

To: Mayor & Members of City Council

From: Kate Leatherbarrow, City Councillor

Re: 2023 Accessibility Conference

AIM

To provide Council with information and updates from the University of Guelph OpenEd Annual Accessibility Conference.

BACKGROUND

National Accessibility Week 2023 was May 28th-June 3rd. The annual Accessibility Conference welcomes both accessibility novices and experts, and encourages attendees to build communities and exchange ideas. "The conference is committed to hosting a high-quality and affordable event that is an inclusive and equitable experience for both presenters and attendees."

COMMENTS

Last week I spent two days in the City of Guelph attending the annual Accessibility Conference. I was joined by one other committee member from Woodstock's Accessibility Advisory Committee, Mr. Allison Gowling. The conference took place inside Rozanski Hall which is located in the centre of the University of Guelph campus. As an attendee you had a variety of session options to choose from. 5 session rooms and each session running for 45 minutes to an hour. The speakers and panellists were enthusiastically receptive to question periods and were also approachable after each session.

When we think of the term 'disability' we often think of a vision or mobility disability. Throughout this conference experience it was clear that disabilities present in different forms and impact many. Based on Canada's Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022, in 2017, 1 in 5 people in Canada aged 15 years and over (roughly 6.2 million people) have at least 1 disability. There are different types of disabilities, and they can range from mild to severe. 1 in 3 Indigenous people have a disability which is a much higher rate than the general population. Policy, employment, experiences, and services must strive to do more than the bare minimum. More than what the standard requires. The sessions focused on the education system, The AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act), workforce, web design, and offered a variety of tools to provide a more inclusive experience for those living with a disability. Tools to eliminate barriers in our communities.

One of the sessions I attended on the first day of the conference was: How can we make parks more accessible? Speaker Dr. Tilak Dutta from KITE, Research Institute, University of Toronto, was knowledgeable and engaging. His past work includes studies of scooter manoeuvrability to make recommendations for changes to building codes as well as the design of anti-collision systems for power wheelchairs to give more wheelchair users greater independence. Dr. Dutta spoke about making trails accessible for users and their families. "It is not just a handful of people who need user-friendly public spaces". In 2021 Dr. Dutta

received a \$1.2 million grant from Accessibility Standards Canada to investigate the experiences of park users (National Parks) and create a list of recommendations on how to improve accessibility for individuals with disabilities. It was noted that with a wide range of disabilities, the model 'one size fits all,' is not necessarily best practice. Longer accessible trails, sensory trails, updated information on websites so guests can plan their trip, accessible washrooms, and websites with ALT text, are just some ways everyone can enjoy parks more! Barriers both big and small impact whether people get outside, and this can have a huge impact on mental health.

I am grateful to be on the Woodstock Accessibility Advisory Committee and to have attended this conference. Something to always keep in mind, the more we learn and the more feedback we seek, the stronger our communities will be.

RECOMMENDATION

That Woodstock City Council receive the report regarding the 2023 Accessibility Conference as information.