

To:	Warden Halliday and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	August 9, 2018
Subject / Report No:	CAOR-CW-17-18
Title:	County-Wide Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee
Prepared by:	Rob Hatten
Reviewed by:	Kim Wingrove
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	County-wide
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee of the Whole as presented per Resolution CW200-18; Endorsed by County Council on September 13, 2018 per Resolution CC85-18.

Recommendation

1. That report **CAOR-CW-17-18 County-Wide Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee** be received; and
2. That staff bring back a report with a **Terms of Reference for a county-wide Accessibility Advisory Committee for Council consideration**; and
3. That consideration be given in the **2019 operating budget for part time staff resources to oversee the Accessibility Coordinator functions**.

Executive Summary

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001, requires Grey County and its local municipalities with 10,000 or more residents to have an accessibility advisory committee. All municipalities, regardless of size, are required to consult with persons with disabilities on certain projects. These committees provide valuable input that helps make Grey County communities more inclusive and age-friendly. Having a formal joint accessibility advisory committee will help municipalities remain compliant with provincial legislation and promote greater consistency for accessible policies and practices throughout the County.

Background and Discussion

The expectation for an Accessibility Advisory Committee

Municipalities in Ontario that have more than 10,000 residents are required to create an accessibility advisory committee (AAC) and involve it in planning processes. Two or more municipalities may set up a joint committee instead of having their own. Members of a joint

committee may be chosen in a way that works best for the community and the only requirement is that the majority of committee members have to be people with disabilities.

Although municipal staff are expected to support the AAC as a key resource, the intent is for the committee to determine its own work plan and priorities.

The Province encourages municipalities to consult with their AACs about how to implement and maintain compliance with the provinces accessibility standards, to prepare compliance reports, and any other matters where a council seeks the committee's advice.

By law, an AAC must be consulted on the following matters:

- Creating, reviewing and updating multi-year accessibility plans
- Developing accessible design criteria in the construction, renovation or placement of bus stops and shelters
- When determining the proportion of on-demand accessible taxis
- About the need, location and design of accessible on-street parking spaces when building new or making major changes to existing on-street parking spaces
- Before building new or making major changes to existing recreational trails (not back country trails) and to help determine particular trail features
- Building or making major changes to existing outdoor play spaces
- The placement of rest areas along exterior paths of travel

Municipal AACs are also expected to review site plans and drawings from developers. These include site plans for subdivisions, municipal offices, community centres and recreational centres. The AAC must also comment on public municipal buildings that are constructed, purchased, leased or significantly renovated.

In addition to all of these requirements, the AAC can also be a resource for providing advice about municipal programs and services. They can identify barriers in our policies and procedures and provide advice for improving our services so they become more inclusive for everyone. For example, Grey County's AAC has commented on major changes to Grey County's websites, they have reviewed our accessible customer service training, and given advice on our Workplace Accommodations Procedure.

Challenges recruiting and maintaining municipal AACs

Recruiting for a municipal AAC has proven to be a challenging task for Grey County and its local municipalities. These are volunteer committees and it can be difficult to recruit enough interested members, specifically members who identify themselves as having disabilities. Recruitment is made more difficult when Grey County and the local municipalities compete for membership. When calls go out for new members at the start of each term, or to replace members throughout the term, very few applications are received and it isn't uncommon to require multiple advertising cycles to recruit a qualified applicant. The process is time consuming for staff and ad costs can become significant.

Once committees are established, staff coordinate regular meetings to review the above mentioned matters for AAC feedback and advice. Coordinating these meetings can be difficult too as committee members may have jobs with conflicting schedules or their level of individual ability may limit their independence and ability participate in a meeting.

These challenges are not unique to the County and each municipality is in a unique position in terms of AAC function and overall compliance with accessibility legislation. Also, with Grey County's continued growth, some municipalities are getting closer to the 10,000-resident threshold and will soon require formal committees.

Earlier this year County staff contacted the CAOs and Clerks at each of the local municipalities surveying them to see if they would be interested in creating a joint AAC for the entire county. Five municipalities were quick to indicate they would be interested in the County playing a larger role in the coordination of a joint committee. Some local municipalities already have well-established AACs and may be less interested in a joint committee.

Benefits of a joint AAC

Some of the main benefits of a joint municipal AAC include:

- Consistent AAC input across the county
- Greater opportunity to recruit qualified members
- Administrative support for local municipalities
- Pooled staff knowledge and resources
- AAC agendas that are more rewarding and meaningful for committee volunteers
- Reduced costs for participating local municipalities
- Potential for the County's Accessibility Coordinator to become a bigger resource for local municipalities

Some upper tier municipalities in Ontario have already adopted joint accessibility advisory committees with their local municipalities, and neighbouring municipalities. Some examples include Perth County, Elgin and Middlesex Counties, Huron County, Lennox and Addington, Kitchener with Waterloo and the Region of Waterloo.

How it could work

There are two different models being considered for how a Grey County AAC could function. Both would see a County accessibility coordinator taking on the main administration and coordination role for the committee. The coordinator would work with the Clerk's department to schedule meetings and manage agendas and minutes.

Under one model the coordinator would be in direct contact with a staff lead for accessibility at each municipality. The staff lead would attend each joint AAC meeting as a non-voting member to present materials, participate in discussions and share knowledge. Each local staff member would be responsible for reporting the AACs recommendations back to their local council. Each municipality would still be responsible for managing their own accessibility compliance, such as bi-annual reporting, policy creation, budgeting etc.

Under a more comprehensive model, the Grey County accessibility coordinator would fulfill all of the responsibilities above. They would ensure compliance for all of the participating municipalities, update each Council, complete required reporting etc. This model has been adopted by Perth County (including the City of Stratford) and the counties of Elgin and Middlesex.

Other considerations

- Additional staff resources will be required to fulfill the AAC coordinator responsibilities. The amount of resourcing is dependent on which delivery model is chosen and the number of municipalities that chose to participate.
- Terms of reference will need to be developed that is agreeable to all participating parties.
 - Committee membership will need to be considered, such as number of members and representation from each participating municipality.
 - Having political representation from each municipality on the committee is unrealistic.
 - Number of public members needed to fulfil the committees role
- Direction needs to be given soon to allow time to prepare for recruitment of committee members for the 2019-2022 term.
- More dedicated resources for Accessibility would help make Grey County services more inclusive. Staff will be more knowledgeable of the AODA and the ODA as well as the Ontario Human Rights Code. Being public sector, we have a duty to accommodate to the point of undue hardship and are at a higher risk of human rights complaints if our services and spaces are not accessible.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

[Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#)

Financial and Resource Implications

A joint municipal AAC would increase workload for County staff while reducing workload at the local level. Provision may need to be made in the 2019 budget to accommodate this change.

Relevant Consultation

Internal Kim Wingrove, Heather Morrison

External local municipalities, other county Accessibility staff members

Appendices and Attachments

None