

### REPORT FROM THE DEPUTY CLERK AND ACCESSIBILITY COORDINATOR

Re: Annual Budgetary Consideration for Accessibility and 2025 Priority List

#### RECOMMENDATION

That the 2025 Ad Hoc Budget committee consider the 2025 Budget Priority List for Accessibility when reviewing the Operating and Capital Budgets; and

That the 2025 Ad Hoc Budget committee consider an annual commitment towards accessibility for AODA compliance through dedicated funds between \$25,000 to \$50,000.

#### BACKGROUND

At the October 2024 Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meeting the committee proposed a proactive approach of a plan to present an annual priority list of accessibility projects to be incorporated into the annual budget planning process. The intent is to ensure a structured, ongoing commitment to accessibility improvements across the city.

#### ANALYSIS

Staff sought recommendations from the AAC of what priorities/projects they would like to see built in to the 2025 budget. Below is the list of priorities in order to be considered for the capital budget:

1. OPP station ramp and entryway
2. Bus stop at the hospital (alternative stop or bring current stop up to AODA compliance)
3. Transit system phased approach (implementing an on-demand service and pricing for new busses)
4. Westview Park (accessible upgrades to parking area, washrooms, pathways, seating areas, lighting, playground)
5. Automatic doors installed at Municipal facilities where there is public access
6. Entryway at City Hall (drop off zone at bottom of the ramp, better signage)

The proposed accessibility projects reflect a strategic, phased approach to improving accessibility across the City. Each priority area addresses barriers identified through community feedback, compliance requirements, and operational considerations. They also align with the Accessibility Audits conducted by the committee in 2024.

In addition, the City is currently undergoing a review of their Multi-Year Accessibility Plan which will help with future planning and budgeting allocations for accessibility initiatives.

Accessibility and inclusivity are essential components of a thriving, equitable community. By prioritizing accessibility, the City of Elliot Lake demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that all residents, including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations, can fully participate in public life and access city services. Enhancing accessibility not only improves quality of life but also promotes social integration, community engagement, and economic participation.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Municipalities often integrate accessibility considerations into their broader departmental budgets and capital projects. For instance, the City of Peterborough addresses accessibility priorities such as sidewalk infrastructure, transit systems, and park access through annual departmental budget requests and external funding opportunities, implementing these priorities as budget and resources permit.

Additionally, municipalities may seek external funding to support accessibility projects. The Municipality of French River, for example, received a \$20,000 Inclusive Community Grant from the Ontario government to create an accessible trail.

Setting aside funds each year specifically for accessibility projects provides the resources needed to make steady progress toward a more inclusive community. This proactive approach allows the City to address immediate needs while planning for future improvements, aligning with provincial accessibility standards and anticipating evolving community expectations. Annual investments also enable each city department to plan and incorporate accessibility enhancements within their operations, ensuring that accessibility becomes an integral, ongoing priority.

The 2025 Ad Hoc Budget committee, in consultation with department directors, should establish a fixed fund dedicated to AODA compliance and legislative requirements. This fund should be replenished annually to support ongoing improvements and ensure adherence to accessibility standards. A dedicated budget will provide flexibility to address priority projects while facilitating long-term planning for accessibility upgrades across municipal services and infrastructure.

## **LINKS TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

This is linked to the City's Strategic Plan through Infrastructure and Capital Projects. The City is committed to making community spaces accessible, regardless of ability and encourages all to do the same. The Accessibility Advisory Committee will continue to be consulted in the design and planning of new facilities and the renovation of existing facilities.

## **SUMMARY**

By maintaining a dedicated budget for accessibility, the City of Elliot Lake can guide itself toward becoming a more inclusive and accessible community, ultimately fostering a more welcoming and equitable environment for all.