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Joint BEWG and HWG Tour of 500 MacNab and Review
of its Accessibility

June 23rd, 2023

500 MacNab St. N.

1:00PM – 2:30PM

Those in Attendance: James Kemp, Anthony Frisina

Also in Attendance: Kaywana Gargarello, Michael Brown

We began by sitting down with Kaywana and Michael and getting the history of the building. It is actually two buildings, one is three floors and is inaccessible with only stair access and the other building is seventeen floors with elevators, but only fifteen of them are habitable. It was recently retrofitted to be at least partially accessible. It is also designed to be a minimal impact building and everything is designed to be as efficient as possible due to its passive model.

There are two classifications of accessible apartments in use, 1) Accessible and 2) Barrier Free. More effort is made for the latter than the former. We then discussed the question: What does it mean to be accessible and barrier free? We mentioned several ways to make things more accessible and recommended additional reading into

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things like the guide to home modification for those with sensory loss (CNIB).

After our discussion period, we began our tour with the patio area outside of the Common room. Michael explained how they have plans to upgrade the street entrance on the South-East corner from stairs to a ramp. James asked if they plan to connect the property grounds with accessible paths and they do not.

We then toured the Laundry Room and began discussing our problem with touch screens on self-serve kiosks like washers and dryers along with the PIN pads. We also discussed how they are very low to the ground due to their passive energy design and agreed with Kaywana that mounting them on a pedestal will be needed to improve their accessibility. Anthony asked if it was possible to purchase one or two top loaders if some found them more accessible, but Kaywana responded they are extremely rare and most products on the market are front loading now.

We then toured the recycling area and it seemed fairly accessible with door openers. We did recommend one or two larger print sorting instruction posters as well as bigger pictograms. *Paula pointed out there was no way for a person with vision loss to determine where the recycling is supposed to go.

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We then moved to the Mailbox area. It was a very open area to allow for easy movement. Every box was marked in raised numbers and braille. James suggested being able to provide larger numbers for those that needed them. We also discussed braille briefly explaining how it is only used by 9% of those with vision loss. Kaywana asked if she was wasting her time making things braille and we replied that though it is not used as much anymore, it is still very helpful to those 9% of people that can read it and it is never a waste of time.

There were two elevators, one smaller than the other. I found them very snug and would have trouble bringing in groceries on the smaller one. Buttons are raised and braille as well as audible announcing. Very smooth ride.

We were shown a vacant barrier free bachelor or studio apartment. Every apartment has a raised number placard outside the door with braille. Barrier free units have an automatic door opener in the form of a remote. Apartment was two rooms with a closet. The main room was a kitchen and living area and the second room was the bathroom. There was an induction stove top with a flat panel touch screen. *Lance had concerns about how to use an induction top and those concerns should be considered when designing protocols for new tenants. *Paula had concerns about the touchpad and the expensive pots and pans needed for induction stove tops.

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The range-hood's controls were out of easy reach. Kaywana asked us about putting a fixed counter beside the main countertop and wondered if she could use something else as it would be fixed and can't be adapted to different people's needs. It would also take up a lot of space. James suggested a rolling island that could be locked where it was needed and rolled away when not needed. Anthony raised the issue that it would take up space under the counter where the wheelchair needed to go as well as the locks would be hard to access unless they were push button. James replied that a special nook could be made to house it in the corner and if it had storage in the base, you wouldn't lose storage space either. Fridge is shorter than average with the freezer at the bottom with a pull out drawer. The top shelf is pushing the limits of someone in a wheelchair reaching. The oven cabinet was a separate unit. The door opened sideways and a table slid out of the cabinet as a work surface. It too had a flat black touch screen control panel. The oven was small, like a trailer sized oven. Fan and light is controlled by a remote. Apartment comes with one set of blinds to help save energy. Alarms also have flashing strobes. James suggested ensuring they are tuned so as not to trigger seizures in those sensitive. Power box and breakers are accessible if you have the finger strength to flip them. *Voice alarms?

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Washroom is barrier free and has ample grab bars. Anthony took issue with the L shaped bar beside the toilet. *Prefers two bars, one horizontal and one vertical. Toilet paper holder is way too far from the toilet. Push button toilet flush is hard to push down, toilet is too high. Both Kaywana and Anthony do not like the fixed bench that is required. It would be preferred to be able to adapt the shower space for personal need as a standard one size fits all is not accessible. We discussed universal design and the grab bar problem, because everyone needs them in a different configuration and the acrylic surface doesn't allow for multiple punctures. Anthony asked if Kaywana could put an emergency call button connected to 911 in every bathroom. James pointed out that it was a huge request and asked if it had to be every apartment or just the ones that someone is at risk. That setting up a City owned phone line for every unit is an exorbitant cost. Kaywana further asked who would monitor this system. James asked if a system like LifeAlert would be an acceptable alternative and Anthony agreed that it might. Shower plumbing was easy to adapt to individual need.

We were shown the two different types of garbage rooms, accessible and not accessible. There are two accessible garbage rooms in the building with door openers, but the garbage chute door is hard to open and the doors are narrow. The hallway is also very narrow. It doesn't seem

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that two garbage rooms are enough with so many accessible units.

Michael took me up to the observation deck alone and it consisted of an open space with views of the harbourfront from three sides. Any tenant has access and it is often used as a quiet place to read. I could see Theodore Tugboat from there.

We said goodbye to Kaywana and Michael before I remembered to mention the button plates used at the front and side of the building and how they may be considered compliant with the AODA, but they are too painful for the ACPD to recommend and we instead recommend patterned concrete to achieve the same effect. Anthony was curious about the two different sized parking spaces. *Different sizes under the IASR.

In conclusion, we saw a lot of improvements over older apartments and it is a more accessible building, but work is still needed. We hope that the CityHousing recommendations coming through HWG will assist in making all CityHousing properties even more accessible.

We thank CityHousing for the opportunity to tour the building and Kaywana and Michael for their time and hospitality.

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