially in response to pandemic, and the need for safe and socially distanced activities and in promotion of access to public spaces to all people. The ECAAC, in collaboration with the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA), the Geographic Information Systems division for the County, as well as the Communications department, developed a platform for the public to submit feedback regarding the trails in our region. Phase 1 included the ERCA trails.

Feedback received from the public continues to be reviewed by the ECAAC and recommendations are made based on the common themes and findings. Some examples of feedback received to date relate to trail condition, placement of gates and access points, as well as the need for rest areas along the trails. Next steps in the WE Check The Trails project will be to add more trails to the feedback forms, including some municipal and CWATS trails.

The ECAAC has also had the opportunity to work with the Infrastructure Services department for the County of Essex, as they develop plans for the upcoming Civic Centre renovations. As draft plans have been prepared, the Project Manager has attended ECAAC meetings to provide a detailed overview of the architectural layout and to receive the Committee's feedback regarding the accessibility of the planned spaces. As the project progresses, consultations continue with the County team.

In response to requests from local municipalities, the County of Essex hosted a joint meeting of the local accessibility advisory committee Chairs and Vice Chairs in 2021. That meeting was successful in providing a forum for information sharing and a means for members to express ideas and to foster potential regional collaboration for future accessibility initiatives. Some items discussed at the joint meeting related to inter-municipal collaboration and support for each-other's initiatives, the use of wayfinding technology (such as NaviLens) in municipal facilities and within the transportation networks, extending communication networks to include information related to accessible modes of transportation etc. Further meetings are anticipated to take place in the coming months.

The Committee continues to identify priorities, share information, provide education and better their communities through their attempts to remove attitudinal and physical barriers to accessibility. Communication has been key to maintaining connections during the pandemic. Support received from the County of Essex departments has been key to ECAAC project success and continuity. Since the ECAAC was an early adopter of a virtual platform for meetings, the continuity of their activities and communication has been possible, despite blips in technology and connectivity issues from time to time.

AODA Compliance for Municipalities for 2021

Beginning January 1, 2021, all public websites and web content posted after January 1, 2012 must meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA other than criteria 1.2.4 (live captions) and 1.2.5 (pre-recorded audio descriptions). The County of

Essex is in compliance with that criteria at this time. The County ensures compliance by monitoring the website using software tools which flag areas of non-compliance, and remediates those upon notice. The County has further taken steps to ensure accessible communication and customer service by making sure any content published to the County website meets accessibility standards.

An Accessibility Compliance Report was submitted to the Province in November of 2021. The next compliance matter to address will be an update to the County of Essex Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, which will be due by the end of 2022.

Training and Tools for Accessibility

The County of Essex has acquired software products and services that reduce the time and effort required to create and remediate documents in order for them to meet accessibility standards for documents. Peer to peer training has continued on this front and progress is evident as the adoption and skill sets advance. The County has also served as a resource for our local municipalities and local partners as they navigate their own accessibility requirements. It is through collaboration and effort, that the County of Essex is making effective and efficient strides to ensure accessible customer service, accessible communication, to support our partners where possible and to ensure implemented accessibility policies and practices are adequate.

Financial Implications

All financial expenditures related to accessibility in 2021 were included in the 2021 budget.

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive the 2021 Annual Accessibility Report in compliance with the Essex County Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2018-2022), as information.

Respectfully Submitted

Katherine Hebert

Katherine Hebert, Deputy Clerk

Concurred With,

Mike Galloway

Mike Galloway, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix Number	Title
Appendix A	2021 Status Update MYAP 2018-2022