

CITY OF HAMILTON

MOTION

Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities: February 8, 2022

MOVED BY J. KEMP.....

SECONDED BY.....

**Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities Request
respecting Accessible Transport related to the City’s
Accessible Taxicab Financial Incentive Program and
Accessible Taxicab Operators in Hamilton**

WHEREAS, to increase reliable on-demand transport above and beyond that provided by Disabled and Aged Regional Transportation Service (DARTS), the Accessible Taxicab Financial Incentive (ATFI) Program was initiated by the City of Hamilton in 2018, providing an additional \$5 for every trip and intending to decrease excessive wait times and no shows of Accessible Taxicabs by incentivizing the extra loading and unloading time and further travel time in between pickups;

WHEREAS, the ATFI Program initiated an audit procedure in 2019 that verified random Accessible Taxicab rides by reviewing trip camera footage with the corresponding paperwork;

WHEREAS, the 2020 audit of the ATFI Program reported decreased wait times from 1-2 hours to 10-15 minutes, a decrease of complaints and an increase in the number of Accessible Taxicabs to 40 Operators;

WHEREAS, the increase in insurance rates in 2020 impacted the Taxicab industry, making it more expensive to operate and more difficult to compete with Personal Transport Provider (PTP)

Operators such as Uber and Lyft that do not have the same regulation and overhead costs, causing the removal of a large number of Taxicabs from service;

WHEREAS, the ATFI Program was temporarily suspended in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and was not continued until August 2021;

WHEREAS, despite the loss of the ATFI Program, the Accessible Taxicab Operators continued to provide service through the worst of the initial lockdown, which was made more difficult by the fact that the Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) was not picking up people with mobility devices unless they were accompanied;

WHEREAS, the length of the suspension of the ATFI Program as well as the uncertainty of its future viability contributed to the attrition of Accessible Taxicab Drivers as well as the service standards and there are currently no plans or discussions regarding paying the Accessible Taxicab Drivers retroactively or otherwise compensating for their efforts during the COVID-19 Pandemic;

WHEREAS, the number of Accessible Taxicabs on the road dropped from pre-pandemic levels of 40 Accessible Taxicabs to 15 in August 2021;

WHEREAS, the resumption of the ATFI Program in August 2021, served to increase Accessible Taxicab numbers to 20;

WHEREAS, this overall decrease in the number of Accessible Taxicabs has increased the wait time at rush hour from 10 to 15 minutes to approximately 1-2 hours, which does not constitute a reliable “on-demand” service;

WHEREAS, the cost of safely and legally putting a single Accessible Taxicab on the road is exorbitant, as the vehicles need to be new to allow for proper accessibility conversion and can cost upwards of \$75,000. Furthermore, proper training of

personnel, licensing and insurance can total an estimated \$100,000, representing a significant investment that is solely the responsibility of the owner/operator. With the ATFI Program being put on hiatus for 16 months, there is no guarantee of return on investment and a \$5 per trip incentive seems to be inadequate;

WHEREAS, there are reports that PTP Operators are putting Accessible Vehicles on the road in other municipalities and charging an additional \$10 directly to the customer and the Taxicab Brokers have recently raised the suggestion of charging more for Accessible Taxicab rides. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), however, clearly states that the additional cost of accessibility cannot be downloaded to the customer;

WHEREAS, the PTP Operators are not beholden to the same regulations as Taxicab Operators, as they can opt to pay \$20,000 per year in lieu of providing an accessible fleet;

WHEREAS, the Burlington Taxi Service was recently forced to stop operating due to the volatility of the Taxicab industry and should serve as a warning that the same thing could happen in the City of Hamilton; and

WHEREAS, Taxicabs serve as an interim and emergency form of transport for people of all abilities and are an essential service for any municipality;

WHEREAS, the AODA states that all forms of transportation, including Taxicabs, should be fully accessible by 2025, should provide equivalent service and should not cost any more than regular service.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

That staff be directed to:

- (a) Investigate methods of revamping or improving the Accessible Taxicab Financial Incentive Program in an effort to recruit drivers and to ensure the program's sustainability in the future;
- (b) Consider the feasibility of compensation to the Accessible Taxicab Operators that provided accessible service during the lockdown and the Accessible Taxicab Financial Incentive Program's suspension period;
- (c) Develop a pandemic contingency plan with respect to the Accessible Taxicab Financial Incentive Program's audit process to ensure continuity of service while maintaining pandemic protocols as well as the safety of the staff; and
- (d) Determine if Personal Transport Provider Operators that are providing Accessible Transport in the City are charging an additional fee for the service, if they have plans to provide accessible service in the future or if they are willing to pay a more proportionally equivalent annual fee to opt-out of the requirement to provide Accessible Transport.