
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CEC-03-2023 Amendment to Accessibility Staffing Hours For Consideration by Council in Committee on March 21, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

To approve a budget amendment for Capital Project 123004 – Website Redesign and Hosted Web Provided Services, specifically to increase the hours for the Accessibility Coordinator from part-time to full-time for a two year period to address non-compliance concerns raised by the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CEC-03-2023 Amendment to Accessibility Staffing Hours be received;
2. AND THAT the Accessibility Coordinator position be changed from part-time to a temporary full-time position for a two year period;
3. AND THAT the 2023 Tax Supported Capital Budget be amended to include an increase of \$21,220 to fund the first year of additional 0.31 FTE staffing requirements for the Haldimand County website redesign and hosted web provided services project, as outlined in Report CEC-03-2023;
4. AND THAT an additional \$21,220 be included in the 2024 Tax Supported Capital Budget to fund the second year of additional 0.31 FTE Staffing requirements;
5. AND THAT a Council-approved Initiative be included in the 2024 Tax Supported Operating Budget related to this additional staffing, with a levy impact of \$0.

Prepared by: Trish Cardwell, Manager, Customer Experience and Communications

Reviewed by: Cathy Case, General Manager of Corporate & Social Services

Respectfully submitted: Cathy Case, General Manager of Corporate & Social Services

Approved: Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) sets out a process for developing and enforcing accessibility standards. The Act mandates that as of January 1, 2021, all organizations' internet websites must conform to World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA (except for live captions and pre-recorded audio descriptions). The web content guidelines define how to make web content more accessible to people with a disability.

Every two years, organizations are required to submit a mandatory report to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility with responses to questions pertaining to various requirements in the Act. Immediately following the approval of the County's 2023 Capital Budget, the Ministry issued a non-compliance order to Haldimand County as the website content currently does not meet legislated WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards. The volume of required remediations to fix the issues were too large to address with the current website tool and resources available. In February 2023, Council approved Capital Project

123004 – Website Redesign and Hosted Web Provided Services in order to secure a third-party provider to rebuild the website on a platform that will meet all required web guidelines including accessibility requirements. Due to this capital project being initiated, the Ministry has granted the County an extension to become compliant with the legislative requirements by December 2024. In the interim, staff have implemented a temporary tool to assist in identifying and remediating any accessibility issues in the current website while the new website is being redesigned and built. These efforts require extra staff time to review and approve all suggested remediations. A Compliance Plan has also been developed, including a list of key milestones and timelines associated with the website redesign and rebuild initiative, in order to meet the December 31, 2024 deadline.

In order to be able to respond to the work required to move towards compliance, staff propose that the Accessibility Coordinator position be temporarily increased by 11 hours per week for a 2 year period to assist with additional associated work required to meet compliance timelines.

BACKGROUND:

Every two years, staff are required to submit an Accessibility Report to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility to verify that they are compliant on various sections of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). In the 2021 AODA Compliance Report submitted to the Ministry on December 14, 2021, staff responded to the Information and Communication Standard question, advising the Ministry that the County's website did not fully comply with their requirements.

Since submitting this report in December 2021, the County hired a part-time Accessibility Coordinator in July 2022. The Accessibility Coordinator is to act as the subject matter expert in accessibility and provide leadership in achieving and maintaining a state of compliance of AODA standards, in addition to several other accessibility functions. Staff have taken steps to attempt to remedy the non-compliance issue including:

- fixed the automatic transition of objects in the web banner to meet compliance standards;
- installed a user overlay plug-in tool called "Userway" which enables the end user to access a multitude of modifications for accessibility on our webpages including features such as screen reader compatibility, increased text size, modified contrast and colour modifications, and spacing options on our current web Content Management System (CMS) tool;
- implemented the "Userway" tool report that identifies accessibility issues and suggests remediations that need manual approval to fix; and
- received Council approval on February 2, 2023 to embark on a new capital project initiative to rebuild the County's website on a third party hosted web CMS solution that will ensure the County website conforms to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA as legislated.

On February 6, 2023, the County was contacted by the Compliance and Enforcement Unit from the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility to follow up on the reported website non-compliance in 2021. The Ministry requested the submission of the 2023 Accessibility Report by end of February 2023 (typically due in December 2023) in order get an update on how the County has met the compliance requirement related to the Information and Communication Standard.

Staff advised the Ministry Case Worker that the current website is still not in compliance, but that Council has recently approved a capital initiative to redesign and rebuild the County website on a third-party web content management system. The third-party host will be required to provide a web solution designed to meet the criteria outlined by the Ministry to meet legislated WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards ensuring web content is accessible. The Ministry has granted the County an extended deadline to rebuild the website ensuring it will meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards by December 31, 2024.

A Compliance Plan has been developed, including a list of key milestone activities and timelines for the website redesign and rebuild initiative, in order to meet the December 31, 2024 deadline. In the interim, staff must also continue to conduct regular monitoring and maintenance of the current website. Staff must still submit the 2023 Accessibility Report in December to report progress made on milestones outlined in the Compliance Plan. The bi-annual Accessibility Report is a significant undertaking in a normal year and will be even more intensive due to the compliance issues being monitored by the Ministry.

If compliance of the Information and Communications Standard within AODA is not met by the extended deadline of December 31, 2024, there is a risk that Haldimand County could be fined up to \$100,000 per day for non-compliance.

ANALYSIS:

Currently, the Accessibility Coordinator is funded through the base Tax Supported Operating Budget as a 0.69 FTE, resulting in 24 hours per week, to act as the subject matter expert for all County accessibility matters including as the staff resource to the Accessibility Advisory Committee. Since hiring the Accessibility Coordinator, he has been the main liaison with members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and staff to provide input around AODA legislation as it relates to any work being done in Haldimand County. He is responsible to monitor and assist with conducting associated work included in the approved Accessibility Plan and prepare any related reporting requirements. Although the incumbent has already made positive advancements for the County related to accessibility, with the current workload and part-time hours, it will be difficult to maintain continued success in all areas of accessibility including website compliance.

As a result of the Ministry issued non-compliance, the Accessibility Coordinator will need to work closely with staff managing the website project to ensure key milestones outlined in the Compliance Plan with the Ministry are achieved. Additional time will also be required in the interim to address accessibility issues by monitoring “Userway” reports, completing any suggested manual remedies on the current live website and tracking these remedies for reporting within the 2023 Accessibility Report to the Ministry. This will be in addition to the existing tasks and responsibilities of the position.

Staff are recommending increasing the Accessibility Coordinator hours from 24 per week to 35 per week, essentially moving the position from part-time to full-time, for the duration of the website project – 2 years. The additional 11 hours per week will allow for the above outlined responsibilities to be addressed adequately, ensuring Ministry compliance by end of 2024. This will not only mitigate the risk of future fines, but it will also ensure full compliance of the County’s new website which will allow accessible options for residents and other website users.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Staff are proposing that the associated costs for additional wages and benefits would require an increase to Capital Project 123004 – Website Redesign and Hosted Web Provided Services in the amount of \$42,440. As this impact would take place over a two year period, the proposed amendment to the approved 2023 Tax-Supported Capital Budget would be for \$21,220, and would be funded from the Capital Replacement Reserve – General, outlined as follows:

Project 123004 - Website Redesign and Hosted Web Provided Services	2023 Approved Budget	Additional Funds Required	Proposed Revised 2023 Budget
Capital Expenditures:			
Computers – New	\$5,000	\$0	\$5,000
Software/App Development & Acquisitions	\$120,000	\$0	\$120,000
Furniture - New	\$10,000	\$0	\$10,000
Staffing Costs	\$127,000	\$21,220	\$148,220
<u>Total Capital Expenditures:</u>	\$262,000	\$21,220	\$283,220
<u>Financing:</u>			
Capital Replacement Reserve - General	\$137,000	\$21,220	\$158,220
Capital Replacement Reserve – Information Technology	\$29,000	\$0	\$29,000
Federal Capital Grant Funding	\$96,000	\$0	\$96,000
Total Financing:	\$262,000	\$21,220	\$283,220

Similarly, the proposed impact to the 2024 Tax-Supported Capital Budget would be as follows:

Project 123004 - Website Redesign and Hosted Web Provided Services	2024 Forecasted Budget	Additional Funds Required	Revised 2024 Forecasted Budget
2024 Staffing Costs (Funded by CRR – General)	\$127,000	\$21,220	\$148,220

The approved 2023 Tax-Supported Operating Budget included a Council-approved Initiative related to project management costs for a two-year website project. Staffing costs associated with the 2nd year of the project will appear in the 2024 Operating Budget as a Council-approved initiative, but since it is funded from the capital budget, the levy impact is \$0 in each year.

Should the recommendations in this report be approved, a Council-approved initiative will also be included in the 2024 Operating Budget related to this additional 0.31 FTE compliment, which will also result in \$0 impact to the tax levy in each year.

If it is determined that the Accessibility Coordinator position should remain full-time beyond 2024, the 0.31 FTE would need to be presented at that time for consideration through the budget process. If not, the position will revert back to a permanent part-time status.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

By providing a compliant website, the County is allowing accessibility of municipal information to members of the public who live with a disability.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: Yes

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

None.

ATTACHMENTS:

None.