

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Merrickville-Wolford Multi-year Accessibility Plan. While we appreciate this opportunity, this review does not serve as an endorsement of the plan by The Merrickville Lions Club.

The Merrickville Lions Club has identified accessibility as one of the foundational principles for the club and is committed to supporting and engaging in initiatives that increase accessibility for persons with disabilities within our community. Through our Accessibility Committee we have, for example, created and distributed an accessibility checklist for our use and for others to provide guidance on areas to consider for having greater accessibility when hosting events (included in an attachment); we have purchased accessibility signage so that temporary event parking can be identified for those with disabilities; we sponsored the first accessible wagon ride at the 2024 Christmas in Merrickville-Wolford celebration and we endeavour to host our events in more accessible locations. We are working with the Merrickville Legion to assess and act on opportunities to improve building accessibility.

We congratulate the municipality of Merrickville-Wolford on the creation of an accessible website and the installation of actuators (door openers) at locations within the community. Positive, concrete progress is essential to achieving a more accessible community for all.

We also recognize the stated commitment to accessibility within the document: *“The Municipality is committed to working towards creating a barrier-free, accessible environment for all who call Merrickville-Wolford home, or for those who come to visit and experience all this community has to offer. This Multi-Year Plan provides a road map on how the accessibility standards will continue to be monitored and achieved.”*

In terms of the 2025-2029 accessibility plan, we offer the following comments:

We strongly encourage the municipality to be more comprehensive and more specific in identifying opportunities to prevent and remove barriers. The current document is vague and does not commit to specific deliverables nor does it offer strategies. It does not live up to its promise to provide a “road map” on how accessibility standards will be monitored and achieved. As such, we would like to see the stated commitment better translated into an actionable plan that identifies the tangible outcomes to be achieved, the budget to be allocated and/or sought, and the steps, timelines to do so.

It is not clear within the plan if the Municipality intends to conduct a formal, expert-led assessment of the accessibility needs of the municipality but to our knowledge, this has not yet taken place. The plan would benefit from being anchored in meeting needs that would be identified through such an expert assessment, and we encourage the municipality to have an assessment undertaken.

We also encourage the municipality to establish an Accessibility Committee with membership from the community, including persons with lived experience, and with experts in accessibility that would have a mandate to work with municipal staff and leaders to achieve a more strategic, implementable accessibility plan for Merrickville-Wolford.

We further encourage the municipality to ensure that accessibility improvements are reviewed and tested by experts and those with lived experience and to incorporate the need for review/testing within the plan. For example, installation of actuators on doors should ensure that they are located in an appropriate place for those with mobility impairments. Website improvements should undergo usability testing and so forth.

While we recognize that progress must be incremental given fiscal contexts and human resource capacity, we see several missed opportunities within the plan to achieve greater accessibility in the near to medium term and offer our input below. While acknowledging that needs and priorities would be identified through a formal, accessibility needs assessment, we encourage the Municipality to:

- Identify and act on barriers to access at the Municipal building such as:
 - More clearly identifying the accessible parking space and the accessible ramp.
 - Ensuring that parking is not permitted adjacent to the ramp so that access is not blocked.
 - Replacing the entry actuator with an updated version.
 - Creating a more accessible reception space such as by lowering the counter.
- Commit to rather than “consider improving” the onboarding and continuous accessibility training for employees to ensure customer service needs are being met and by specifying how that will be accomplished.
- Make internal accessibility policy, procedure and training documents available to the public.
- Identify the source(s) of training packages being delivered to staff (AODA training packages for example).
- Onboarding training for new employees – identify customer service training within this plan and how accessibility standards are addressed within. As a few examples, public works employees will be trained on the importance of maintaining accessible entrances and staff who interact directly with the public will receive training on how to provide service for persons with disabilities as part of their onboarding.
- Be clear on the date by which **all municipal forms** will be made accessible for residents to use.
- Make the municipality’s accessibility commitment and the option to receive documents in alternative formats much more prevalent on the website.
- Develop and deliver an accessibility awareness space on the website.
- Conduct a plain language review of the website and implement changes by identified date.
- Identify a place for and create, with appropriate signage and enforcement, accessible parking spots within the downtown core.
- Ensure proper curb access for the accessible parking spots so that persons with mobility disabilities can access the sidewalks in the downtown core.
- Repair existing corner curbs in the downtown core to ensure that persons with mobility disabilities can access the sidewalks in the downtown core.

- Create a proper accessible parking spot at the Merrickville Public Library with updated signage, appropriate levelling of the spot with consideration to paving the parking area.
- Implement braille writing on signs in key areas
- Create a pedestrian crosswalk with audible indication of status
- Actively seek partnerships within the municipality and with other levels of government to achieve greater accessibility of public spaces.
- Seek partnerships with the local business community to identify and to mitigate any municipal impediments to achieving greater accessibility to local businesses.
- Commit to identifying, with a staggered plan to implement, rather than “explore” options of enhancing the municipal recreation amenities to increase accessibility for more residents. Ensure that prior to any implementation, there is review and testing as appropriate by experts and those with lived experience.

We welcome further opportunities to engage with the Municipality on achieving a more accessible Merrickville-Wolford.

Sincerely,

Sarah Telford, Chair

On behalf of the Merrickville Lions Club Accessibility Committee