

Attachment A

Background:

It has been brought to the Accessibility Working Group's (AWG) attention that Council is considering the formation of a single advisory committee for all equity seeking groups, including persons with disabilities. The current Framework draft mentions this and staff have informed the AWG that they will not be presenting a Terms of Reference for AWG's successor when the final Accessibility Framework is presented to COTW in March, contrary to Council direction of January 26 2017.

Council members who have served as AWG Council liaisons have witnessed just how diverse and far reaching disability issues can be and how little most individuals really understand the breadth and extent of accessibility considerations.

During the AWG's mandate, much progress towards accessibility has been made but there is still a long way to go. A well informed intersectional approach could have value in the long run but in the short term, it will only serve to slow or even reverse this progress unless an accessibility advisory committee is struck to continue the work of the AWG during the transitional period.

There are several City projects in their initial stages which have reported to Council that they will continue consulting with the AWG yet the AWG will cease to exist as early as the end of April. Even if an Equity Advisory Committee was struck by this May, it would not be in a position to continue providing knowledgeable advice for many months.

It is presumed that an Equity Advisory Committee would only have one or two representatives from the disability community and the likelihood of these individuals knowing much about disabilities other than those that they experience personally, is not very high. The risk is that the understanding of accessibility will revert back to what is generally well known and accepted and this would be a step backwards.

Sharing an agenda with several other equity seeking groups will mean that accessibility issues may not be addressed in a timely manner and opportunities for barrier prevention may be missed. The AWG has met almost every month for 4 ½ years, with a full agenda at each meeting, often having to defer agenda items. The AWG has also been asked to consult on a regular bases as the multitude of City projects move forward, and have often scheduled additional meetings to accommodate these requests.

(Note: The majority of current AWG members have served this entire 4 ½ year period. Other advisory committee members serve for only two year terms but The AWG members have recommitted several times as the timeline for the Framework has been extended and the drafting of new terms of reference and recruitment of new members has been postponed.)

It is believed that the threshold for application of an Equity Lens will be quite high, yet many of the accessibility concerns addressed by the AWG have been at the detail level and often for small scale projects which would probably not meet the equity threshold.

Undoubtedly, these negative effects will be lessened by the presence of the Accessibility Coordinator, but it will be many months before the position is filled and several more before the Coordinator is up to speed with both the historical and current issues.

There will inevitably be a significant gap in time between the current AWG and its replacement with one or two representatives on the proposed Equity committee. To bridge this gap and provide continuity, The AWG is recommending that Council strike a temporary accessibility advisory committee, its mandate to be reviewed annually. AWG would also recommend that such a committee should include one or two current AWG members who could help guide the new committee and the Coordinator, once hired, through this transition.

AWG can possibly see the day when participation as part of a larger Equity Advisory Committee may serve persons with disabilities adequately but until the Accessibility Coordinator is up to speed, staff is trained and the recommended practices and policies are put in place through the Accessibility Framework and Action Plan, a dedicated advisory body is needed.