



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: April 29, 2024

FROM: Strategy, Policy and Communications Department

DATE: April 16, 2024

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

LOCATION: Town-wide

WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the final Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028 be approved.

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.
- Development of the town's first formalized IDEA Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028 builds on 20 years of work the town has been engaged in to advance IDEA.
- A draft IDEA Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028 was presented to Council on December 18, 2023. It incorporated findings from a current state inclusivity assessment conducted by the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Consulting Inc. 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.
- The draft plan outlined a roadmap of actions with associated timelines to support both the town's workforce and community, under an overall objective and mandate, spread across four key goals. The draft plan was tabled from December 18, 2023, to January 31, 2024, to give staff and the community an opportunity to provide feedback.
- Comments received were reviewed and incorporated into the draft final IDEA Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028, and/or directed to individual departments for awareness, or actioning, as appropriate.

- This report brings forward the draft final IDEA Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028 in Appendix A for approval, with updates based on Council, staff and community feedback.
- Upon approval, staff will support implementation of the plan, including through internal and external rollout and communications, and an annual progress report.

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 were detailed in the [December 18, 2023, Council report](#) and 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.

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 the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (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 available on the town's website.

The full 2021 census data sets were released, and staff updated our community demographics celebrating the town's diversity which is 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.

Draft IDEA Multi-Year Plan

On [December 18, 2023](#), a [draft Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan 2024–2028](#) was presented to Council by staff and CCDI Consulting Inc. The draft plan supports the town's new vision for a vibrant and livable community for all, and specifically, its strategic focus on Community Belonging.

The foundational work done through the current state inclusivity assessment that informed the plan was detailed in the [August 9, 2022](#), and [December 18, 2023](#), reports to Council. The following is a high-level summary of the deliverables included in the current state inclusivity assessment:

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 institutions around the world across all sectors.

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

3. Community engagement in two phases that included:
 - (a) Meaningful conversations with community groups and organizations: The first phase of engagement was conducted in the summer 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) Broad engagement with the Oakville community: 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 IDEA was conducted in early 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 institutions around the world. The GDEIB's framework takes a holistic approach in assessing an organization. In addition to the GDEIB, the town is also measuring the percentage of residents who identify a sense of belonging with the community. This is a key community indicator 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.

Staff 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.

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:

Inclusion is about creating an environment where people have both the feeling and reality of belonging and are able to work and live to their full potential. It needs to be mindfully built into an organization's culture, and into the employee experience through deliberate steps in policies and practices, and programs and service delivery that translates to healthier communities and improved social inclusion.

Council's commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility is expressly embedded in its vision for a vibrant and livable community for all; one where Community Belonging is at its core so all residents can engage in a fulfilling community life that is built to support wellbeing.

Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility are areas that are not always easy to address, the matters are often complex and have to be meaningfully planned. There has been claim that IDEA does not produce successful results. It is important to note that new research addresses the importance of choosing the right approaches, that organizations saying IDEA is important is not good enough. This work can not be performative.

The town has been progressively advancing and reporting on IDEA improvements and initiatives for 20 years however, developing a formalized plan ensures consistency across departments so that we are not being reactive or taking a one-off approach.

A [draft IDEA Multi-Year Plan, 2024–2028](#) was presented to Council at its [December 18, 2023](#), meeting. Following the meeting, staff undertook a feedback period from December 18, 2023, to January 31, 2024, where comments were submitted through email, a dedicated online feedback form, phone and through the town's social media channels. Through the town's paid ad on social media, 64,500 users were reached which generated 212,000 impressions; the town's organic posts reached 5,400 users and generated 13,000 impressions. A total of 294 comments were received through all channels (167 through email, phone and online feedback form; 127 through social media). Three comments were submitted by staff and are included in the community feedback.

A number of themes were observed from the comments, listed in order of most to least mentioned. All comments, with the outcome for the draft final IDEA Multi-Year Plan along with staff responses where appropriate, are included in Appendix B.

1. The Israel-Hamas war is impacting members of the Oakville community. There is disappointment with the handling of delegates at the December 18, 2023, and January 29, 2024 Council meetings (92 comments).
2. Hiring should be based on an individual's merit and capability, not on their background, skin colour or identity (15 comments).
3. IDEA itself is racist, discriminatory, woke, divisive, unfair. This work is not successful (10 comments).
4. Accessibility issues and considerations were raised and suggested (10 comments).
5. IDEA is a waste of tax dollars and resources (9 comments).
6. Truth and Reconciliation issues and considerations were raised and suggested (6 comments).
7. The IDEA Multi-Year Plan is light, performative, and not results-oriented; it is not ready to move forward (4 comments).
8. General - comments that are different than those grouped by theme (21 comments).

Final Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan 2024-2028

Changes and/or additions to the actions have been made to reflect community and staff feedback as appropriate, attached under Appendix A as the town's draft final Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028.

Changes are highlighted on the draft final plan document and include:

- Addition of a page in recognition of the town's land acknowledgement.
- Better colour contrast for accessibility between background colour and font colour on several pages (not tracked, update has been made).
- Additional wording under Goal 1 and additional action under Goal 1.1 to Review plan and actions against best practices and academic research / perspectives / studies related to IDEA.
- Revised timing under Goal 1.1 for review/update of Oakville Inclusion Lens from 2024 and ongoing to 2025 and ongoing. 2024 will be focused on using the Oakville Inclusion Lens for roll out and implementation while in 2025 staff will undertake a review and update.
- Additional sub actions under Goal 3.1 Develop a Truth and Reconciliation Action Plan to include review of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Actions for municipal governments and training for staff.
- Change to wording under Goal 3.1 Develop and implement a Territory Acknowledgement to Review and update a Territory Acknowledgement and protocol to better clarify the intention of this action.
- Addition of word external under Goal 3.1 to Develop and implement a communications plan; revised timing of action from 2025 to 2024.
- Additional wording under Goal 3.1 Update the 2018-2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan to new 2024-2029 plan to include highlighting advancements and initiatives the town has pursued and reporting annually.
- Additional wording under Goal 4 and additional sub action under Goal 4.1 Publish an annual report publicly on implementation and progress of IDEA multi-year plan to include emerging best practices and academic research / perspectives / studies related to IDEA, to ensure the plan and actions are rooted in research and best understanding of modern IDEA principles in recognition that this is a dynamic space.
- Addition of word "internal" under Goal 4.2 to Develop and implement a communications plan.

Updates to the key components of the draft final plan are highlighted with italics under goals 1 and 4 below:

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

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.

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. *The plan and actions are reviewed against best practices and academic research / perspectives / studies related to IDEA, to ensure the plan and actions are rooted in research and best understanding of modern IDEA principles in recognition that this is a dynamic space.*

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. Training and development across the organization is provided to strengthen awareness and promote IDEA in the workplace. *Finally, annually reporting on progress to implement the plan to include emerging best practices and academic research / perspectives / studies related to IDEA, to ensure the plan and actions are*

rooted in research and best understanding of modern IDEA principles in recognition that this is a dynamic space.

Next steps

Following Council approval, staff will support implementation of the plan through the following:

- Internal rollout, including communications about the key elements of the plan, so departments can continue implementing year one actions, allocate resources accordingly for the successful execution of the plan, and integrate the mandate into both the day-to-day and longer-term work of the organization.
- External rollout, including communications about the key elements of the plan, including the mandate, objective, goals and action plan.
- Staff will report annually on progress to implement the plan and post the update on the town's website.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

Community engagement was a key component to inform the development of the town's draft final 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.

Last, the whole community was invited to provide feedback on the draft IDEA Multi-Year Plan from December 18, 2023, to January 31, 2024. Over 290 comments were received and incorporated into the final IDEA Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028, and/or directed to individual departments for awareness, or actioning, as appropriate.

(B) FINANCIAL

Total cost for support from CCDI Consulting Inc. for conducting the current state inclusivity assessment and development of the draft IDEA Multi-Year Plan was \$100,000. The funds were approved as part of the 2022 budget.

There are no direct financial impacts of approving this report at this time. As the strategic actions related to the workforce and community belonging are advanced and developed, specific resource requests will be identified through the annual budget process. Staff plan to assess the first year of implementation and will identify any resource needs in the 2025 budget which follows an open and transparent process including seeking public input.

(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 – *final* Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028 with tracked changes

Appendix B – community and staff feedback through email, dedicated online feedback form and phone on *draft* Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Multi-Year Plan, 2024-2028

Appendix C – community comments on social media

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