

Shelburne forming Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility committee

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Town of Shelburne is dissolving its accessibility advisory committee (AAC) and plans to amalgamate it with the Town's diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) committee.

During their meeting on May 30, Shelburne Council approved a recommendation from Town staff to dissolve the accessibility advisory committee as of October 2022, and incorporate it under the portfolio of the DEI committee for the 2022 to 2026 term of council. The committee would subsequently be renamed as the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) committee.

While the recommendation was to incorporate the accessibility advisory committee with the DEI committee for the next council term, Councillor Walter Benotto urged for the immediate amalgamation of the two committees.

"Having started with process 222 years ago I want to see it continue, whether I'm there or not," said Benotto. "I want to make sure that people with accessibility [needs] at least have a voice somewhere, making sure that their needs are met within the town."

The accessibility advisory committee aims to make the Town of Shelburne barrier-free for all residents and focuses on raising awareness about the accessibility needs of people with disabilities such as communicational, intellectual, sensory, physical, and mental health related.

Despite the committee's accomplishments, they've struggled to secure volunteers and in many cases have not been able to hold meetings due to the lack of members needed to make quorum.

"Up until now we have never been able to have a meeting, which to my mind doesn't allow for the work of accessibility to go ahead. It should continue on and there is enough interest I think with at least one person to make sure that accessibility moves on," said Benotto.

The accessibility advisory committee has been instrumental in a number of local initiatives including; the creation of an accessible viewing place at the CDRC, which allows people with wheelchairs or another disability to view events on the ice; the installation of audible crosswalks at intersections such as Main Street and Owen Sound Street, Greenwood and Main Street, Owen Sound and Col. Phillips Drive, and soon to be Main Street and County Rd. 124; and the replacement of play ground equipment has accessible features.

Denyse Morrissey, chief administrative officer for the town, recommended waiting for the amalgamation until the next term of council to allow staff time to make updates to procedures.

"We really would appreciate the time to come up with an updated terms of reference for the next term of council to ensure that those people that are considering as volunteers to be appointed are fully aware of the new scope because it would change quite drastically," said Morrissey.

The option of amalgamating the accessibility advisory committee and DEI committee is due in part to the fact that accessibility is often directly linked with DEI commitments and initiatives.

The two committees will be incorporated as a pilot project for the 2022 to 2026 term of council with a sub-committee for accessibility created under the newly named Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Committee.