

## REPORT

### Council

**Meeting Date: December 18, 2023**

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**FROM:** Strategy, Policy and Communications Department

**DATE:** December 5, 2023

**SUBJECT:** **Draft Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024–2028**

**LOCATION:** Town-wide

**WARD:** Town-wide

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#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the draft Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028 be received.
2. That staff consult the community on the draft plan in the first quarter of 2024 and report back to Council in the second quarter of 2024, with a final Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024–2028 incorporating comments received from Council at its December 18, 2023 meeting and comments received from the community.

#### **KEY FACTS:**

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The town is committed to advancing a culture of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) for its workforce and community.
- The town has been progressively advancing and reporting on IDEA improvements and initiatives for 20 years, including more recent reports in 2020, 2021, and 2022 that laid out the work underway or expected in areas such as:
  - Implementing the 2017 Inclusion Audit
  - Comparing employee demographics to community demographics; and
  - Developing an Action Plan with eight key deliverables to be used as inputs for the development of an IDEA Multi-Year Plan that would build on progress to support a workplace and community where all feel respected and welcome.
- To support the town in this work, staff partnered with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) Consulting Inc., an external organization leading in diversity and inclusion, to conduct a current state inclusivity

assessment of the town. The assessment was received by Council in 2022 and included a review of the town's policies and procedures, an analysis of respondent data from community engagement, a staff survey on demographics and sentiments of inclusion, and benchmarks to global standards.

- CCDI Consulting Inc. subsequently developed the town's first formalized plan for inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility that integrates actions for both the town's workforce and community, under an overall objective and mandate, spread across four key goals: Foundational (incorporating IDEA in all areas of the organization); internal (attracting and retaining staff); community (reflecting our inclusive culture throughout the range of community services); and sustainability (communicating, tracking, and measuring our efforts).
- This report provides the draft Town of Oakville Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028.
- Staff will obtain feedback from the community on the draft plan in the first quarter of 2024 and report back to Council in the second quarter of 2024, with a final Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024–2028 incorporating comments received from Council at its December 18, 2023, meeting and comments received from the community.

**BACKGROUND:**

The town has been reporting on diversity initiatives and accessibility improvements for 20 years.

Key advancements in this commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility include:

**2003:** Council adopted the three key goals put forth by its Diversity Working Group: to develop a program that demonstrates the town's commitment to an inclusive environment; to identify and implement programming to meet the diverse needs of the community; and to consider staffing requirements to carry out the functions of dealing with diversity issues. In response to these goals, the town established an internal Diversity Steering Committee to encourage diversity initiatives and coordinate annual reporting to Council.

**2007:** Council approved a motion making Oakville a signatory municipality of the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination. The network changed its name in 2019 to the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities. This network brings together municipalities that want to improve their policies against racism, discrimination, exclusion and intolerance. In Canada, there are 82 municipalities that have joined the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities. Being a signatory municipality has helped demonstrate the town's commitment to promoting a culture of inclusion.

**2012:** the town established its first Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2012–2017 to outline the actions the town would take to meet the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), prevent and remove barriers, and the timeframe. A Corporate Accessibility Steering Committee was established to work on the town’s plan and ensure the town met its requirements under the AODA.

**2014:** the town established an Age-Friendly Committee to lead the age-friendly baseline assessment initiative comprising staff, members of Council and a community member. The concept of age-friendly was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002 in response to the aging population.

**2016:** staff began working with members of the Indigenous community on opportunities for the town to participate in the Truth and Reconciliation process to highlight and advance Indigenous history, heritage and contributions to the Oakville community.

**2017:** the town partnered with Optimus | SBR and conducted an inclusion audit of town programs, services, practices, and policies, developed a corporate inclusion statement and identified five key recommended actions and initiatives for a corporate plan to support inclusion in the workplace and community.

Also in 2017, the town established a Corporate Inclusion Advisory Group, bringing the town’s existing staff committees on diversity, accessibility, and age-friendly under one advisory group to better align town efforts to support inclusion. The committee reported to the Office of the CAO with representatives from all town commissions to ensure legislative and corporate requirements were planned and implemented.

The town also launched its second Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2018–2023. The new plan builds on the accomplishments of the town’s first plan and incorporates updated requirements under the AODA’s Accessible Customer Service Standard.

**2018:** staff presented a report to Council on progress to implement the five recommendations from the 2017 Inclusion Audit.

Staff developed an Oakville Inclusion Lens as a tool to support inclusion of all individuals and communities. The lens has three main questions to prompt staff to consider inclusion in their work: (1) What am I already doing to promote inclusion? (2) Who might be impacted and who is not included in the work I’m doing? (3) What changes or recommendations am I going to make to modify the potential impacts? Attached to the lens is a guide to help staff work through these questions with several checklists to support a deeper dive into inclusive considerations. The five checklists included are: working together; programs, services and projects;

communications; public engagement; and inclusive hiring. Oakville’s Inclusion Lens has been sought out by other municipalities who have requested to use it as their own. The lens is attached as Appendix A.

**2019:** the town maintained its commitment to diversity and accessibility for its workplace and community through Council’s 2019–2022 Strategic Plan. One of the key areas of focus was dedicated to an Engaged Community: fostering a community environment that engages residents of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

**2020:** At its meeting on June 22, 2020, Council passed the following motion:

- Whereas the Town of Oakville is committed to promoting a culture of inclusion and diversity by providing accessible and equitable programs, services and facilities to residents and employees and,
- Whereas the Town of Oakville champions inclusion and diversity through increased opportunities and meaningful engagement to support a workplace and community where all feel respected and welcome
- That staff report on the implementation of the inclusion and diversity audit, initiatives already undertaken and further inclusiveness initiatives that can be taken. That staff report on employee demographics and compare this with community demographics and report on initiatives that can be taken to help ensure that the employee pool reflects the demographic make-up of the community.

**2021:** Staff presented a report to Council on progress to implement the recommendations from the 2017 Inclusion Audit, initiatives already undertaken and ongoing, and a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan for 2021–2022 that builds on progress to support a workplace and community where all feel respected and welcome. The action plan established eight key deliverables to lay the foundation to develop the town’s first Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan:

1. Policy review to further support Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan inclusion in the workplace and community
2. Research best practices and conduct benchmarking
3. Build on initiatives already undertaken and recommendations from the 2017 Inclusion Audit
4. Survey employees and compare to community demographics
5. Establish diversity and inclusion measures
6. Facilitate meaningful conversations with community groups and organizations on inclusion in Oakville
7. Facilitate community engagement with the entire Oakville community including residents, residents associations, and businesses on inclusion in Oakville
8. Assess current state and finalize recommendations for a multi-year plan

To support the town completing its foundational work, staff partnered with CCDI Consulting Inc., an external organization leading in diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

**2022:** In January 2022, staff provided Council with a memo to outline progress of the eight key deliverables.

In August 2022, staff presented a Diversity and Inclusion Current State Inclusivity report to Council which outlined the key findings from the eight key deliverables. The report and findings are attached as Appendix B to this report.

The full 2021 census data sets were released, and staff updated our community demographics celebrating the town's diversity, attached as Appendix C and available on the town's website. The town experienced several notable changes to its demographics since the last census data release in 2016. The town saw a significant increase in its racialized population at 42 per cent, up 11 percent from 31 per cent in 2016. Newcomers to Canada was up five per cent in Oakville at 41 per cent in 2021 from 36 per cent in 2016. The top five languages spoken most often at home (other than English) also changed to: Mandarin, Arabic, Spanish, Urdu and Korean. The 2021 census was the first time religions observed were included. In Oakville the most observed religions are: Catholic (29 per cent), no religion (28 per cent), Christian (24 per cent), Muslim (10 per cent), Hindu (four per cent), Sikh (two per cent), Buddhist and Jewish (one per cent).

**2023:** Through Council's Strategic Plan and 2023–2026 Action Plan, inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility were furthered engrained in the town's commitment to an inclusive workplace and community. Council's new vision: to be a vibrant and livable community for all reflects the community's desire for an active, beautiful and full-of-life community where people of all ages and abilities have a place to call home. One of the four key priorities is dedicated to Community Belonging: enhancing community belonging to ensure all residents are invited to engage in a fulfilling community life that is built to support wellbeing. Inclusivity is also one of the plan's guiding principles where we commit to creating a welcoming and inclusive community.

### **Legislative framework**

The town is required to comply with provincial legislation related to equity, accessibility and human rights such as the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

### **COMMENT/OPTIONS:**

While the town has been reporting on diversity initiatives and accessibility improvements for 20 years, the draft Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan 2024–2028 will be the first formalized town-wide plan for Oakville.

Each year staff presents a report to Council on initiatives that advance IDEA with the goal to progressively build on the work already being done. The commitment from departments is evidenced through the town's various program and service offerings such as the continued women-only learn-to-swim program where female lifeguards are provided and windows are covered for privacy, cultural and religious considerations; initiatives such as the reinstallation of the rainbow crosswalk at Kerr and Lakeshore Road this year to reflect the community's desire for the Progressive Pride flag; and being named number one in Canada for our overall Culture Days offerings for the second year in a row for mid-sized cities. The challenge however, without a formalized plan, has been ensuring consistency across departments so that we are not being reactive or taking a one-off approach. An example of this is recognition of different awareness days or months as it relates to cultural, faith, religious, ethnic, marginalized groups, or community calls for action related to IDEA. A proactive approach will highlight the town's commitment in a consistent way, ensuring that there is meaningful recognition that is thoughtfully planned.

To develop the formalized plan, staff partnered with CCDI Consulting Inc., an external organization leading in diversity and inclusion with experience in public and private sector industries. A systems-wide approach was employed from the outset of the work so that inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) was meaningfully embedded in everything that we do.

The foundational work that informed the plan was completed over 2021–2022 through a current state inclusivity assessment conducted by CCDI Consulting Inc. The assessment included:

1. Policy review of over 50 key town policy documents including the town's Respectful Conduct Policy and procedure, Accommodation procedure and Recruitment Policy and procedures.
2. Benchmarking evaluation and research of best practices where staff completed an employer benchmarking survey called a Maturity Meter through CCDI Consulting Inc. The survey evaluated the level of progress of the town as an organization as it related to an IDEA plan, policies and practices. The assessment measures in the benchmarking survey were developed from the 2016 Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Benchmarks: Standards for Organizations Around the World (GDEIB). GDEIB is a framework to benchmark diversity and inclusion progress; it provides practices, policies and actions; and measures diversity, equity and inclusion work to the highest levels of diversity work in institutions around the world across all sectors.

Findings from the benchmarking evaluation place the town's overall employer maturity ranking as *reactive to proactive* (on a scale of five possible rankings: initial stage, reactive stage, proactive stage, progressive stage, best practice

– image below). This indicates that the town is recognizing the value of IDEA and is starting to implement programs within the existing organizational vision and strategy framework. Momentum is building throughout the organization and there is indication that the goal is to implement IDEA programs systematically across the organization and through community services. There were four groups (foundation, internal, external, bridging) with 15 subcategories and 100 assessment markers as part of this comprehensive evaluation. A sampling of the 15 subcategories included: leadership and accountability; recruitment, development and advancement; community, government relations and corporate social responsibility; and assessment, measurement and communications. A sampling of the 100 assessment markers included identifying whether we had work-life flexibility policies; if diversity is reflected in images used on internal and external communications; whether website and communication materials are accessible to people with disabilities; and if diversity is considered in senior leadership/executive appointments.



Staff also conducted a scan of municipalities and other industries for best practices in diversity and inclusion that were reviewed when developing multi-year plan.

3. Community engagement in two phases that included (a) meaningful conversations with community groups and organizations and (b) broad engagement with the Oakville community.
  - (a) The first phase of engagement was conducted through July and August 2021 by our staff inclusion advisory group. Staff conducted 21 virtual focus groups and interview sessions, with representatives from over 60 community groups and organizations participating, including those focused on faith, culture, social services, youth, healthcare, and other areas.

(b) The second phase of engagement was conducted during the fall 2021, through an online survey and in-person efforts by the town’s staff inclusion advisory group. Staff reached out to residents’ associations and businesses as part of this phase of engagement and attended in-person locations such as at the Oakville GO station, food banks and town community centres. Over 600 online surveys were completed.

4. Employee survey dedicated to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility was conducted from January to February 2022 by CCDI Consulting Inc. The survey had two components: a demographic census and an inclusion and belonging questionnaire. The survey was available to all town and Oakville Public Library staff (full-time, part-time and contract). Findings from the demographic composition of the town’s workforce compared to the Oakville population for 2016 and 2021 provide the following for underrepresented groups:

Group	Oakville workforce	Oakville population 2016	Oakville population 2021
Women	48%	52%	52%
Racialized persons	23%	31%	42%
Persons with a disability	17.5%	22% (2017)	22% (2017)
2SLGBTQIA+ persons	9.6%	5%	4%
Indigenous persons	1%	1%	1%

5. Establish diversity and inclusion measures using the 2016 Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Benchmarks: Standards for Organizations Around the World (GDEIB). GDEIB is a framework to benchmark diversity and inclusion progress; it provides practices, policies and actions; and measures diversity, equity and inclusion work to the highest levels of diversity work in institutions around the world. The GDEIB's framework takes a holistic approach in assessing an organization, as referenced under section two above, and the town will measure against the global benchmarks with the goal to continuously advance through the five levels of progress. In addition to this, we are also measuring the percentage of residents who identify a sense of belonging with the community. This is a key community indicator (KCI) tied to Council’s Strategic Plan and 2023-2026 Action Plan. As part of Council’s Strategic Plan, we are also monitoring the employee turnover rate. Last, we are measuring the town’s workforce demographics compared to the Oakville population for underrepresented groups, as referenced under section four above. Benchmarking and tracking measurement are included as actions in the draft Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan 2024–2028.



Detailed key findings from the current state inclusivity assessment were presented to Council at its meeting on August 9, 2022, attached as Appendix B.

Since then, staff has worked with CCDI Consulting Inc. to review the assessment findings, participate in strategy sessions and align to Council's Strategic Plan and 2023-2026 Action Plan.

The town's first draft Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan 2024-2028 is attached as Appendix D. The key components of the plan include:

Draft Objective: To be an inclusive workplace and community where everyone feels they belong.

Draft Mandate: A workplace and community where all residents and staff can access opportunities and services, be treated with fairness and respect, fostering a culture of equity and inclusiveness. This is a shared responsibility.

Draft Goals:

Goal 1: Foundational – drive the objective. Be accountable for incorporating IDEA in all areas of organization.

- The actions in Goal 1 create the foundation for a strong IDEA plan. The town will have a defined IDEA plan that is understood and embedded in leadership practices. Leaders are held accountable for implementing the plan within their departments and teams, supported by training, policies and procedures.

Goal 2: Internal – attract and retain people. Cultivate a work environment that is diverse, inclusive, safe and one where staff feel respected and valued.

- Goal 2 focuses on internal workplace IDEA processes that promote a conscious effort by the town to attract and retain a diverse group of employees that is equitably representative across all levels and functions. IDEA best practices are applied to advancement and succession planning guidelines. These actions further support work-life integration and equitable benefits for diverse needs.

Goal 3: Community – listen to, engage and serve the community. Reflect our inclusive culture throughout the range of services we provide to our community.

- Goal 3 focuses on proactive development of programming, activities, and significant events that advocate IDEA interests in the community.

Goal 4: Sustainability – communicate, track and measure. Align and connect our IDEA efforts through communication, learning and measurement.

- Components of the IDEA plan come together in Goal 4 through bridging internal and external actions. The sentiment of staff and the community are

an important factor in measuring IDEA performance, as is a strong communication plan to keep the workforce and community informed. Evaluation against the global benchmarks to assess the town's level of progress is embedded in actions in this goal. Finally, training and development across the organization is provided to strengthen awareness and promote IDEA in the workplace.

Draft Actions: The five-year plan outlines 40 strategic actions to move the town forward in its commitment to IDEA and to support Council's new vision to be a vibrant and livable community for all that reflects the community's desire for an active, beautiful and full-of-life community where people of all ages and abilities have a place to call home. Specific actions are focused on the town's workforce and others are dedicated to advancing community belonging.

### **Next steps**

Staff will consult the community on the draft plan during the first quarter of 2024 and report back to Council in the second quarter of 2024, with a final Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028 that will incorporate comments received from Council at its December 18, 2023 meeting and comments received from the community.

### **CONSIDERATIONS:**

#### **(A) PUBLIC**

Community engagement was a key component to inform the development of the town's draft IDEA multi-year plan. The first phase of engagement included 21 virtual focus groups and interview sessions, with representatives from over 60 community groups and organizations participating including those focused on faith, culture, social services, youth, healthcare, and other areas.

The second phase of engagement was broad to incorporate the whole Oakville community including residents, residents' associations and businesses. An online survey and in-person efforts were employed that resulted in the completion of over 600 online surveys and community connections made at various locations such as at the Oakville GO station, food banks and town community centres.

#### **(B) FINANCIAL**

While there are no direct financial impacts of receiving this report at this time, as the strategic actions related to the workforce and community belonging are advanced and developed, specific resource requests from departments are expected as part of subsequent annual budget processes.

**(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS**

All town departments are involved in promoting and championing inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility.

**(D) COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

This report addresses Council’s strategic priorities of Community Belonging and Accountable Government.

**(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION**

Groups who are socially and economically marginalized face disproportionate impacts related to the climate emergency. Effectively addressing climate action involves embedding IDEA principles into decision-making processes, including by improving representation and ensuring that solutions are developed with the right people at the table.

**APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Oakville Inclusion Lens guide

Appendix B – Current state inclusivity assessment findings Council report, August 9, 2023

Appendix C – Community demographics related to diversity

Appendix D – Draft Town of Oakville IDEA Multi-Year Plan 2024-2028

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