

ACPD All Advisory Committee Meeting Speech

Good afternoon members of Hamilton Advisory Committees, My name is James Kemp and I am here today representing the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

In brief summation, our committee differs from all other advisory committees in that we wear two hats: We are a sub-committee of Council, mandated by the province, to advise Council regarding the preparation, implementation and effectiveness of its accessibility plan in accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). We are also an advisory committee with regards to all matters pertaining to persons with disabilities and advise Council accordingly. While the provincially mandated review of the AODA is the most essential part of our duties, for the purposes of this meeting I will concentrate on our advisory role.

Our current organization consists of four primary working groups, Built Environment, Transportation, Housing and Outreach with a few ad-hoc working groups that are activated as needed.

Built Environment focuses on things like sidewalks, bus stops, urban braille, public spaces, snow removal and capital projects to name just a few. To give you an example: We are currently working with the City to create an accessible washroom list and make it available online.

Transportation focuses on Public Transit and ensuring that the disabled can travel with safety, convenience and independence on multiple services; HSR, DARTS, ATS and Accessible Taxis. We are currently preparing to host a roundtable regarding Public Transit and ways to move forward post-pandemic.

Housing has recently increased its mandate with approval of Council and is gathering information on a number of disability/accessibility related housing issues that need to be addressed. For example:

Hospital to Housing/LTC transition, RCFs, CityHousing accessibility policies, housing application streamlining, housing guide update, Universal accessibility design etc... When we understand where we are and how we got here, we will better understand what recommendations to present to Council moving forward in order to improve housing for all.

Outreach is responsible for communicating with private agencies and the general public. It became apparent that a large number of citizens of Hamilton weren't aware of our committee and its purpose. To address this problem, Outreach has recently begun a campaign to inform the public about our committee and how they might raise issues and concerns with us. I will return to this later in more detail.

The ACPD has had to address a number of issues this term that have significantly affected our effectiveness to represent our demographic to the best of our ability. First and foremost, we are predominantly disabled. We suffer from health and/or developmental issues that impair our ability to work or think. A number of members suffer from vision loss impairing their ability to read maps and see presentations for example. Medical issues tend to make focus and concentration difficult. At the beginning of this term, Council reduced our membership to be more in line with fellow advisory committees, but we quickly discovered that it was more difficult to achieve quorum with reduced numbers. We asked Council to address this issue and they raised our number to eighteen; we have achieved quorum since then.

Our Committee was just starting to get some momentum going when the pandemic struck. Suddenly we had no ability to advise Council at the time our counsel was needed most. The disabled were affected particularly hard during this time. Decisions were made regarding the disabled without the input of anyone with a disability. The changes were also not transmitted to the public in accessible fashion. I am not here to assign blame or embarrass anyone and that is the limit to which I will speak on that, except to say that the pandemic highlighted just how far we have to go before we can truly call ourselves an accessible society.

Another issue that our committee is trying to address is the need for a searchable database. We have accumulated almost two decades worth of motions, projects, reports, presentations, etc.... and need some way of collecting it in one place, accessible by any member, at any time, with any device. We have looked into setting up an expanded Google Drive or Dropbox account, but that is a very labour intensive project and requires abilities beyond our group's collective skill set. We are currently in early discussions with CityLAB and Community Engagement to see if they are able to help us. I would imagine that database access is an issue for other committees as well.

Despite the difficulties of the past year and only being able to meet virtually, we have had some success as I will highlight.

Commercial rental E-Scooters went before Public Works in May. We raised a number of safety concerns and made a number of recommendations to make them safer. Staff listened to our concerns and made a number of changes in order to improve safety and equity of access.

As I alluded to earlier, the Outreach Working Group made a special effort to connect to the general public. It began by creating a secondary logo in accordance with the Advisory Committee Procedural Handbook. The logo is based on the symbol for Universal Accessibility, a human representation with arms and legs akimbo and our initials being juggled in its hands. When it was approved by Council, we moved on to creating a pamphlet that was eye catching but contained simplified language giving a basic explanation as to our purpose and how to contact us. The pamphlet was approved and is ready for distribution.

Outreach Working Group was beginning to plan a major event for International Day for Persons with Disabilities before the pandemic sidelined everything. In an effort to celebrate IDPWD on December 3rd without a public event, we developed a disability awareness calendar for limited distribution and posting on our webpage. I can say with complete certainty that it is the most comprehensive disability

awareness calendar on the internet. The web version will eventually be linked to individual web pages, but that is a future project. We are hoping to hold a major public event next year.

If I had more time, I would catalogue our committee's many contributions over the past decades. I would also give you a thorough description of our current Outstanding Business List but I would need another five minute time slot to cover everything. I hope this has given you a decent overview of our committee and I am at your disposal if anyone has follow up questions. If there isn't time to answer now, I am sure that the clerk's office can connect us.

Thank you for your time,

James Kemp

Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities