

Accessibility & Inclusion

People living with a disability are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty and to have a greater chance of dying in times of crisis such as extreme weather situations. Kitchener-Waterloo has over 51,000 residents with some level of limitation in their daily activities (2006 Census) and it is expected this number will increase faster than the overall population growth rate. People with a disability are now able to age in the community when, in the past, they were institutionalized or did not live to retirement age. And too, as people age, they have more challenges in areas of daily functioning.

Kitchener-Waterloo has a long history of leadership in creating an accessible and inclusive community. For example, the K-W Barrier Free group was instrumental in getting significant changes such as curb cuts and accessible washrooms in municipal facilities. In large part, due to this leadership, Waterloo Region now has what many say is the best bus system for those with a disability.

A target has been set to have Ontario barrier free by 2025. Communities are now required to have accessibility advisory groups. Locally this is the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee who advise local and regional municipalities. In general, though, there is disappointment across the province for the slow progress that has been made in implementing the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and related standards.

The K-W Disabilities and Human Rights Group, formed in 2008 in response to interest from the community, has addressed issues related to poverty, pedestrian safety & walkability, access to information as well as accessible housing. The VisitAble Housing project is one example that aims to raise awareness of and commitment to having basic accessibility in all new housing that is built.

We've still got a way to go ...

- Increase walkability and pedestrian safety for those with disabilities in all parts of the city – this includes snow and ice removal and ensuring sidewalks are maintained and free of impediments.
- Provide policy to encourage VisitAble Housing principles be included in all new housing to ensure barrier free access for friends, family or, when needed, if mobility is reduced at any age or stage of life.
- Improve access to information for those with disabilities; including technology, mediated support and customized information resources.

Things to talk about:

- What limits our community from being fully accessible and inclusive, physically and socially?
- What responsibilities do local elected officials have for ensuring all people are able to participate fully, year round, in the day to day life of our community now and in the future?
- What is needed to make it possible for public bodies, community organizations and citizens to raise concerns and work together to create a more accessible and inclusive community?
- What is most important to be done now?



How, where, when & why to vote:

www.waterlooregion.org/municipal-elections-2014

contact spckw@waterlooregion.org

519-579-1096/*3010