

Mayor and Council, City of Oshawa
c/o City of Oshawa Clerks Department
November 29, 2023

Dear Mayor Carter and City of Oshawa Councillors.

Re: 2024 Budget Allocation to Oshawa Accessibility Advisory Committee (OAAC)

Allocate the \$9200 proposed

As a member of the OAAC, I have been delegated on behalf of the Committee to share concerns regarding the proposed 2024 Budget allocation which is significantly less, exactly 54.3% less, than that which the OAAC approved and submitted for their work in 2024. I am writing to request that the full OAAC budget proposal of **\$9200** be allocated as was originally submitted with work plan. I make the following comments with all due respect to staff, members of the OAAC and City Council.

At the meeting of October 17, 2023, the OAAC discussed the 2024 OAAC proposed work plan and proposed operating budget and approved same. The total OAAC request was for **\$9,200**. We have been advised that the budget that the Oshawa Accessibility Advisory Committee has been slashed by more than half, to **\$4200**. As the only legally mandated advisory committee, it is not only extremely disappointing to see this action, but also, frankly, disrespectful to the members of the committee, who have committed and continue to commit many hours and years in service to the important work of the OAAC and the City of Oshawa.

Reasons to Reinstate the OAAC Proposed Budget of \$9400

1. Cuts reflect an attitudinal barrier to achieving accessibility

Underfunding of the OAAC reflects a significant **attitudinal barrier** to addressing issues for disabled people, and their caregivers on the part of the City of Oshawa Council. Cutting the budget to this committee undermines the work of the committee and sends a **terrible message to the community that accessibility is not a priority of the City of Oshawa**. Is this the message you want to send to the community?

As you know, the committee is made up of volunteers, many of whom have spent many hours over multiple years dedicating their time to removing barriers and improving accessibility in the City of Oshawa. The expertise of persons on this committee includes many with lived experience as disabled persons, as caregivers or as persons working in support of persons living with disabilities. Many are advocates for disability justice. Their work in reviewing plans for public and private developments, and renovations to city facilities and programs, in questioning staff and in proposing changes to improve accessibility within the city as well as to promote the work of the committee at various City events held through the year **demands support not cutbacks.**

Attracting people to the important work of the OAAC is increasingly difficult as the potential of this committee to effect change is **undermined by underfunding.** Those who have served on the committee for multiple years and are re-recruited to participate with both the lived and caregiver experience to contribute. witness year after year that **Oshawa is not barrier free**, and that the City takes very gradual steps to improve. This is extremely frustrating and has demanded incredible tolerance and patience on the part of OAAC members who are aware of pressing needs for change. Faced with these continual attitudinal barriers through underfunding of the OAAC, current and potential city volunteers will be disengaged and deterred from active participation, and commitment.

2. 2024 is the final year to achieve the AODA Goal of Universal Accessibility for all by Jan 1, 2025 – Cuts will not help to achieve this goal!

2024 is the final year to achieve the goal of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act for a fully accessible Ontario by January 1, 2025. Universal accessibility for all is far from achieved in Oshawa **and the City of Oshawa needs to step up to this responsibility** by fully finding the OAAC and other accessibility improvements as opposed to stepping back from this responsibility. This is the year to make change and that **demands funding and action by the City of Oshawa and its OAAC.**

3. Recognize that Population Growth, Development Pressures Increase OAAC Work and Requires Maintenance of Current Funding or Increases

Oshawa is a rapidly growing city meaning the population of people with accessibility issues is also rapidly increasing. Statistics show **roughly 2.9 million**

Ontarians are living with a disability — more than one-fifth its population. In a growing city, with increasing development within its borders and a growing residential tax base, it is difficult to understand why the City is choosing to balance its budget on the back of a committee whose work benefits so many residents and visitors who benefit from an accessible Oshawa. Adding to this, the growing number of development applications for approval, the work of the committee is continually expanding not decreasing. If one fifth of Oshawa's population is estimated to experience accessibility issues, do you want to give the message that this is unimportant and burden the OAAC with increasing workload without proper resources?

4. Rationale for cuts? \$9200 for 2024 is same as \$9200 for 2023 - no increase requested

Rationale given: “based on Corporate-wide reductions to assist with taxpayer affordability and prior year actuals”

The corporate wide reduction is to proposed expenditures and not actual revenues and expenditures which are increasing. The budget the OAAC proposed of \$9200 is modest and barely recognizes the potential work and impact of the OAAC were it properly resourced to undertake tasks on behalf of the City. We are the taxpayers, and we fund the City. Many persons living with disabilities, their caregivers and seniors are on the front lines of the devastation caused by limited incomes (ODSP, Ontario Works, Canada Pension Plan- Disability, Workers Safety and Insurance Board payments, Old Age Security) in face of rising costs. What you call taxpayer affordability is experienced as hunger, poverty, homelessness, or inadequate housing for many persons in Oshawa. At the same time, the high costs of housing being built in Oshawa means there is an ever-enlarging property tax base. **If the City of Oshawa could accommodate the OAAC budget of \$9200 in 2023 which was not fully expended, it should be easily able to accommodate the exact same OAAC budget of \$9200 as is proposed for 2024.** The OAAC is not requesting an increase but the status quo. **This is a reasonable and responsible approach.**

Prior year actuals do not reflect the fact that the committee activities were considerably reduced during the height of the COVID pandemic and continue to recover as COVID persists. The prior year actuals do not reflect the full potential

activities of the committee. In other words, the City of Oshawa saved money from prior OAAC operating budgets during the height of the pandemic, and these can be reallocated to fund the OAAC now.

5. Honour The Vision – AODA Goal and Mandate: Universal Accessibility by 2025

The goal of the Accessibility for Ontarians Living with Disabilities Act (AODA) passed in 2005 is to achieve accessibility in Ontario by January 1, 2025.

The purpose of the AODA is to develop, implement and enforce standards for accessibility related to goods, services, facilities, employment, accommodation, and buildings. The target date for reaching this goal is no later than January 1, 2025. **The AODA is social justice legislation that is meant to redress a history of discriminatory exclusions by identifying, removing, and preventing discriminatory barriers.**

In 2023, this goal went through a legislative review with a report by Rich Donovan. “...Appointed by the province in early 2022 to conduct a legislative review of the [AODA] act, [he] said little progress has been made since the law was passed in 2005. That stems from design flaws in “services, products, technology, buildings, infrastructure, careers, processes and human imagination,” he said. (Global News Canada, March 10, 2023)

“People with disabilities still consistently face barriers in their everyday experiences, from navigating city streets, to applying for jobs, to accessing public transit and government services,” wrote Rich Donovan. (Global News Canada, March 10, 2023)

“Entities serving Ontarians with disabilities need to change ... There is no plan that adjusts behaviours to achieve an accessible Ontario.” Rich Donovan (Global News Canada, March 10, 2023)

In their submission to the consultation on the development of the 2023 Donovan Report, ARCH Disability Law wrote the following:

“Accessibility matters because it is a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society.”^[4] Ten years ago,

the Second Independent Reviewer, Mayo Moran, observed that “[a]n inclusive society of the kind that the AODA aims at will be healthier and more robust along many dimensions.” (ARCH, May 26,2023)

It is “...the **role of government to create, strengthen, and enforce accessibility standards and reform standard development processes to achieve the goals of the AODA.**” (ARCH, May 26,2023)

as well as “...the need to **engage in a continual process of barrier removal that is informed by the lived experience of persons with disabilities,**” (ARCH, May 26,2023)

“Going beyond compliance requires obligated organizations to take steps **to listen to the experiences of persons with disabilities.**’ (ARCH, May 26,2023)

To effect the vision of the AODA 2005, you must fully fund the budget proposal of \$9200 without hesitation and look for what the City can do to enhance the work of the OAAC and accessibility in 2024 on the lead up to the goal of a Universally Accessible City of Oshawa by January 1, 2025.

6. 2024 City of Oshawa Celebrates its 100th Anniversary & OAAC Participates

It is anticipated that there will be several promotional events during 2024 to celebrate the City of Oshawa’s 100th Anniversary in which the OAAC will be invited to participated. This will result in **extraordinary costs** in addition to the regular work of the committee compared to the current year. Costs for promotional materials, transportation, and volunteer expenses need to be funded as per request and not cut considering this. As previously indicated, the OAAC did not ask for an increase to accommodate such extraordinary expenses. The OAAC asked for the same budget as in 2023.

SUMMARY – Fund the proposed budget of \$9200

For the reasons given above, I am asking on behalf of the OAAC that you **fund the work of the OAAC as proposed for 2024, in the amount of \$9200** at a minimum. To repeat this is a humble request that you:

- 1. Examine your own attitudes to addressing barriers for persons living with disabilities in Oshawa that you may unknowingly be perpetuating.**

- 2. Strive to achieve and honour the AODA Goal of Universal Accessibility for all by Jan 1, 2025 in the City of Oshawa. .**
- 3. Recognize that Population Growth, and Development Pressures in the City of Oshawa increase OAAC Work and require maintenance of current funding or increases**
- 4. Recognize that there have been past unspent budgets of the OAAC and underfunding of OAAC that can be utilized to pay the 2024 status quo budget request**
- 5. Recognize increased participation opportunities by OAAC during 2024 100th Anniversary Celebrations in the City of Oshawa with funding required.**

Thank you for considering this request. The OAAC requests an acknowledgment of receipt of this communication and anticipate a positive response to this request.

Sincerely,

Julia McCrea

Member,

Oshawa Accessibility Advisory Committee

Email: M.F.I.P.P.A. Sec 14(1)