

STAFF REPORT: Administration



REPORT TO: Council
MEETING DATE: March 9, 2009
REPORT NO.: CEDC.09.02
SUBJECT: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act- Information and Communications Standard Response
PREPARED BY: Lisa Kidd, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report, CEDC.09.02, "Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act- Information and Communications Standard Response", for information purposes.

B. Background

Several laws in Ontario address accessibility and some requirements have existed since the 1980s. Since then, progress on accessibility has been made in some areas and by some organizations.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) was passed with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, is a law passed by the Ontario legislature that allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility and to enforce them. The standards are made into laws called regulations, and they provide the details to help meet the goal of the AODA. The AODA is the foundation on which the standards are built.

The province is in the process of unveiling these proposed standards. They are as follows:

- customer service
- transportation
- information and communications
- built environment
- employment

The province asserts that the purpose of the accessibility standards is to move organizations in Ontario forward on accessibility. The standards will set requirements in a number of key areas and will be reviewed at least every five years. New requirements may be added.

Late in 2008, the Ontario government released the initial proposed Accessible Information and Communications Standard. A standards development committee, composed of representatives from the disability and business communities, developed the proposed standard.

The proposed standard outlines how businesses and organizations may be required to provide accessible public information in various formats such as online, print, verbal and digital.

In February 2009, the province sought comments with respect to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)- Information and Communications Standard. The Blue Mountains staff submitted a response to the proposed standard (see Attachment 1). The response is closely aligned with the response submitted by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

The committee will reconvene to review and consider the input they received during the public review period. Then, the committee will submit a final proposed standard to the government for consideration as law.

To date, all but the built environment standards have been released for public review.

The Blue Mountains staff have recently formed an AODA committee consisting of staff to undertake the following:

- Review the proposed standards;
- Draft formal responses to the province;
- Review implementation processes for these standards;
- Consider the financial impact of these standards; and
- Communicate the above to Senior Management Team and Council.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan

6.6 Implement processes for continuous improvement

D. Environmental Impacts

None.

E. Budget Impact

According to the KPMG study, the net cost to implement the Communication and Information Standard is estimated between \$1.345 million and \$3.805 million dollars for a municipality similar to our own. Based on this estimate, the cost to implement the standard would mean a 40% increase to our tax rate.

F. Attached

None

Respectfully submitted,

Signature



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Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Information and Communications Standard: A Response

The Blue Mountains fully supports accessible municipal services for its residents and visitors. We must find financially viable ways to remove and prevent barriers that limit the participation of our community members and staff members with disabilities. We recognize the valuable contribution these people make to our community both socially and economically.

That said, The Blue Mountains has significant concerns with respect to the cost to implement the proposed Information and Communication Standard and the financial pressure this will put on the Town tax rate, and ultimately, our ratepayers.

According to the KPMG study, the net cost to implement the Communication and Information Standard is estimated between \$1.345 million and \$3.805 million dollars for a municipality similar to our own, in terms of population and location. Of particular concern is the cost to implement business enterprise system upgrades, estimated between \$1.24 million and \$3.62 million. Municipalities utilize a broad range of software systems to ensure the delivery of municipal services to ratepayers. The cost to upgrade these systems to the proposed standard would be significant. Moreover, the current strain on our human resources would be exacerbated with the need for staff to research new systems, train and implement new business enterprise systems in accordance with the proposed Information and Communication Standard.

In closing, while the Information and Communication Standard is an admirable component of the AODA, it is cost prohibitive. The net cost to implement this would mean a 40% increase to our tax rate. With growing financial pressure on our community residents, downloading this kind of cost to the taxpayer is not conceivable. Significant financial and human resources support from upper tier governments will be required in order to deliver communication and information in accordance with the AODA proposed standard.

We are committed to removing and preventing barriers to persons with disabilities and are happy to work with the province to find financially viable ways to achieve this. Thank you for the opportunity to respond. We look forward to your response.

The Blue Mountains will be a progressive four season community, building on its agricultural and recreational features, offering a healthy and supportive lifestyle to a diverse range of residents, businesses and visitors.