



Report to: Development Services Committee

Date Report Authored: June 21, 2011

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**SUBJECT:** Accessibility Design Guidelines, Final Report  
**PREPARED BY:** Shirley Marsh x6900

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1) That the staff report and presentation titled Accessibility Design Guidelines, Final Report, dated June 21, 2011, be received;
- 2) And that the Accessibility Design Guidelines, Final Report June 2011, be approved by Council;
- 3) That the Accessibility Design Guidelines be integrated and coordinated with other Town policies, regulations, manuals, and design guidelines as appropriate;
- 4) That staff continue to inform and work with Council, staff, developers, consultants, the community and others to implement the Accessibility Design Guidelines;
- 5) That staff may revise the Accessibility Design Guidelines from time to time as necessary;

And that Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Accessibility Design Guidelines is a comprehensive resource document consisting of detailed criteria, standards and guidelines for planning and designing accessible environments.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to obtain Council approval of the final Accessibility Design Guidelines (Attached in Appendix A).

**BACKGROUND:**

Council adopted the original "Joint Municipal Guidelines for Accessibility" in 1998. Since that time, the province enacted new legislation, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA, 2001), followed by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005). In general, the ODA/AODA requires municipalities to prepare an Accessibility Plan and 'identify, remove and prevent barriers faced by people with disabilities'. Markham's first Accessibility Plan was prepared in 2003, and it has been updated periodically with the latest being completed this year. One of the objectives stated in the Accessibility Plan was to update the former Joint Municipal guidelines for Accessibility to meet various ODA/AODA requirements, as well as future built environment standards expected to be completed by the Province.

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In 2006, Associated Planning Consultants Inc. (APC), in joint venture with SPH Planning and Consulting Limited (SPH), were retained by the Community Services Commission to conduct the initial review of the former Joint Municipal Guidelines for Accessibility and to update the guidelines to meet the requirements of the ODA/AODA. Additionally, the Asset Management Department retained SPH to conduct accessibility audits of key Town facilities. The audits utilized the Guidelines as formal evaluation criteria to determine accessibility levels at Town facilities including The Town Civic Centre, and Miliken Mills Community Centre. Diverse locations and environments were audited to evaluate the accessibility guidelines and start the formal process of identifying and removing barriers in order to address accessibility issues across the Town's portfolio of buildings and sites.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The Town retained SPH Planning and Consulting to conduct the current update to the Accessibility Design Guidelines. The work expanded on and improved the information in the previous guidelines to produce a comprehensive resource document covering technical accessible design criteria relating to broader planning, design and development processes.

### Guideline Organization

The Guidelines identify accessibility criteria organized in the following sections:

- Common Elements
- Exterior Environments
- Interior Environments
- Systems, Controls and Communications
- Special Facilities and Spaces

This organization groups key elements and features of the built environment together in order to facilitate how the information is used, while also removing and eliminating redundancy of information identified in previous versions. The Guidelines recognize four key factors; diversity, barrier removal, provincial direction and changing demographics. Through implementation of these guidelines, the Town will be able to provide practical solutions that optimize accessibility for new construction and/or renovations of existing facilities and sites. The identification, prevention and removal of barriers related to Town facilities will demonstrate leadership to encourage the private sector to follow with both existing and new facilities.

The application of the Guidelines set out in this document is driven by Provincial legislation with formal requirements established for municipalities to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. This legislation includes the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA, 2001), the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005) and the Ontario Building Code (OBC). Combined with the development of the Town's updated Accessibility Design Guidelines, this legislation supports the

Town's position and ongoing initiatives to be a proactive leader in addressing accessibility issues through improved design and by developing inclusive communities.

The update of the Guidelines was guided by a cross-commission team consisting of the Accessibility coordinator and representatives from Operations, Recreation, Library, Engineering, Urban Design, Planning, Building and Corporate Communications. Development and refinement of the document was based on input obtained during consultation with staff representatives. In addition, the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) was consulted throughout the development of the Guidelines. The consultation process determined ways to implement the Guidelines across various departments, combining the needs of Staff responsible for addressing various accessibility issues, as well as meeting the needs and expectations of AAC members and the broader community.

Examples of key updates to the Guidelines are summarized as follows:

- Ensuring all guidelines and technical design criteria meet the requirements of applicable legislation;
- Incorporating accessibility best practices relevant to the municipal context;
- Establishing linkages with the Town's development application procedures, based on Staff consultation conducted;
- Providing new sections that relate directly to Town processes, programs and initiatives
- Developing Checklists that are integrated in relevant sections of the Guidelines to assist Staff with implementation;
- Integrating diagrams, graphics and photographs for clarity; and
- Through extensive reorganization and re-writing of the Guideline content to simplify information for legibility and to make the document more user-friendly for diverse audiences.

As accessibility requirements evolve, in response to Provincial legislation, updating the Town's Guidelines will continue. These Guidelines are a "living document". Future changes may be related to the Ontario Building Code (OBC) and requirements for the design of the Accessible Built Environment Standards (ABES) stemming from the AODA. Currently, the Accessible Built Environment Standards (ABES) have not been approved and have been publicly released in Draft format only and are undergoing the process of Ministry review and approval. No formal timeline has been identified by the Province for release of formal ABES. The development of the Town's updated Guidelines integrated as much information as possible to address the accessibility criteria and information expected in future ABES to the greatest extent possible based on the Consultant's experience.

Although the design criteria within the Guidelines may differ from the requirements of the Ontario Building Code (OBC), the intent is that OBC requirements are used as the baseline and minimum requirements that are to be applied as part of the design process. These guidelines reflect an optimum level of accessibility for the design of the built environment, going beyond the requirements of the OBC.

## **Application and Implementation**

The Accessibility Design Guidelines are a key component of the Town's Accessibility Strategy. The application and implementation of these guidelines will be evaluated on a project-by-project basis by Town staff, in collaboration and consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including the Markham Accessibility Advisory Committee, as required. Further, the Guidelines will also be available for use by external applicants/agencies involved in new construction and/or redevelopment projects through the site plan, subdivision plan, landscape plan, parks planning, design and maintenance processes.

In summary, the Accessibility Design Guidelines are:

- Mandatory for all new construction and renovations (e.g. retrofit, alteration or addition) to existing facilities, owned leased, or operated by the Town of Markham;
- Encouraged to be implemented by other sectors and organizations within the Town of Markham; and
- Recognized as addressing the needs of diverse users, with or without disabilities to ensure inclusive environments for all.

The intent is for the Town to demonstrate proactive steps towards making all facilities and sites accessible, prior to formal approval of the Provincial accessibility standards for the built environment (e.g. ABES). When approved by the Province, these Accessible Built Environment Standards (ABES) will be applicable to both the public and private sector. The Town of Markham recognized that addressing accessibility issues as early as possible in the planning and design phases of new construction and redevelopment projects is the most effective way to ensure accessible and inclusive environments.

### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE: (external link)**

Costs associated with implementing these guidelines will be incorporated into future budgets for construction/renovations.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

The Accessibility Design Guidelines will build on other Town strategic priorities, such as the Accessibility Plan, Greenprint Sustainability Plan, Diversity Action Plan, Integrated Leisure Master Plan, Growth Management, Transportation/Transit, Environment, Municipal Services, and Parks, Recreation, Culture and Library Master Plan/Public Safety and Diversity.

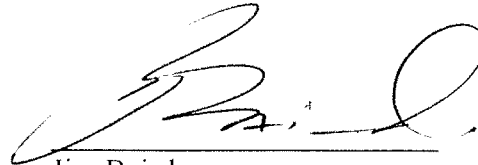
### **BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:**

All internal departments within the Town and also the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) have been involved throughout the development of the Guidelines and will continue to be involved as required.

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**RECOMMENDED BY:**

  
Ronji Borooah  
Town Architect

  
Jim Baird  
Commissioner of Development

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Appendix A – Accessibility Design Guidelines