

Edward Lau Deputation - April 19, 2022.

Thank you, Mayor, Councilors, staff, colleagues from the Markham Accessibility Advisory Committee, and all attendees who are attending today's session for providing me this opportunity to share my views on "Accessibility."

My name is Edward Lau. My pronouns are his and him. If you happen not to have your camera on or cannot see me, I describe myself as:

- A middle-aged man in my 40s; (visual description)
- I am a Chinese Canadian with short black hair; (visual description)
- I wear a pair of glasses; (visual description)
- I am married and have 2 kids: a daughter and a son; (background description)
- We live with my parents in Markham;
- My family and I came to Canada when I were 8;
- I have a disability from birth for which, from time to time, I have trouble controlling the movements of my right body and my breathing rhythms;
- My sister has autism.
- My mother does not speak English;
- My father owned a business in Markham for 25 years before he retired. He used to work 12 hours a day and 6 days of the week.

My parents chose, and subsequently, my wife and I continue to choose Markham as our home because we feel safe raising our kids in this city. My wife and I don't have to fear that my kids going to school will be bullied, denied, or rejected because of their ethnocultural background. My parents do not have to fear that when taking my sister to public places, they will be looked at differently by people with discerning expressions. There are still a few negative episodes from time to time. However, those situations are infrequent and irregular. For myself, I can attest that I have not been asked at any social setting in Markham in recent years to:

- lift my arms up to showcase my disabilities on how unstable my body is,
- be reminded that I may have forgotten to take my medications, &
- be suggested that getting my driver license is a gift from the government if it is not from heaven.

My family's sense of safety for living where we are comes from our collective experiences of interacting with people. Culture is about how people interact with each other. Good culture motivates people to stay, come and grow while bad culture can do exactly the opposite.

Good culture combined with modernized infrastructures make our city a great place to live.

A key attribute of a good culture is "Accessibility". The concept may be called differently at different points of history, but the fundamental has not changed.

Accessibility is about achieving equality to opportunities.

It is a public good that benefits everyone: you, me, he, she, they, them, and us. We are all human beings. We all get old, and things can happen to us at any moment of time whether it is: good, bad, intended or not intended. Making buildings (like the City Hall), infrastructures (like the transportation system), programs (sport programs) and services (snow removal or building permit services) more accessible will benefit all of us in one way or another.

When accessibility is not being embraced, the people with disabilities are often being impacted first and foremost. One example is, as our Provinces are opening for economic recovery from COVID, many of the arts, social and employment programs, and services for people with disabilities are not yet opened.

The principles of accessibility include:

- (a) all persons are to be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities.
- (b) all persons have the same opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have regardless of their disabilities.
- (c) all persons have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disabilities.
- (d) all persons have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities.
- (e) laws, policies, programs, services and structures have taken into account the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons.
- (f) persons with disabilities are being involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services and structures.
- (g) the development and revision of accessibility standards and the making of regulations are being done with the objective of achieving the highest level of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

If our city has all those principles embedded in our city's DNA, why wouldn't people want to live here. Why wouldn't our businesses continue to grow and why wouldn't the value of our properties continue to rise in a healthy manner.

While there is no dispute about the concept and principles of accessibility or equality to opportunities (for example, all Markham citizens should have equal access to the parks and recreational programs. Drivers and bikers should have equal rights to use the roads.), when we speak with residents, businesses or the public, their answers can be extremely divergent.

This has a lot to do with the fact that each of us came with different experiences and our needs and wants can differ dramatically. Resources are limited and therefore, what are the priorities? Some work will be done first, and others will be done later. I am not sure where accessibility is being placed at the

priority list, but in my opinion, it is an important topic because it has a direct impact on our living quality and ensuring accessibility is a basic human right and it is legislated.

Based on intuition and my personal experience where I live in Markham, work in the GTA and volunteer for the disability community since I was 16, I believe the City is doing well in terms of embracing accessibilities. The following are some of the opportunities that I am exposed to while living in Markham.

- I purchased a home in Markham and have other investments.
- I have always been employed ever since I completed my undergraduate degree at Western University where I did my major in commercial aviation management and economics.
- I completed a Master of Arts in Public Policy and Administration in 2009 part time where my employer paid for my education.
- I voluntarily helped a Markham based charity to conduct a qualitative research study of a needs assessment for Chinese people with intellectual disabilities and their families in the GTA. The studies were funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
- I am, or was, the board of director for Community Living Toronto, APTUS for People with Complex Disabilities and Community Living York South.
- I fund and organize string orchestra concerts for musicians with and without intellectual disabilities in Markham for 10 years.
- I am a member of the Markham Accessibility Advisory Committee and a Chair of the Outreach Subcommittee.
- I get to take my kids to competitive swimming or hockey at various Markham community centers a few times a week.

As a member of the Markham Accessibility Advisory Committee, I was particularly impressed by the thoroughness of how the draft City's diversity action plan was being developed. The process involved was well documented which includes Research, Discovery, Community Engagement and Design.

I was also impressed that the various communities were consulted. To name a few, the consultation included communities of: Ethnic Origins, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ and more.

The action plan included shared values such as inclusion, diversity, belonging, and measurement. Measurement is a challenging piece for which I am very happy to see. It is an important piece that enhances accountability. The diversity action plan further states the different pillars and themes that were generated from the development process. The goals and recommended actions are clearly stated under each theme.

All to say, I am very impressed and congrats to the staff who orchestrated this process.

Accessibility is a continuous improvement process. In my final remarks, I like to share a couple points for your kind consideration in addition to what I shared about the diversity action plan.

1. It is important to have automatic door openers that work at all facilities.
2. There are heavy glass doors at City facilities that do not have working automatic door openers
3. Hand driers in some public washrooms require the users to reach into the machine. It might be hard for those who have challenges standing.
4. It is important to have spaces available to rent at reasonable pricing for performing arts, birthday parties, music rehearsal for all our communities including persons living with disabilities.
5. Sufficient availability of disability parking is important for us to use City services and amenities
6. It is important that accessibility be taken into account when designing, evaluating and monitoring facilities, programs, services.

As a member of the Markham Accessibility Advisory Committee,

It might be beneficial to:

- Have a high-level accessibility policy in plain language that states Markham's commitment to accessibility. If it hasn't been done so, the policy should be signed by the accountable executive and be placed at a highly visible location for staff and members of the public to see. If the diversity action plan is being accepted by the council, I think this is the document that I am looking for.
- Have the MAAC terms of reference reviewed and updated as required.
- Have a documented process for (1) identifying tangible and intangible barriers, (2) establishing priorities, and (3) creating and implementing an accessibility audit plan against the applicable requirements that is based on risk. The draft diversity action plan has done that at the high level for which I am glad. At the advisory committee level, perhaps we can follow those footprints.
- Have a central depository database for receiving and retaining information pertaining to accessibility for good succession planning.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity for me to share my views.

Edward Lau

Member of the Markham Accessibility Advisory Committee.