

Housing Working Group Meeting Notes

June 27th, 2023

Virtual WebEx Meeting

12:00PM – 2:00PM

Those in Attendance: Lance Dingman, James Kemp

Also in Attendance: Amy Majani, Jessica Bowen,
Amanda Warren-Ritchie

Those Absent: Jayne Cardno, Paula Kilburn, Robert Semkow

- 1. Welcome and Introductions**
- 2. Approval of June 27th Agenda:** Agenda was approved
- 3. Approval of May 16th Meeting Notes:** Meeting notes were approved
- 4. CityHousing Recommendations Final Review:**
We reviewed the report's 15 points individually and received valuable guidance on how to word them accurately to achieve the desired outcome.

9.2(a)

- 1) Clarify that we are speaking of the WCAG 2.0 AA Web Compliance on the website and web content. Amanda stated that they follow corporate policy in this regard. Chair responded that we are talking mainly about the forms that are available and that though policy may be met, we are asking for a more guided approach. Jessica asked if we could make a list of the current website's deficiencies so she has an easier time explaining the barriers to those that need to fix them. Lance pointed out that he has many issues with the website from a comprehension perspective and that is equally an issue. Jessica also mentioned P.O.U.R. which is used in the WCAG. It stands for Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust; and that these are the guiding principles in accessible web design.
- 2) Jessica first asked the question if it really is a new build or if they are just replacing what was there beforehand. Chair responded that it wasn't so much the debate on the definition of new build, more pointing out the missed opportunity for making some efforts at improving accessibility while staff were doing work already, perhaps making one of the benches or tables fully accessible for example. Jessica recommended that we clarify the different legislations and design principles, AODA, OBC, IASR,

9.2(a)

Universal Design, BFDG, etc. and highlight that their lack of specific guidelines to public spaces has become an issue or even a barrier.

- 3) Jessica only had questions about the location of said playground, approximately what year it was installed and if it was a new build.
- 4) The only suggestion for this one was to clarify it is regarding Parking in the explanation. We briefly discussed the different sizes of accessible spaces at 500 MacNab.
- 5) Both agreed that we can always make things more accessible and that it's not so much about compliance as providing the best customer service possible. Amanda also suggested we lift waiting areas from number 6, to number 5 as CityHousing only has one and it is connected to the service counter. Number 6 will now refer to lobbies and common areas.
- 6) As mentioned above, we will now make this about common areas. Jessica was curious if there were plans to make them compliant or fully accessible, but Amanda couldn't answer at this time. Also the question of what is fully accessible complicates the issue. Chair pointed out that there is different standards of common areas in all buildings, with some offering much more than others. More austere common areas in buildings like Rebecca are very different from the common areas of Strathcona, for

9.2(a)

example, with their greenhouse and billiard room.

Amanda and Jessica mentioned a needs assessment would be required on each building. Chair pointed out that a dedicated staff would be perfect for this.

- 7) Jessica mentioned that maintenance plans are required under the design of public spaces but mentioned there is a lack of a clear communication channel from the tenant to the property manager/project manager for tenants to raise accessibility concerns about maintenance plans. Jessica further mentioned that we have encapsulated this problem further on in the document.
- 8) Chair began by giving a brief example of the problems tenants face with untrained maintenance staff and contractors and the reasoning behind the request for more training. Jessica responded by listing the requirements of human rights and accessibility training including the AODA and that they are in compliance as it relates to customer service. Chair pointed out that according to the Unlocking the AODA document, there is a higher level of training required than previously understood including training on mobility devices and aids. Jessica responded that some of the items listed are covered in the current training modules, but that more could be needed to address gaps and that compliance is not necessarily enough. She further explained that the wording of this

9.2(a)

was an issue and recommended using things like equity training or accessibility awareness over “sensitivity training”. Lance said that he feels sensitivity training is needed for understanding different people’s needs. Jessica confirmed the City has training on the human rights code and accessibility, customer service when interacting with people with disabilities. The City does not have training for contractors/staff when dealing with more extreme situations like heat emergencies.

9) No one had any comment for bulletin boards.

10) Amanda mentioned we should clarify that we are seeking a voluntary accommodations list creation as we cannot ask if and what someone’s disabilities are. She also mentioned that notice of entry time is set by the Landlord Tenant Act. We learned through our research though that additional time is an appropriate and allowable accommodation. Chair will clarify these points.

11) We briefly discussed the MCS issue and how it is an individualized issue, requiring each building to have its own policies in place based on its current tenants’ needs. Lance gave us a brief anecdote on how he caused a woman to react badly to the mere scent of cigarette smoke on his clothing. Chair

9.2(a)

pointed out that these are the people that we need to be looking after here.

- 12)** Amanda began by saying there is no standard policy here and they cannot ask if there is need. Jessica pointed out that if we constantly remind people that accommodation is possible if requested, as they do with employment, that it might assist in this. She further mentioned that as we employ more Universal Design, the needs should diminish. It may help to give examples of types of accommodations possible so people understand their rights here.
- 13)** Jessica mentioned that this was incorrect. That they are required to report on a bi-annual basis instead of a tri-annual. The document we were using must be out of date on that point. Chair will amend.
- 14)** Amanda began by pointing out that there is a fairly robust procedure in place for this already. That a medical professional is required to submit a sort of needs assessment and the Property Manager tries to accommodate on that basis. Chair explained that over the years, he has had many conversations with CityHousing tenants in his role as a Tai-Chi instructor; that tenants would often confide that they wanted to put in requests for modification, but were concerned

9.2(a)

about being labelled problem tenants and discriminated on that basis. Amanda quickly assured us that CityHousing would not do this for any reason. The Chair responded that it's not so much about the response, but the perceived response that is keeping them from requesting adaptations in the home and this is where this section came from. Jessica chimed in that she understands there is a large power imbalance in the rental market that is skewed heavily in the landlord's favour. Amanda asked us to be more specific on what we are asking for as a third party, because the medical professional is technically a third party already. Chair responded that the third party is the Accessibility Staff member/department we are asking for. That it is somewhat like what the tenant support worker is supposed to do; act as an interface to the property manager, but that position has its challenges in its current iteration.

- 15) Jessica began by saying she didn't think that self-serve kiosks were meant to be interpreted in this way as they were supposed to refer to things like pin pads and point of sale machines, but as she thought about it, she understood the ramification of what self-serve kiosk actually means. Chair explained how that is what we thought at first too, that we began by thinking of the PIN machines at the service desk as well as the laundry card loading machines, then we realized that

9.2(a)

the washer and dryer is a self-serve kiosk too. At the recent MacNab tour, we further realized that meant the touch pads on stove tops and ovens as well. This is going to be a huge problem that will need an individualized approach from unit to unit and from building to building. Amanda asked us to further expand on this section for the Board's understanding. Amanda also mentioned digital signage like the screen at First Place, it needs to clarify font size, brightness levels, scrolling speed, etc.

Jessica and Amanda didn't feel it necessary to go through the conclusions as they are pretty explanatory, only asking that it be updated to reflect the changes mentioned above. Chair will also revise the recommendations to reflect the changes.

Amanda went on to ask that we put into bullet form the improvements we hope to see by these recommendations, i.e.: Staff rotation is an issue, training is lacking, etc. to specify what some of the issues are in a at a glance format.

Amanda also asked us to be clear what we are asking for as we are vague when we say department/staff. Chair responded that as a volunteer, this is a hard one to clarify, being fully cognizant of what a single FTE costs annually. He further suggested that we could start with one employee and move up to two or three if

9.2(a)

required as CityHousing has over 7000 units in its current portfolio and that is a big job. Amanda agreed this was a good start as she is already pursuing hiring an EDI specialist and this report would align with that goal.

It should be noted that Jessica and Amanda's participation in this process is very much appreciated and their response is overall positive. Jessica and Amanda thanked the HWG for providing such thorough research and recommendations.

5. Heat Response Plan Discussion: Chair informed the group that he is now a member of the Heat Emergency Response Working Group for Climate Change and gave a brief description of the first meeting results. Lance mentioned that he read the Chair's delegation to the Public Health Committee and thought it accurately described some of the issues faced by RCF tenants. We will discuss this in much more detail next month after people have a chance to review the documents.

6. Other Business: There was no other business.

7. Adjournment

9.2(a)

ACPD Housing Working Group's Recommendations to Improve Accessible Housing in CityHousing Hamilton Buildings for Simplified Customer Service, Better Quality of Life and More Stable Housing in Accordance With the AODA.

Background

The Housing Working Group spent considerable time over the past two years studying the AODA and a document written in part by the provincial government called "Unlocking the AODA" to learn how the AODA affected housing without saying housing. We managed to identify 17 points of intersection between Housing and the AODA. After inviting Amanda Warren-Ritchie from CityHousing and discussing them with her, we narrowed that list to 15 points that need to be addressed. They are itemized below and recommendations for improvement attached.

1. Employers over 50 people are required to be both AA compliant and AA web compliant by the end of 2021.
 - CityHousing does not monitor or test AA web compliance independently, instead relying on the City to have ensured their compliance. As there is still some issues with accessibility on City websites, it is recommended that CityHousing do their own testing

9.2(a)

to ensure the forms and documents used by tenants are fully accessible to all available technologies such as screen readers.

2. New picnic tables, benches and other seating must be installed on level, hard surfaces and connected to accessible pathways.

- CityHousing is taking steps to make any new build's seating and landscape fully accessible as well as announced that they will retrofit all existing buildings to accessible standards by 2027. During the pandemic, all chairs and amenities were removed from all properties. When they were reinstalled, they should have been made at least partially accessible as this is technically a new build. A dedicated accessibility department/staff in CityHousing would be able to ensure accessibility was achieved above mere AODA compliance.

3. Playgrounds need to be fully accessible and those with disabilities should be consulted before construction.

- At least one playground has been installed at a CityHousing property that is not accessible. No consultation occurred with the residents to ensure accessibility needs were addressed. A dedicated accessibility department/staff would be better

9.2(a)

equipped to ensure accessibility and address resident concerns.

4. Required to follow IASR guidelines regarding accessible parking spaces.
 - CityHousing is currently in the process of unifying policies across all buildings. We will be unable to confirm proper adherence to IASR guidelines until that time. A dedicated accessibility department/staff would be able to assist in this process to ensure proper accessibility.

5. If service counters are offered, at least one needs to be fully accessible.
 - While the service counter on the third floor of the CityHousing offices is in compliance with the minimum AODA guidelines, more effort should be made to improve its accessibility by adding enhancements like contrast strips, tactile marking and pictographic signage to name a few. A dedicated Accessibility department/staff would be able to help with this.

6. At least 3% of seating in lobbies and waiting areas need to be able to accommodate all mobility devices.
 - As was mentioned, CityHousing has committed to making all properties and common areas fully

9.2(a)

accessible by 2027. We don't know if that will be to a minimum AODA standard or if they will attempt to make them fully accessible. We recommend that a dedicated accessibility department/staff would be able to ensure the correct improvements are made thereby saving money from having to retrofit or modify afterwards.

7. Housing providers are required to have maintenance plans in place to ensure that the AODA is being adhered to despite the disruptions.
 - There is no process for tenants to complain during ongoing work except to deal with the project manager and contractor directly. This is intimidating for many and there should be an independent channel for requesting resolutions. A dedicated department/staff would be able to voice concerns of tenants and work with the contractor to establish proper protocols.

8. Accessibility, sensitivity and accommodation training must be provided to all employees, contractors and volunteers.
 - The current training is reading the AODA. This is insufficient as the AODA requires customer service and sensitivity training when addressing the needs of person with disabilities. An dedicated department/staff would be able to develop training modules for

9.2(a)

employees, contractors and volunteers as well as document their completion and track problems.

9. Housing providers must place notice and bulletin boards at accessible levels.

- There are many buildings without bulletin boards at the correct height for people in mobility devices. There is also a problem with notices for people with vision loss. A dedicated accessibility department/staff would be able to address these problems.

10. Leaving notices of entry on doors is not enough with disabled tenants. They may not leave very often and wouldn't see the notice with enough time. More effort is required.

- There is currently no list for people that need accommodations like better notification protocols or more time to prepare. A dedicated accessibility department/staff could assist by keeping a master list for each building and advising on the best method of communication for those with special requirements.

11. Toxic chemicals can trigger Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS). The least toxic should be used when required.

- A dedicated accessibility department/staff would be able to formulate a Multiple Chemical Sensitivities

9.2(a)

policy for each building dependent on the requirements of tenants. This would improve the health and wellbeing of tenants, no matter their condition.

12. Accommodations need to be made when showing new units to prospective tenants.
 - Currently the policy is to attempt to accommodate when asked for, but there is no standard policy. A dedicated department/staff would be able to provide an array of accommodations that would be available so that prospective tenants could ask for them in confidence. This will help to get honest requirements for modifications before they move in.

13. An AODA Compliance Report is required every three years. Online Compliance must be reviewed as well.
 - Reporting is currently taking place annually to Jessica Bowen but we were informed that they don't test their own online compliance. A dedicated accessibility department/staff would be able to ensure website accessibility independently of City Staff.

14. Housing providers are required to make accommodations up to the point of Undue Hardship.

9.2(a)

- Considering the housing crisis currently in progress and the fact that the HWG promotes the principle of aging in place, we are recommending that a dedicated department/staff would be better able to assess the needs of tenants and make modifications as their physical conditions change. Due to the fact that affordable housing is scarce, we have learned that people with disabilities are reluctant to approach the property managers to ask for modifications in case they are labelled problem tenants. An independent process would better encourage people to ask for the modifications they require and not suffer needlessly. A simplified application would also assist in this process.

15. Self-service kiosks are required to be fully accessible and can accommodate those with vision loss.

- This is a major issue of concern that is going to require special effort. This is referring to things like the laundry card loading machines as well as washers and dryers. As these machines become more digital; the displays are nearly impossible for people with vision loss to use. They are also very confusing to some people and explanations on how to use should be available in pictograms where possible in order to accommodate language and developmental barriers.

9.2(a)

A dedicated department/staff that can work with each building to ensure the laundry facilities are accessible for all tenants is needed as they will be modified on a case by case basis.

Conclusions:

In doing this research, we had difficulty in understanding exactly how the AODA affects housing, because it doesn't specifically mention housing for the most part. This creates issues for Landlords and Property Managers when understanding their responsibilities under the act. Most see the AODA as a checklist that needs to be marked off and nothing more.

In the fifteen points we mentioned above, we have learned that CityHousing is not actually meeting the minimum standards in the act because no one quite understands them.

Using an example above, CityHousing requires all outside contractors to read and sign off on the AODA and that satisfies the accessibility training. However, according to "Unlocking the AODA" CityHousing is also required to ensure they have sensitivity and accessible customer service training and that is not being done.

9.2(a)

CityHousing is required under the act to create a dedicated complaint line/system for people with disabilities to raise issues or provide accessibility related feedback and they have yet to do so. Relying on the Tenant Support Worker or Property Manager is not an appropriate alternative.

While CityHousing uses the Hamilton.ca network, they need to ensure their own part of it is as accessible as possible. At the very least, they should put all online forms through accessibility testing regularly.

Barriers are still being created at CityHousing properties to date because there is no one on staff that is specifically trained in understanding mobility and accessibility. As we were informed, CityHousing has received a fund to make all its properties accessible by 2027, but if they don't understand what needs to be done, how do they ensure they have achieved accessibility?

Self-serve kiosks are another major issue that needs to be addressed, but it needs to be addressed on an individual basis. Having an accessibility department means that people with disabilities can provide confidential information on their personal requirements so they can ensure all tenant's needs are met. Laundry rooms are a particular point of focus as each building will need their own combination of solutions.

9.2(a)

Finally, given the precarious nature of housing, people are not asking for the modifications they need in their home as they don't want to put their housing at risk. This is necessary though as we know that aging in place is the most economical option at the moment. Requiring tenants to request modifications through their property manager is too intimidating for fear of being labelled a problem tenant. We need a dedicated staff member/department that can represent tenants in these requests as a neutral third party.

While AODA compliance is the minimum standard, the ODA specifically requires that we identify, eliminate and prevent barriers. With respect to housing, the AODA's lack of any detailed requirements has become a barrier itself and we need to ask how to make these properties and residences truly accessible. The only way we can see to do that is to bring in people that are trained in equity and accessibility and/or to form a citizen advisory committee comprised of tenants from CityHousing properties that can represent these interests.

Recommendations:

The ACPD's Housing Working Group recommends the following:

1. CityHousing creates a separate department that is to ensure all properties are achieving accessibility or at

9.2(a)

least taking steps to improve it. This can be done through the following steps:

- a. Begin by touring each property and listing steps that need to be taken in a priority list to be addressed as labour and finances allow. This will ensure that money allocated to improving accessibility is used as efficiently as possible.
- b. Create a hotline/complaints system to provide necessary feedback as is required under the act.
- c. Review the CityHousing website / application forms to ensure they are achieving full accessibility.
- d. Develop a clearer system to request modifications in the home and serve as an intermediary between the tenant and the property manager.
- e. Review any new construction or renovation plans to ensure they are trying to incorporate Universal Design as it will save money over time.