

To: Mayor Ashe and
Members of Council

From: Timothy Higgins
Accessibility Coordinator

Copy: Chief Administrative Officer
Division Head, Public Affairs & Corporate Communications

Subject: Accessibility Advisory Committee
2024 Year End Report and 2025 Proposed Work Plan
File: S-1000

May 26, 2025

The Pickering Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) is pleased to submit, for Council's information, its 2024 Year End Report and 2025 Proposed Work Plan.

2024 Year End Report

In 2024, nine AAC meetings were held. The Committee continued to contribute to the goals of Pickering's Five-Year Accessibility Plan for 2021-2025 in the following ways:

A. AAC Membership, Training and Meetings

Committee - Throughout 2024, the AAC was comprised of ten Council-appointed Committee members, two non-voting elected Councilors, and an Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade (APBOT) non-voting representative. The AAC approved the Committee's 2024 schedule of hybrid meetings allowing attendance both virtually and in-person.

Liaison - The role of Accessibility Coordinator, the AAC's Staff Liaison, was moved to the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer and the function of Accessibility reassigned to the purview of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

EDI - The Manager, People & Culture and the Senior Advisor, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion provided an update to the AAC regarding the City's EDI Strategy and spoke to:

- key learnings and themes uncovered through community consultations;
- the vision, mission, and priority areas of focus for the City's EDI strategy; and, next steps in the EDI Strategy process.

Training -The Staff Liaison shared learning materials, and provided orientation and job-specific accessibility training to AAC Members relating to:

- an accessibility overview of the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*, and the *Ontario Building Code*;

- AccessForward, a provincial Accessibility training platform
- Pickering's 5 Year Accessibility Plan (2021-2025);
- policies available on the [Accessible Pickering](#) Website including:
 - [Accessibility Policy \[ADM 090\]](#);
 - [Accessibility Standards for Customer Service \[ADM 090 001\]](#); and,
 - [Hiring Policy \[HUR 040\]](#);
- AODA reviews by David Onley and Rich Donovan; and,
- federal government accessibility standards.

Conferences - The Staff Liaison provided the Committee with a brief summary of the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals (ONAP) Conference, hosted by York Region in May, 2024 during National Accessibility Awareness Week. This Conference addressed, among other important accessibility matters, the topic of municipalities advocating effectively with developers to encourage building a greater number of accessible homes and increasing accessible residential accommodation options available to new home buyers.

Awards - Former AAC Member M. Thorpe Ross received a 2024 Regional Accessibility Award recognizing her long service and valuable contributions to Pickering accessibility such as with respect to playground renovations and the inclusiveness of the City's aquatics programs.

B. Awareness Activities

AODA Review - The AAC discussed the Independent 4th Review of the AODA authored by Rich Donovan dated June 5, 2023, and its findings. Mr. Donovan reported that the Province of Ontario is failing to achieve its accessibility commitments for 2025 and declared an "accessibility crisis". The AAC endorsed the Summary of Recommendations outlined in the Independent 4th AODA Review and resolved that Pickering City Council:

- endorse the Independent 4th AODA Review recommendations;
- recognize the accessibility crisis in the Province of Ontario; and,
- forward a resolution of Council to the Premier of Ontario and other applicable parties.

Canada Day (evening) - The Manager, Cultural Services provided the AAC with an overview of the Canada Day event proposed site plan. She outlined a review of the event in prior years and proposed plans for 2024, highlighting increased efforts to make the event more accessible and welcoming. The AAC Provided input on the Canada Day evening event, specifically on a new proposed plan to improve accessibility and inclusion considerations and to make the event more welcoming.

Canada Day (daytime) - The AAC delivered a "Tranquility Tent" exhibit at Pickering's 2024 Canada Day celebrations, to offer cool, shaded, relaxing space for guests to unwind given rising mental health, economic anxiety, and social isolation issues. Pickering's accessibility partner, the Pickering Football Club, provided inclusive sport/recreation activities.

Website - The Supervisor, Public Affairs & Corporate Communications provided a presentation to the AAC to introduce the City of Pickering's Website Redesign Project, a project that was supported by the City's Digital Strategy. Informed by advice from the AAC, the City refreshed Pickering.ca website to improve the user experience and enhance the accessibility of online services for people of all abilities.

Website - City Development staff informed the AAC that all documents prepared by City Development that are being made available to the public through the website are AODA-compliant.

Best Practices - The AAC has continued to monitor local, provincial, national, and international emerging accessibility legislation, regulations, policies, best practices, products and services and has considered adaptations for use in the City of Pickering. For example, the Committee monitored recent accessibility standards developed by the Canadian federal government and kept informed about accessibility opportunities related to artificial intelligence (AI) adaptive technology advances.

Grants & Awards - AAC continued to monitor and support potential submissions for municipal, regional, and provincial grants and awards to profile Pickering's accessibility investments and achievements. For example, The Accessibility Advisory Committee endorsed a letter of support to accompany the City's submission for grant funding for playground replacement at seven Pickering community parks with new, accessible playgrounds.

C. Plans, Policies, Standards, and Implementation

Reports - The 2023 Year End Report and 2024 Proposed Work Plan, having been endorsed by the AAC, and the Accessibility Core Staff Team (ACST) were approved in May 2024 by City Council and posted to Pickering.ca.

Playgrounds – The Manager, Landscape & Parks Development provided periodic updates to the AAC regarding the City's efforts to refurbish City playgrounds and enhance their accessibility. Through the Accessible Playground Reconstruction Project which focused on inclusive play, Pickering updated nine of its parks with universally designed playground features to help enhanced inclusive spaces and has extensively reconstructed four playgrounds in a way that profiles accessibility best practices. These upgrades were made to Progress Frenchman's Bay East Park, Forestbrook Park, Southcott Park, and St. Mary Park.

Transit - The AAC discussed service changes implemented by Durham Region Transit (DRT) on January 1, 2024, including the standardization of 800-meter distances between bus stops and the reduction of buses serving Pickering. Due to a lack of community consultation by DRT, the City received numerous complaints about this matter suggesting that DRT's service changes had resulted in heightened barriers to elderly and disabled transit users.

The AAC resolved that the service changes implemented by Durham Region Transit contravened the OHRC and the AODA and requested that Pickering Council reach out to the Region to request a reversal of service changes and further consultation with Pickering residents, especially those with disabilities. DRT subsequently committed to reviewing its service changes and follow-on discussions at a Durham Region Transit (DRT) Executive Committee meeting, as well as at a March 21, 2024 Town Hall on Transit were well attended by community advocates.

Taxis – In light of public concerns regarding inadequate taxi services in Pickering and across Durham Region, the City of Pickering collaborated in an informative Region-wide survey of accessible taxi services.

Lighting – The AAC advised Council of accessibility, safety and security concerns regarding exterior lighting at City Hall and the Pickering Public Library. Council endorsed an exterior lighting study of the City Centre and budget has been identified to obtain consulting services.

Environment – City staff shared his lived experience with an environmental sensitivity to sound with the Committee, and discussed how a loud alarm system could be detrimental rather than helpful for someone who is neurodivergent. The staff member noted that this environmental issue was unfamiliar to many and pointed out that conventional alarms that meet Building Code Standards may not always effectively alert people who are neurodivergent.

Other Updates - Updates were also provided to the AAC regarding the Rotary Frenchman’s Bay West Park project and the use of Pickering’s Let’s Talk platform to consult residents.

In 2024, the AAC continuously monitored:

- walkway reconstructions, sidewalk retrofits, new multi-use paths, installation of tactile plates at intersections, curb cuts, snow clearing, traffic light timing, parks, playgrounds, special event accessible parking, etc. For example, an AAC Member presented photos to the Committee highlighting examples of accessibility barriers in Valley View Park/City Hall area. The photos profiled a storm drain in disrepair, with cracks in the sidewalk; and, an old gate piece installation, protruding in the middle of a walkway. Consequently, a walkabout by several key City staff was arranged to confirm accessibility pathway and lighting deficiencies, and take timely remedial actions;
- progress with respect to Pickering’s Five-Year Accessibility Plan for 2021-2025;
- progress on implementing recommendations from the LEAD partnership initiative;
- the City’s steps to ensure website accessibility commensurate with WCAG 2.0 Level AA AODA Information and Communication Standards; and,
- the City’s staff and volunteer training process related to accessibility

D. Consultation & Collaboration

Accessible Housing - In 2024, AAC continued to review accessible housing issues raised by Pickering residents since new housing is often being designed and built without accessibility sufficiently in mind, while aging Pickering residents are growing increasingly uncomfortable in their homes. The AAC considered how best to incent builders to plan developments with accessibility at the forefront of their designs. The AAC also considered the effectiveness of Pickering’s site plan review process and concluded that addressing accessibility earlier in the application process would be a valuable enhancement.

As a result of this, the AAC struck a Sub-Committee on March 20, 2024 and appointed C. Rudberg-Chin, B. Ferguson, and K. Sullivan as its members. This Sub-Committee, in collaboration with the Planning Division of the City Development Department is exploring potential partnerships, policies, procedures and accessibility standards that will incent and guide the inclusion of accessible design in City residential development projects. AAC representatives also met with the Manager, Sustainability & Strategic Environmental Initiatives, to learn how the City engaged the

building community in the creation of the Integrated Sustainability Design Standards (ISDS) and the Sustainability Series Workshop.

The Sub-Committee aims to develop an accessibility-focused site plan checklist, a potential accessibility orientation symposium for developers, and is exploring collaborations with like-minded advocacy groups such as the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition. This work is ongoing.

Durham Abilities Centre – A collaboration of the City of Pickering and LEAD (Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery) was initiated in 2023 and a series of improvement planning consultation workshops were held in the spring of 2023, culminating in a comprehensive 2024 report to the City. The LEAD report identified multiple opportunities to improve inclusion and accessibility at all organizational levels, and to enhance Pickering’s accessibility programs, policies, processes, and services. Follow-up actions are included in the AAC’s 2024 and 2025 annual work plans and longer-term recommendations will be carried forward to the new 2026-2030 Accessibility Five Year Plan.

The LEAD Canada program is offered through the Durham Abilities Centre and is funded and endorsed by the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA). LEAD is a methodology to help governments, public and private sector organizations collaboratively define and embed inclusion and accessibility into strategic planning, daily operations, program environments, and organizational culture. The LEAD process helps organizations to identify opportunities to improve and enhance inclusion and accessibility at all organizational levels.

Workplace Mental Health – The Pickering Mental Wellness Committee hosted a range of initiatives to promote mental health and well-being in the workplace. Mental Health First Aid training was made available to City staff. Events included Facial and Fascia Stretch Therapy, mindfulness and healthy eating workshops, volleyball, pickleball, a Learn to Skate workshop, Improv in the Park, and visits from Therapeutic Paws of Canada.

Community Mental Health – As previously discussed, the AAC delivered a third annual “Tranquility Tent” exhibit at Pickering’s 2024 Canada Day celebrations, to offer cool, shaded, relaxing space for City residents and guests to unwind in response to the pandemic’s tragic impact on mental health, anxiety, and social isolation.

DRPS Children’s Games – Pickering supported the 40th Annual Durham Regional Police Children’s Games for approximately 80 disabled youth aged 5 to 18 on November 10, 2024 held at Durham College. Pickering has partnered annually with DRPS, Grandview Children’s Centre, and other community organizations since 1985 on this event. DRPS presented a plaque to the City to honour and celebrate the Pickering’s 40th consecutive year of partnership.

Business - Through its APBOT representative, the AAC regularly exchanged accessibility information and collaborated with Durham Region businesses.

Through the Committee’s Staff Liaison, the AAC was kept apprised of accessibility partner news, opportunities and events, including from:

- Pickering’s Accessibility Core Staff Team;

- Pickering’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team;
- Pickering’s Age Friendly Team;
- Pickering’s Mental Wellness Committee;
- Durham Region’s network of Accessibility Coordinators;
- the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals;
- the Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility; and,
- Accessibility Standards Canada.

E. Site Plan Reviews

Site Plan Review for Municipal Developments - For new City buildings and parks, and renovations, AAC reviewed plans helping to ensure barrier-free accessibility. For example, the AAC provided advice to the Pickering Museum Village Log House and Log Barn Restoration project. The project included the replacement of the barrier-free access ramp to the log barn, addition of interior glass barrier-free doors, and the leveling of the building floor space. Other 2024 plans reviewed by the AAC included the Beachfront Park revitalization, Seaton Recreation Complex & Library, and the renovation of Council Chambers.

Site Plan Review for Private Sector Developments - The AAC continued to work in collaboration with City planning staff through an ongoing site plan application review process. As required by the AODA, the AAC reviewed and provided accessibility advice with respect to the following site plan applications in 2024:

- S14/23, DDSB elementary school & childcare centre at 1100 Azelea Ave., Seaton;
- S15/23, Suncor Energy Inc. Petro Canada gas station at 1800 Brock Rd.;
- S07/88 (R23), manufacturing and warehouse addition at 125 Squires Beach Rd.;
- S13/23, hotel with access to Pickering Town Centre at 1355 Kingston Rd.;
- S09/08(R24-1), NIVLOG Investments Ltd., 1635 Bayly St. – Day Care;
- S09/08(R24-2) – JMPM Holdings Ltd. at 1635 Bayly St., Bldg “E” – Warehouse/Office Building;
- S01/23 #2, Pickering Valley Developments Limited at 1515 Pickering Parkway;
- A 08/22, SP-2022-03 & CP-2022-04 at 2660, 2670 and 2680 Brock Rd.;
- S08/98(R24), WO MV Realty Inc. at 1220-1280 Squires Beach Rd.; and,
- Watson’s Glenn Golfclub house at 7th Concession and Lakeridge.

2025 Proposed Work Plan

The AAC is pleased to present its 2025 Proposed Work Plan. The Plan, which outlines concrete actions the AAC will undertake to improve accessibility, includes, but is not limited to:

F. 2025 Accessibility Priorities

Vision: The City of Pickering's long-term vision is to ensure that Pickering is a caring and responsive community known for its commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility as well as its related accessibility achievements. With the support of Members of Council, management, staff, the AAC, volunteers and community partners, barrier removal will continue to be a priority in Pickering. Accessibility is everyone's responsibility and will be incorporated by design into the work of all City Departments.

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) - Pickering's 2021-2025 Five-Year Accessibility Plan sets out initiatives to meet Pickering's commitment to an inclusive community where all residents and visitors have access to City services, programs and facilities in an integrated manner that promotes dignity and independence. The AAC will continue to comply with Ontario's accessibility standards. Further, the City is committed to going beyond legislated minimum requirements, where feasible, to ensure that barriers to accessibility are identified and removed.

Based on Pickering's 2021-2025 Five-Year Accessibility Plan, and informed by best practices, Pickering's areas of priority in 2025 will include:

- mental and physical wellness, particularly through recreation and sports
- accessible and affordable housing options
- community employment opportunities for people with disabilities
- accessible parks, playgrounds, pedestrian and cyclist corridors, sidewalks, and trails
- accessibility partnerships and collaboration
- increasing support for service and support animals
- website navigation and content accessibility
- facilities signage and navigation
- leveraging AI advances for accessibility
- accessible transportation

LEAD - The City's accessibility journey will also be informed by outstanding recommendations from the Abilities Centre LEAD Project, identifying potential accessibility enhancements in the following areas:

- Leadership;
- Governance & Structure;
- Strategy;
- Financial Management;
- Supplier-Partnership Management;
- People Resources;
- Program & Service Delivery;

- Communications and Marketing; and,
- Facility & Technology Support.

MYAP Renewal – The AODA Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is a public-facing roadmap for meeting obligations under the AODA and preventing and removing barriers to accessibility across the organization. As prescribed by the AODA, the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) must be updated every five years and posted publicly on the organization’s website. A new Pickering MYAP will be developed, through public consultation, to take effect from January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2030.

2025 AODA Compliance Report - As prescribed by the AODA, municipalities must report on AODA compliance to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility every two years. Pickering will need to submit a compliance report addressing both the City of Pickering and the Pickering Public Library by December 2025.

G. Awareness Activities

Canada Day - The AAC will host a fourth annual “Tranquility Tent” exhibit at Pickering’s Canada Day daytime celebrations, to offer a cool, shaded, relaxing space for people to unwind.

In 2025, the AAC will continue to:

- monitor local, provincial, national, and international accessibility legislation, regulations, policies, best practices, products, services, and networking opportunities.
- foster/promote/support submissions for municipal, regional, and provincial awards and grants to profile Pickering’s accessibility investments and achievements.

H. Plans, Policies, Standards, and Implementation

In 2025, the AAC will continue to monitor:

- progress on and completion of Pickering’s Five-Year Accessibility Plan for 2021-2025;
- progress on implementing recommendations from the LEAD partnership initiative;
- the City’s steps to ensure website accessibility commensurate with WCAG 2.0 Level AA AODA Information and Communication Standards;
- walkway reconstructions, sidewalk retrofits, new multi-use paths, installation of tactile plates at intersections, curb cuts, traffic light timing, parks, playgrounds, special event accessible parking, etc.; and,
- the City’s staff and volunteer training process related to accessibility.

I. Consultation & Collaboration

Accessible Housing – In 2025, the AAC Sub-Committee will continue its work to complete and pilot an accessibility-focused site plan checklist, a potential accessibility orientation symposium for developers in Durham Region, and is reaching out to exploring possible collaborations with like-

mindful advocacy groups such as the Accelerating Accessibility Coalition with a view to leveraging the Coalition's substantial and established advocacy networks and resources.

Pathways2Employment – Following on from Pickering's successful partnership with the Durham Abilities Centre LEAD Program (discussed above), and in light of pervasive employment barriers encountered by Canadians living with disabilities, Pickering partnered once more in 2025 with the Abilities Centre for its Pathways2Employment program to offer meaningful, 150-hour job placement opportunities for 2 Durham youth with disabilities.

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program – S. Moore, Legislative Specialist, Town of Ajax provided an overview of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program, why it was important, and how it had been implemented in the Town of Ajax. S. Moore provided a summary of items to consider when exploring the feasibility of implementation.

J. Site Plan Reviews

The AAC will continue to work in collaboration with City planning staff through an ongoing site plan application review process. In 2025, to the date of writing, the AAC has reviewed and provided accessibility advice with respect to the following private sector site plan applications:

- S06/24, Ansar Medical Services Inc., at 2177 & 2185 Brock Rd.;
- S06/88 (R24), 1900 Dixie Road - Garden Centre; and,
- S05/98 (R24), Amendment #1, Pickering Islamic Centre at 2065 & 2071 Brock Rd.

Submitted on behalf of the Pickering AAC Members:

- Maurice Brenner, Regional Councillor
- Dave Currie
- Saima Fatima
- Brian Ferguson
- Katherine Hale
- Ayesha Khan
- Mara Nagy, City Councillor
- Carla Rudberg-Chin
- Dylan Schick
- Michael Shackleton
- Sam Snyders
- Kevin Sullivan
- Aaron Topper, Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade Representative

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