

## **1. Introduction**

With the passage of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) in 2002, all municipalities were required to establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) by September 2002 and to file annually an Accessibility Plan. Accessibility Plans must identify barriers to persons with disabilities and the municipality's plan for the removal of those barriers. The first Plan is to be submitted and is to be made public by September 2003.

The ODA represents a significant departure from previous initiatives to address the challenges facing persons with disabilities in two main areas. First, disabilities are now defined very broadly to include not only physical disabilities affecting access to buildings or buses, for example, but also visual, hearing and intellectual impairments that affect a person's ability to participate fully in the community. Second, the ODA requires municipalities to consider barriers created not only by physical limitations to facilities or other assets, but also those which may be created by policies, practices, by-laws, programs, and services administered by the municipality.

The implications of the ODA span across all the Divisions of the City requiring a coordinated approach and concerted effort to meet the expectations of the Act. Each Departments' planning process and annual budgets will have to reflect the intent of the ODA to remove barriers in existence and to prevent new barriers from being formed in the future.

### ***1.1. Acknowledgements***

The first City of Mississauga Accessibility Plan was accomplished as a joint project with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Staff Working Group – Appendix B, (including Karen Morden, Community Child/Youth Consultant and Nicola Reynolds, Volunteer Planner) along with the thoughtful guidance and insight of Ken Owen, Director of Facilities and Property Management. Paul Mitcham, Commissioner of Community Services and other members of the Senior Management Team are in support of this plan.

## **1.2. AAC and Staff Working Group**

In September of 2002, an inaugural AAC was formed by appointments made by Council. A full recruitment process following the typical City procedures will be undertaken to appoint a new AAC with a term coincident with the term of the new Council formed in November of 2003.

One of the requirements, as mandated by the ODA, was to establish an AAC with at least 50% of its membership being persons with disabilities.

The current AAC and Staff Working Group developed the Terms of Reference for the AAC (see Appendix A).

Based on research into the requirements of an Accessibility Plan and other municipalities' approaches to the development of such a Plan, it was decided that a team of staff representing various Divisions within the City was required to assist in the process. An ad hoc Working Committee, which had been in place during the implementation of the ODA, was augmented due to the corporate-wide implications of the Plan. The staff assigned to the Staff Working Group appears as Appendix B.

## **1.3. Accessibility Plan Development Process**

A strategic planning process was utilized to develop Mississauga's Accessibility Plan. All AAC members and the Staff Working Group were invited to participate in a series of sessions. In addition to the Staff Working Group, the City's Community Youth Worker and a volunteer planner were invited to participate. These sessions included:

### **Education/Training:**

- a) "Creating an Accessible Community" presented by Kevin Duguay, Planner from the City of Peterborough.
- b) CNIB video presentation.
- c) Sensitivity/Disability Awareness Workshop, presented by the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities

**Vision Workshop and Discussion about our Successes:**

- a) Vision Workshop: A vision was developed in response to the question: “What are some of the ways that Mississauga will be different with respect to accessibility in 5 years?”
- b) Discussion about our Past Initiatives: A comprehensive list of past initiatives with respect to accessibility in the past 3-5 years was developed. There were also some significant initiatives that occurred more than 5 years ago which needed to be included. For example, the Special Needs Policy for programs offered by Recreation and Parks was implemented in 1991. See Appendix E for the complete list of past initiatives.

**Obstacles and Strategic Directions Workshops:**

- a) The Obstacles Workshop helped to “open the doorways to the future”. The issues which are preventing us from making the City accessible were examined in detail.
- b) The Strategic Directions Workshop provided an opportunity to look at the underlying obstacles that were preventing us from realizing our goal of an accessible City, and to develop approaches for overcoming these obstacles.

**Action Planning:**

This session identified what could realistically be accomplished within 1 year, 2 years and beyond. The actions that would focus our efforts and result in real change were clearly identified.

***1.4. Objectives for the Development of the Plan***

- To review the City’s past initiatives in identifying, removing and preventing barriers.
- To establish a common understanding of the underlying obstacles that impact making the City of Mississauga accessible.
- To establish a practical picture of the desired future - our vision.

## City of Mississauga Accessibility Plan

- To achieve consensus on key strategic directions and priorities to prevent and remove barriers to persons with disabilities.
- To determine action steps required to achieve specific elements of the identified strategies.