

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES POLICY C602 UPDATE

Recommendation

That Community and Public Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That Council Policy - Accessibility for People with Disabilities C602A, as set out in Attachment 1 of the May 12, 2025, Integrated Infrastructure Services report IIS02803, be approved.

Requested Action		Council decision required	
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle		ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals	
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.		Healthy City	
City Plan Values	BELONG		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community safety and well-being
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	C602 - Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy		
Related Council Discussions	None		

Executive Summary

- Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy C602 is updated to align with the Corporate Policy Framework and reflect an ongoing commitment to providing equitable access and opportunities for people with disabilities.

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- Key updates to Policy C602 include a commitment to making Edmonton an accessible city, the addition of new guiding principles and the use of plain language.
- The updated Policy C602A will be implemented using an updated procedure that sets out roles, responsibilities and guiding principles.
- The key implementation activity includes developing and implementing Corporate Accessibility Plans. The 2025-2029 Plan is expected to be in place by Q3 2025.

REPORT

According to the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disabilities, 27 per cent of Canadians aged 15 years and older, or 8 million people, identified as having one or more disabilities limiting them in their daily activities. In Alberta, the percentage is 27.5, up from 21.7 per cent in the previous survey, conducted in 2017. In the Edmonton Census Metropolitan Area, 28.5 per cent of people aged 15 years and older identified as having at least one disability. The number is expected to grow with an aging population.

A disability can be permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, and not all disabilities are visible. People with disabilities face many barriers restricting their independence, choice and ability to participate in their community to the fullest. These barriers may be attitudinal, systemic, physical, technological or communicative. Accessibility refers to the absence of barriers and is fundamental to the quality of life, well-being and engagement of individuals with disabilities.

The Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy C602 was approved in 2019 to ensure people with disabilities have equitable opportunities to access, participate in, and contribute to the community. This Policy is a commitment to identifying, removing and preventing barriers, enabling Edmontonians to fully participate in their city.

Policy C602 has been reviewed and updated to align with the current Corporate Policy Framework and to continue the progress towards making Edmonton a more accessible city where residents with disabilities feel welcome and have a sense of belonging. Accessibility promotes equity and benefits everyone, regardless of age or ability.

Current Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy C602

The purpose of the Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy C602 is to:

- Guide the development and implementation of City policies, civic engagement, programs and services, communications and technology, employee services and infrastructure, ensuring individual needs and diverse abilities are being considered.
- Ensure people with disabilities are treated with respect and have equitable access and opportunity to participate in and contribute to City policies, civic engagement, programs and services, communications and technology, employee services and infrastructure.

The current policy is accompanied by Administrative Directive A1472, Accessibility for People with Disabilities, and an administrative procedure.

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Overview of Policy Updates

This Policy update reflects learnings over the last five years and includes:

- Alignment with the current Corporate Policy Framework
- Introduction of the commitment to be an accessible city
- Revisions to ensure the use of plain language
- Clearer commitments
- Addition of new guiding principles
- Minor revisions to definitions for alignment with current best practices

Attachment 1 includes the updated Policy, C602A. As per the Corporate Policy Framework, the Council Policy will be reviewed every four years.

Because of the number of changes to content and Policy C602's layout, the differences between the previous and proposed Policy C602A are presented in Attachment 2's table, in lieu of a redline version.

Implementation

The previous Administrative Directive A1472 and Procedure provided guidance on implementing the Policy. To align with the Corporate Policy Framework, they have been updated and combined into a single procedure, Accessibility for People with Disabilities.

The updated Procedure will continue to guide Administration in activating the Council Policy and will be finalized upon Council approval of the updated Policy C602A. Procedure updates include:

- Adding guiding principles to reinforce a commitment to being an accessible city.
- Defining clear roles and responsibilities for implementing the Council Policy.
- Increasing the Corporate Accessibility Plan term from three years to four years.
- Adding additional processes and guidelines for staff.

The updated procedure, Accessibility for People with Disabilities, is included in Attachment 3..

A key policy implementation activity is the development and implementation of corporate accessibility plans. The plans include actions to remove accessibility barriers to City programs, services, practices and spaces. The 2021-2024 Corporate Accessibility Plan had 70 actions and ended in June 2024; 46 actions were completed and 19 are ongoing. Moving forward, the term of each plan will be four years to align with the timing of the four year budget cycle. Administration is currently working on the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan, which is expected to be in place by Q3 2025.

Budget/Financial Implications

Approval of the updated Policy C602A itself does not have any budget implications. Corporate accessibility plans are developed using existing resources. Any budget requirements for the implementation of actions included in the 2025-2029 Plan will be incorporated into future capital and operating budget requests.

Legal Implications

The approval of the updated Policy C602A does not have any specific or direct legal implications and does not materially change the City's practices. The City continues to abide by its legal duty to accommodate in accordance with legislation and collective agreements.

Community Insight

Administration completed two phases of engagement for this Policy update and the development of the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan. The engagement collected feedback from:

- The Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Edmontonians with visible and invisible disabilities, including physical, sensory and developmental disabilities
- Family members and caregivers of a person with a disability
- Organizations that advocate for and/or provide services to people with disabilities
- City of Edmonton employees
- The general public

Phase 1 Engagement

Administration engaged with the public to assess awareness of the City's commitment to accessibility and understand barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing City programs, services, practices and spaces. In addition to an online survey, workshops were held to engage directly with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, Chrysalis Society, Edmonton Association of the Deaf, Canadian Council of the Blind and the Centre for Autism. The survey had more than 1,700 respondents, and more than 100 participants attended the facilitated workshops.

Fifty-six per cent of survey respondents were aware of the City's commitment to accessibility, and 43 per cent agreed that accessibility for people with disabilities in City programs, services and spaces has improved in the past few years.

The survey results indicate that a large percentage of people with disabilities experience barriers or challenges when accessing City services such as City programs, infrastructure, public transit and the hiring process. Feedback on barriers was used to develop actions for the Corporate Accessibility Plan.

The following list shows the percentage of survey respondents who indicated experiencing barriers. Respondents refer to those who indicated having a disability and have used the related City service.

- 76 per cent of 324 respondents experienced barriers when accessing City programs
- 76 per cent of 546 respondents experienced barriers when using public streets or open spaces
- 69 per cent of 416 respondents experienced barriers when using public transit
- 64 per cent of 157 respondents experienced barriers when applying for a job with the City
- 46 per cent of 478 respondents experienced barriers when accessing City facilities
- 54 per cent of 546 respondents experienced barriers when accessing City information, interacting with the City or participating in engagement events

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In addition to public engagement, an internal engagement was also conducted to gather staff feedback. Staff engagement helped identify key themes, including the need for clearer implementation guidelines, training resources, and alignment with workplace accessibility standards. These insights were considered in the Policy updates and the development of draft accessibility actions for the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan.

The feedback from Phase 1 engagement informed updates to the Policy, Procedure and accessibility actions for the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan. Key changes influenced by engagement include:

- Adding guiding principles to support making Edmonton an accessible city.
- Simplifying policy language for clarity and inclusivity.
- Adjusting the Corporate Accessibility Plan term from three to four years.
- Refining the implementation roles and responsibilities.
- Adding a specific reference to invisible disabilities.
- Adding language around workplace inclusion for employees with disabilities.

Phase 2 Engagement

As part of Phase 2 engagement, both the public and City staff were consulted on the updated Policy and proposed actions for the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan.

The public survey received over 1,400 responses, with broad support for the City's efforts to improve accessibility. While most respondents welcomed the Policy updates, some expressed concerns that funding accessibility initiatives could lead to higher taxes and questioned whether these efforts primarily benefit a smaller segment of the population.

Survey findings from respondents with disabilities:

- 81 per cent agreed the updated Policy statement clearly outlines Edmonton's commitments to a more accessible city.
- 83 per cent agreed the guiding principles aligned with the City's goal of creating a more accessible Edmonton.

Key themes from public feedback on Policy updates:

- Effective implementation is critical - ensure the Policy translates into tangible, measurable improvements.
- Accountability is essential - elected officials, staff, contractors and consultants must be aware of and responsible for implementing the Policy.
- Stronger commitment language is needed - less aspirational language was recommended for some measures.
- Success must be measurable - clear compliance monitoring mechanisms should be established.

Administration engaged with City staff to gather insights on the updated Policy, Procedure and draft actions. More than 300 staff provided input. Overall, staff expressed strong support for the Policy and the updates, particularly the use of plain language and the addition of new guiding principles. However, concerns remain regarding implementation challenges, particularly the

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availability of funding and resources. Staff emphasized the importance of integrating accessibility into budget planning and strengthening accountability mechanisms to ensure commitments translate into meaningful action.

The feedback from Phase 2 was used to refine the Policy and Procedure.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

Administration continues to work closely with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) to seek guidance, expertise and feedback on accessibility-related initiatives. Ongoing engagement with the Committee includes:

- Providing regular updates on the implementation of the current policy.
- Consulting on specific accessibility initiatives, such as the development of the Corporate Guideline on Service Dogs.
- Gathering insights on barriers that people with disabilities experience in Edmonton.

As part of the Policy update process, Administration met with the AAC to discuss the updated Policy, Procedure and draft actions for the 2025-2029 Corporate Accessibility Plan. The Committee expressed strong support for the updates and recognized a positive shift in organizational culture regarding accessibility in recent years. They also highlighted key areas for further action, including:

- Introducing regulations to require developers to incorporate accessibility in new projects.
- Increasing the availability of accessible housing across the city.
- Exploring the City's role as a regulatory body, such as requiring accessibility compliance for business licensing.

GBA+

To ensure the Policy meets the diverse needs of people with disabilities, it is crucial to understand how different identity factors intersect and interact. Disability is an intersectionality that could affect anyone at any time, regardless of any other identity factors. Other intersecting identity factors can further negatively affect the experiences of people with disabilities.

A GBA+ process was applied to the development of the current Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy. A modified GBA+ process was used to plan outreach during the Phase 1 and Phase 2 engagements. This helped to better assess how people with disabilities who have multiple intersecting identity factors are affected and experience barriers.

Several non-profit organizations that serve target populations were contacted to better understand the unique needs and challenges of those directly affected by this Policy. Data collected through online surveys was divided by intersection, i.e., disability, gender, age, ethnicity and income.

Individuals can experience multiple forms of marginalization simultaneously. Among Phase 1 survey respondents who identified as a person with a disability:

- 64 per cent are women
- 6 per cent identified as a gender minority

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- 40 per cent had an annual household income below \$60,000
- 25 per cent are above the age of 65 years

Among Phase 2 survey respondents who identified as a person with a disability:

- 61 per cent are women
- 13 per cent identified as gender minority
- 30 per cent had an annual household income below \$60,000
- 36 per cent are above the age of 65 years

Engagement data is used to assess the current state of accessibility, identify barriers that continue to prevent participation and inform actions that address the barriers. Having a policy that ensures people with disabilities are treated with respect helps create a city that is more welcoming for all.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was reviewed for environmental and climate risks. Based on the review completed, no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

Attachments

1. Council Policy - Accessibility for People with Disabilities C602A
2. Comparison of Current Policy C602 and Updates
3. Procedure - Accessibility for People with Disabilities