

Dec. 7, 2020: The Accessibility Advisory Committee has reviewed the 2021 City of London Budget Update and has no issues with the amendments. However, we would like to reiterate our concerns about the lack of funding towards accessibility, the risks it may pose, and the ableist structures it helps to perpetuate.

Please note that I have been authorized to speak on behalf of the committee, as per its Nov. 26, 2020 meeting. We endorsed a motion that would see members provide me, as Chair, with its feedback, and offered me the authority (and privilege) of drafting this letter on its behalf.

We would like to strongly state that our initial statement regarding the multi-year budget plan was one of tepid acquiescence, not any sort of endorsement. As we said when we stood before you, understanding that there were significant fiscal restrictions in place -- and this was pre-pandemic -- please don't make things worse. That's hardly a ringing endorsement. When our budget expectations are focused not on improvement or equity, but rather not making an already untenable situation worse, that should speak to the state in which our community resides.

Our City presents significant barriers to people with disabilities. Accessible transit is still woefully underfunded, there are significant access barriers (whether it's snow removal or lack of accessible paths) throughout the city, and despite all the talk about diversity and inclusion throughout the city, one lens is always excluded from these reviews.

With that in mind, I encourage you to reframe your thinking about accessibility. Instead of thinking about "How do we promote accessibility?" I would you like to reframe that statement into "How do we reduce ableism?" Accessibility is a nice word. But it's a term that allows you to justify passing things over. We would like to reframe the conversation into one that's harder to ignore. Accessibility measures combat the root issue: ableism. And we would like ableism to take its rightful place at the core of the City's inclusion and diversity lens.

The community that we represent has been systemically prevented from having equitable access to the community around us. And this continues to this day: when you allow communities to exempt themselves from simple things like having sidewalks, that is continuing an ableist structure.

We believe that there are significant risks to the City. Should someone come forward with a claim of inequitable treatment under AODA, we believe it would be challenging to dismiss those without merit. As well, the goal of AODA is for a fully accessible province by 2025. London is far from that and will not reach that goal without any sort of investment. The multi-year budget plan only serves to kick that can down the road -- but that road is coming to an end.

So, yes. We have no issues with the budget update at this time. But that does not mean we believe the initial budget is adequate. We hope that ableism becomes part of the suite of lenses through which you view all council decisions and proposals. We hope that reframing accessibility towards what it is -- anti-ableist remediation -- will see the City embrace the cause

in the same vigorous manner that it has with anti-BIPOC racism and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination measures.

We are not asking for different or special. We are asking for this City to be a community that affords all of its citizens equitable access to all parts of the community. When you endorse measures or tacitly support ongoing systemic structures that preclude members from fully participating in that community you are, in effect, choosing which citizens are allowed to be full citizens and which others must stay on the outside looking in.

That's not the London I know; nor is it the London we want to be. So I ask you to move beyond rhetoric for the sake of rhetoric; I ask you to move beyond performative solidarity when it comes to accessibility. Instead, I implore you to take tangible action against ableism and help London reach the AODA goal of universal accessibility by 2025. At some point, that requires more than just an investment of words. It requires funding, resources, and effort.

Thank you for considering my statement.

Jay Ménard
Chair
Accessibility Advisory Committee