



Administrative Report

To: Warden MacDonald and Members of Essex County Council

From: Katherine Hebert
County Clerk

Date: Wednesday, December 04, 2024

Subject: Accessibility Initiatives Annual Compliance Review

Report #: 2024-1204-LCS-R40-KH

Purpose

The purpose of this Administrative Report is to provide County Council with a summary of accomplishments and activities undertaken by the Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee (the "**ECAAC**") throughout 2024 and to provide information on how these activities align with the County's [Multi-Year Accessibility Plan \(2023-2027\)](#).

Background

In accordance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (the "**AODA**"), County Council adopted a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for the years 2023-2027 the "**Accessibility Plan**"). This Accessibility Plan included a provision that a report would be provided annually to County Council to update Council on the status of the accessibility initiatives identified in the Accessibility Plan that were undertaken over the course of the preceding year. The ECAAC works year-round to promote accessibility and inclusivity in Essex County and often assists the County in ensuring the initiatives outlined in the Accessibility Plan are carried out.

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

Discussion

The Essex County Accessibility Advisory Committee

The ECAAC is comprised of 7 members, the majority of which are people with a disability. Other members of the ECAAC include people working in the

disability community and a representative from County Council. The ECAAC meets monthly with some exceptions, and these meetings primarily take place in-person and are livestreamed whenever possible.

The ECAAC continues to identify priorities, share information, provide education, and aims to improve our community through their efforts to remove attitudinal and physical barriers to accessibility. Support to the ECAAC from various departments of the County has been key to ECAAC project success and continuity.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan - Review and Monitoring of the Progress

As part of compliance requirements, the County's Accessibility Plan is updated at least once every five years. During the period in-between, on an annual basis, the County reviews the progress of the initiatives undertaken in the Accessibility Plan. Progress reports are provided to both the ECAAC and County Council.

Ongoing feedback from the ECAAC on the progress of the initiatives is reported to County Council through monthly minutes of the ECAAC, and through ECAAC delegations to County Council twice annually.

Below is a summary of the progress made with respect to the Accessibility Plan:

Compliance - Review: Accessible Customer Service Policy, Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation Policy and Accommodation Policy

A review of the Accessible Customer Service Policy, the Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation Policy and the Accommodation Policy, resulted in the following changes:

- Changed language from gender specific pronouns, to gender neutral to be more inclusive;
- Expanded the definition of "disability" to include language from the *Accessible Canada Act*, the AODA, and the OHRA; and
- Added a definition of "barrier", which included language from the *Accessible Canada Act*, the AODA, and the OHRA.

Terms of Reference – Revision of Language

A review of the Terms of the Reference for the ECAAC resulted in the following changes:

- Changed language from gender specific pronouns, to gender neutral to be more inclusive;
- Expanded the definition of "disability" to include language from the *Accessible Canada Act*, the AODA, and the OHRA;

- Added a definition of "barrier", which includes language from the *Accessible Canada Act*, the AODA, and the OHRA; and
- Updated language in section 7 of the Terms of Reference to reflect County staff support for the ECAAC.

Contract Language

The County Solicitor and the County's Procurement Office were tasked with including expanded language in all contracts that require compliance with AODA for contractors who perform work for or on behalf of the County.

This seemingly small step, has impacted operations in the following ways:

1. Fewer instances of reported barriers during construction operations;
2. Fewer instances of reported barriers resulting from construction or renovations;
3. Greater instances of receiving accessibility compliant documents from consultants (meaning documents are provided that meet criteria of PDF/UA for Universal Accessibility and ease of use with screen reader technology);
4. Greater accountability for vendors as it relates to meeting AODA requirements for the County; and
5. Increased awareness of requirements for accessibility compliance when doing business with the County.

Accessibility Flag Raising

In 2022, as a joint venture with the local municipalities, to commemorate National AccessAbility Week a regional accessibility flag was commissioned.

The flag design is of a stylized figure in a wheelchair facing the right side of the flag, with a series of seven right-pointing chevrons behind it, the word Accessibility is below the design.

These chevrons symbolize the 7 local County municipalities moving forward with Accessibility together, in the right direction, suggesting momentum, progress and action, moving the most recognizable symbol for accessibility forward.

Each year, in alignment with National AccessAbility Week, members of the ECAAC, Council, and Administration along with members of local Councils and the public gather to raise the flag in solidarity. This annual event is symbolic and representative of the County's commitment to improving accessibility for all.

WE Check the Trails

[WE Check the Trails](#) is a community engagement exercise, born out of the concept of inclusivity and access for all. The ECAAC and the County have implemented a data collection tool that members of the community can use to report on features, conditions and issues that may impact the overall accessibility of local public trails. This information is reviewed by the project team and reported to those who are responsible for the trails.

The WE Check the Trails feedback form can be used to report and rate the accessibility and conditions of designated local trails. The public's assistance is needed to make this program a success. The form includes a button for geo-location, so users can pinpoint which trail they are using.

The feedback forms are live and available on the County Website to receive public comments on accessibility of trails in the County.

Advancing the Strategic Priorities of the County

In September 2024, the ECAAC hosted the inaugural **Accessibility Fest-for-All** which took place at the Colchester Park. The event was planned by the County, and in partnership with the Town of Essex and its AAC. The stated goal was to raise awareness around inclusive opportunities and activities that promote services and spaces for people with varying levels of ability. The event touched on many of the Strategic Priorities for the County, including:

Working as Team Essex County:

Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results -The event was attended by many of the local municipal partners and allied organizations. The informal structure allowed for a unique networking opportunity amongst the exhibitors. The event showcased the amenities the Town of Essex incorporated into the Colchester Park facilities to make it an inclusive outdoor setting. The Town was honoured during the event with a certificate from Assisted Living Southwestern Ontario (ALSO) for their exceptional efforts in the area of accessibility.

Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence:

Being an Employer with Impact – The event was an approved Volunteer Day for County staff under the Employee Engagement program. The opportunity allowed staff to engage with the ECAAC, local municipal partners, each other, and the community. The contribution of the volunteer group was critical to the event's success and provided insight into the objectives of the ECAAC to those who

participated as volunteers. The feedback on this event from our volunteers was heartwarming, and inspiring.

Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence:

A Government Working for the People - Combining the efforts of the Town of Essex and the County on this project furthered the goals of both groups. To ensure that there were no barriers to participation, the event was offered at no cost to attend for exhibitors or for guests who attended. Events that promote accessibility and inclusion inevitably establish a sense of belonging, making all feel more welcome in our community, connected to resources, and like valued members of the public.

Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence:

Promoting Transparency and Awareness – The ECAAC was able to offer an opportunity to local Accessibility Advisory Committees to further their own objectives. Each had an option to participate and those who did, highlighted their resources and applied the mandate of raising awareness to draw attention to the great work being done for accessibility improvements and barrier removal in the local municipalities in the County. These engagements across our local municipalities were invaluable.

Building a Regional Powerhouse:

Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities across the County – The event showcased the efforts being made to develop communities within the County that are inclusive. Offering facilities that provide space for all makes the County more welcoming to current and future residents. The intent of the ECAAC is to take the event to each willing local municipality for each to have an opportunity to be the "host" location and to highlight the accessible amenities they have to offer.

The success of the event has inspired the Town of Amherstburg to proactively approach the County for consideration for hosting the next event to showcase the great work they have done in that community in support of accessibility.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications resulting from this report. Accessibility initiatives for the County and funding for the ECAAC form part of the annual budget and are considered during budget deliberations.

Consultations

During the preparation of this report, the following individuals were consulted:

- David Sundin, Director, Legislative and Legal Services/County Solicitor
- Crystal Sylvestre, Coordinator, Legislative and Community Services

Strategic Plan Alignment

Working as Team Essex County	Growing as Leaders in Public Service Excellence	Building a Regional Powerhouse
<input type="checkbox"/> Scaling Sustainable Services through Innovation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Focusing "Team Essex County" for Results <input type="checkbox"/> Advocating for Essex County's Fair Share	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Being an Employer with Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A Government Working for the People <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Promoting Transparency and Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> Providing Reliable Infrastructure for Partners <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporting Dynamic and Thriving Communities Across the County <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonizing Action for Growth <input type="checkbox"/> Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

Recommendation

That Essex County Council receive report number 2024-1204-LCS-R40-KH Accessibility Initiatives Annual Compliance Review as information.

Approvals

Respectfully Submitted,

Katherine Hebert

County Clerk

Concurred With,

David Sundin

David Sundin, BA (Hons), LL.B., Director, Legislative and Legal Services/County Solicitor

Concurred With,

Sandra Zwiers

Sandra Zwiers, MAcc, CPA, CA, Chief Administrative Officer

Appendix	Title
A	MYAP 2023-2027 (2024 Year End Reporting Update)