



# INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b>	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	August 8, 2017
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Information on the Installation of Hearing Loops in Public Facilities (CES17041) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
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<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Chris Herstek Director, Recreation Community & Emergency Services Department
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## Council Direction:

On April 10, 2017 at the Community and Emergency Services Committee meeting, staff were directed to;

- (a) Investigate the technology known as a “Hearing Loop” and report back to the Emergency and Community Services Committee on ways to encourage private sector use of this technology as well as exploring available options for use in City facilities; and,
- (b) That the issue of how to promote the use of “Hearing Loop” technology be referred to the Seniors Advisory Committee for a discussion.

## Information:

A hearing loop is a special type of sound system for use by people with hearing aids. When a speaker is using a connected microphone, the hearing loop provides a magnetic, wireless signal that can be picked up by a hearing aid. This direct signal removes unwanted background noise and eliminates the need for alternative headset/receiver devices. Hearing loops also allow for multiple individuals with compatible hearing aids to connect at one time.

A hearing loop must be installed in a defined room or space where there is a speaker who has access to a connected microphone. It is unusual for loops to be installed within a whole building (i.e. lobbies and multiple program spaces) and is typically used in public spaces or rooms where there are presentations, speakers, or performances.

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*OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.*

*OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.*

*OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.*

Consequently, municipal buildings with a number of rooms would need to identify specific spaces to install individual hearing loops.

Cost of installation is dependent on a number of factors such as the size of the room, seating layout (fixed or movable), floor surface (concrete/wood), type of flooring and room usage. The cost can range from \$3,500 to \$10,000 per space. Before planning for installation, an evaluation would be required to determine the feasibility in the identified building/space and to ensure proper sound clarity is possible.

The installation of a hearing loop will only benefit people with auditory disabilities who utilize a compatible hearing aid. According to Statistics Canada, 40% of adults aged 20 to 79 have hearing loss in one or both ears, although not all require a hearing aid. Hearing loss is more prevalent in older age groups, with adults aged 60 to 79 being 78% more likely to have hearing loss than younger adults.

In 2016, the Recreation Division had 76,555 users in registered programs, with 97 users disclosing they have an auditory need ranging from slight hearing loss, ear tubes, or the use of hearing aids or cochlear implants. However, since this disclosure is voluntary, the number of individuals is most likely higher, especially for those accessing senior centres.

The Recreation Division is committed to accommodating persons with disabilities and tracks all requests for alternative communication or assistive devices and technology. Previously, accommodations have been made for those with hearing challenges, including changing program rooms, ensuring appropriate positioning of staff, using visual aids, and providing sign language interpreters. To date, the Recreation Division has not had any requests for hearing loops in any Recreation Centre facilities.

In addition, each Recreation facility has signage to notify patrons of assistive devices available through the City of Hamilton, including devices for patrons with auditory challenges (Plex-talk, Ubi Duo, Motiva FM System, Front Row FM System, Pro-Tour FM System). Many of these devices require the individual to use the provided equipment (such as headphones) and can benefit those who have only minor hearing loss or do not have compatible hearing aids. Although for those with compatible aids, these devices detract from personal privacy and convenience.

Alternatives to hearing loops or City of Hamilton assistive devices, include portable “tabletop” systems that can be used in smaller meeting spaces and accommodate fewer than 3 people using hearing aids. A table top system is more cost effective (ranging from \$590-\$850), and could be well utilized in many City of Hamilton public facilities, as it could be shared amongst various centres and program rooms based on need.

Given this information, hearing loops will be most beneficial where:

- Speaking or delivery of auditory information is the primary activity, where there is only one speaker at a time (i.e. speeches, workshops, performances, Council Chambers, concerts)
- A higher proportion of individuals likely to use hearing aids congregate (i.e. senior centre facilities)
- The space is prone to echo or background noise (i.e. convention centres, auditoriums, theatres)

A pilot installation of the Hearing Loop is planned for a recreation centre this year to determine the effectiveness of the technology before a broader application in additional City facilities.

#### **APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

None