Access Advisory Committee

2010 ANNUAL REPORT

Passing the Torch



It's become an annual ritual for me to reflect on the year and the progress the committee has made on furthering accessibility issues in the City of Winnipeg.

This year's reflection is particularly meaningful as 2010 marked my last year as chair of the committee. Councillor Ross Eadie will be chairing and I'm pleased and proud to pass on the proverbial torch to such a passionate accessibility advocate. The shift is a natural progression; when Councillor Eadie was voted in, it felt like the right thing to do to have a person with a disability chair this committee. While it's hard to leave something I've put so much time and energy into – not to mention enjoying the work and the people I've met as we've built relationships within the civic structure, government and in the community – I hope to still be involved in accessibility issues but from a different perspective.

In the past twelve years, Winnipeg has established a reputation as a national leader in accessibility issues. We were the first city in Canada to adopt a universal design policy. We were also at the forefront with the introduction of a sign language interpreter policy (where an interpreter will be provided for all city services). Along with establishing – and continually revising and updating – universal design standards and guidelines, we hired a Universal Design Coordinator who works with civic departments to ensure accessibility for all citizens is a priority.

Relationships have been at the core of these movements and achievements. It was through discussion and education about the importance of accessibility that we could make things like a fully accessible council chamber a reality. We've really come a long way in the way accessibility is integrated into the planning of our city. I'm proud of that. It means the citizens of Winnipeg, regardless of their abilities, size or age, have the opportunity to access, communicate with and participate in their city and community.

Among these relationships was the introduction of a provincial representative on the AAC. That has resulted in greater discussion and partnership where appropriate on projects like visitable housing.

So many things have changed and it's exciting to realize that when a group of people are dedicated to a common cause, progress is possible. My thanks to the Mayor for his support, to City Council and civic administration for their commitment…and of course to the AAC members for offering their time, expertise and perspective. Chairing the AAC is one of the things I'm most proud of in my work as a City Councillor. Thank you for the opportunity to work with all of you to make our city a city where barriers are removed and addressed to the benefit of all.

Accessibility Awards Celebrate Universal Design

The number of submissions for consideration has grown. The partnerships within the projects submitted speak to the community commitment to creating barrier free access.

The calibre of projects submitted featured impressive elements of universal design. Those elements challenge the selection committee during site visits and interviews. While the discoveries are exciting and the impact accessibility has on lives is truly amazing, picking winners is the tough part.

But most of all, architects, designers and planners are more aware of the benefits of universal design than they ever have been.

That's largely in part to the education component that goes hand in hand with universal design. The creation of Universal Design Standards helped provide a basis from which to provide developers and architects with clear parameters about what universal design is and how to achieve it.



It's not a surprise that since its inception in 2002, the annual Accessibility Awards have grown considerably. Everyone eagerly awaits the annual celebration of the best and latest in universal design and barrier free access.

At the heart of this year's awards was celebrating what worked and the good elements that enhanced a facility's accessibility. Of the 19 projects submitted for consideration, seven accessibility awards were presented, along with one honourable mention and one special recognition award. Many of the projects were community-based, which shows that the message of accessibility is reaching beyond the government sector.



A feature of the awards ceremony was a presentation by Matthew Sapolin, Commissioner for the Mayor's Office of New York for Persons with Disabilities. He spoke of universal design from a large urban perspective – namely of a shift from basic accessibility to a more universally designed approach to the built environment - but also from the perspective of a person with disabilities himself.

"It's exciting to commend the project owners, designers and architects for their commitment to the spirit of universal design and the impact it has for everyone," said Jenny Gerbasi, AAC Chair.

The AAC invited Matthew Sapolin to present workshops to city staff and university architecture and design students. He also participated in a meeting with Minister Jennifer Howard (responsible for persons with disabilities) to discuss his 20 year experiences with the Americans Disabilities Act (ADA) and the potential new legislation in Manitoba similar to the ADA.

PROJECT	HIGHLIGHTS
Haese residence	A wooden ramp that showed accessibility can also create beauty
Parsons/Sunabacka Residence	Combining function, environmental friendliness and technology to create a home where everyone can be comfortable
ACCESS Downtown	Exceeding accessibility requirements with roomy examination rooms and accessibility features for a wide variety of users
North Centennial Recreation and Leisure Facility	A retrofit of a swimming pool with ramp and numerous safety and accessibility features
University of Manitoba Welcome Centre	A truly welcoming environment for a wide variety of abilities, thanks to elements like tactile wayfinding features, low seating blocks, and ample parking facilities.
University of Winnipeg Community	Along with accessible dorm rooms on each tactile signage enhance accessibility for all
Manitoba Indigenous Cultural and Education Centre	Major renovations to enhance accessibility including a zero grade entrance, great use of light, and inclusive seating

Honourable Mention

Green Heart Housing Co-op	This visitable housing project has design elements which address basic accessibility in every suite

Special Recognition

Habitat for Humanity	This collaborative project highlighted how important planning is when creating an accessible home with assistive equipment

What People Said At Community Consultations

Seventy-five people had answers to key questions posed on September 9th at the Millennium Library. Invitees from stakeholder groups spent an afternoon in table discussions that included identifying the three most important accessibility issues for the City of Winnipeg, identifying barriers, resources, and solutions.



Transportation (both transit and Handi Transit), programming, accessible and affordable housing and employment were at the top of people's minds when it comes to accessibility. Other issues, such as audible traffic signals, more accessible and diverse signage and tactile markings were also raised during the discussions. Educating staff so they better understand the issues surrounding accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The information and insight presented at the community consultation contributed to the strategic plan the AAC created for 2011/12. The issues raised by the citizens of Winnipeg that fall under the capacity of the City of Winnipeg's programs, services and information were considered in the developing of a plan to begin addressing what can be changed to the benefit of all.

Changing committee

There has been a great deal of activity and movement within the AAC. We welcomed some new members – Louis Gaudry and Sam Unrau, Larry Baillie and Shannon Keys – whose fresh perspectives and interest will be an asset to the committee.

We also said good-bye to long-term members. Doris Koop, Liz Mitchell and Ken Shachtay have offered invaluable insight during their six-year terms. We'd like to extend our thanks to them for their commitment and passion to furthering accessibility issues.

The AAC would also like to welcome its new Chair, Councillor Ross Eadie. A long-time advocate for persons with disabilities, Councillor Eadie offers a unique perspective on accessibility issues. He was one of the original AAC members present when the initial terms of reference were drafted in 1989. Welcome!

Retrofitting



For several years now, the Accessibility Program has meant an annual budget of $350,000 from the city budget is earmarked for the upgrading of buildings and elements to remove barriers to access. This past year, projects included:

- detectable warning surfaces
- a TTY device for the City Clerk's office
- upgrades to the Margaret Grant Swimming Pool (a ramp, washrooms)
- enhanced entrance and washrooms at community centres
- accessible book return chutes at libraries
- LCD screens at five libraries
- automatic door openers and more

Accessibility An Eye Opener

Louis Gaudry first heard about the AAC at a health and wellness conference at the Victoria Inn. His meeting with committee coordinator Chris Sobkowicz was an eye opener. “I never really paid attention to accessibility all my life. Now I’m more aware of my surroundings,” he says.

Seeing accessibility as something that could potentially affect anyone – even those without a disability – because of age or an accident such as in a broken leg where crutches are needed; was a turning point for Louis.



He’s now looking at buildings with a more discerning eye to see if they are accessible. What he sees is a shift toward accessibility in the past couple of years. Things like electric doors make life easier for Louis but he can see there’s still room for more work to be done.

That’s why he’s recently joined the AAC. To learn more about accessibility, meet interesting people who are just as passionate as he is about removing barriers and to see what kind of change he can be a part of. And to be a part of helping people understand the importance of incorporating universal access into new buildings, so they can get it right the first time.

Louis is a public speaker with an interest in leisure. He is the Manitoba Chairperson for the Active Alliance for Canadians with Disabilities. He witnessed firsthand what an adapted golf cart can do through the Manitoba Adaptive Golf Coalition.

“If we lived in a perfect world, we wouldn’t need to do this work. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world and every change can make a step forward,” he says. “Change doesn’t happen tomorrow. Such is life. It gets you thinking how things can be changed to make things more accessible.”

Thank you

Accessibility issues, universal design and barrier free access…these were new concepts when the AAC was initially established in 1989. Since then, much progress has been made to educate civic leaders and administration and the general public on these issues.

In the past decade, the AAC has established Winnipeg as a national leader in accessibility. Other communities are looking to what we’re doing without formal legislation (but holding our selves accountable for creating and establishing accessibility standards).

This is possibly due to the relationships built and fostered over time plus the support of Mayor Katz, city council and civic administration moving accessibility forward and for that we are grateful. The AAC also extends thanks to the community stakeholders and agencies, including the Province of Manitoba, who share information, insight and collaborate with us on important issues.

What We Plan to Work On

With input from the citizens of Winnipeg, the AAC has created a to do list for the coming year. The list includes:

- supporting the development and delivery of education about accessibility for a variety of groups
- continuing to meet with provincial ministers to foster commitment on joint projects, including new and sustainable legislation on accessibility.
- reviewing and updating the Accessibility Design Standards.
- participating in most major City of Winnipeg projects to ensure Accessibility Design Standards are being implemented.
- advocating for online accessibility for a variety of users byworking to revamp the AAC and City of Winnipeg's websites.
- building and expanding relationships and partnerships with stakeholder groups and agencies.
- educating year-round about the importance of Universal Design with an annual celebration That features the presentation of Accessibility Awards.
- working within the Our Winnipeg key directives to ensure accessibility is sustainable and prevalent in projects and programs.

Financial Report 2010

Revenues

Council Funding	$ 69,000.00

Expenditures

Meeting Costs	$ 5,710.00
Administrative Support	$ 40,000.00
Administrative Supplies	$ 4,085.00
Special Projects	$ 3,088.00
Communication	$ 12,017.00
Total	**$ 64,900.00**
Balance	$ 4,100.00

Committee Members

Mayor Sam Katz (Ex-officio)

Councillor Jenny Gerbasi (Chair)

Councillor Harvey Smith (Alternate)

Larry Baillie	Louis Gaudry
Janet Hunt	Jacqueline Jasinski
Shannon Keys	Doris Koop
Liz Mitchell	Sandy Popham
Ken Shachtay	Sam Unrau

Province of Manitoba Representative
Colleen Waters (Disabilities Issues Office)

Committee Coordinator - Chris Sobkowicz

Universal Design Coordinator - Judy Redmond

City Clerk's Department - Krista Kunz

Winnipeg

311 City Services

TTY: 986-2200

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