

## Accessible Parking Review

### ISSUE

This report provides findings and recommendations related to the Accessible Parking Review, for Saskatoon's on-street pay parking zones.

### RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation recommend to City Council:

1. That the proposed amendments to Bylaw No. 7200, the Traffic Bylaw, 1991, as outlined in this report, be approved; and
2. That the City Solicitor be requested to make the necessary amendments to Bylaw No. 7200, the Traffic Bylaw, 1991.

### BACKGROUND

The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, at its meeting held on December 5, 2022, received the Accessible Parking Review – Scope of Work Report. The report outlined the plan and scope for the Accessible Parking Review (Review), which included a review of the City of Saskatoon's (City) Accessible Parking Permit Program (Program) and an audit of the current on-street accessible parking infrastructure within pay parking areas in the Downtown, Riversdale, Broadway and Sutherland Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).

The Program operates in conjunction with the SaskAbilities Accessible Parking Program. SaskAbilities operates its program by issuing parking placards to individuals with specific mobility challenges for use in designated parking stalls. SaskAbilities has issued approximately 20,000 accessible parking placards across Saskatchewan.

Since the SaskAbilities program does not directly address paying for on-street parking in Saskatoon, the City implemented the Accessible Parking Permit Program (Program) in 1960 and charged a \$15 annual fee. The Program provides users with free parking in pay parking zones and eliminates the need for users to navigate to parking meters. The fee was increased to \$20 per year in 1981 and has not been adjusted since that time. The Program permit, which comes in the form of a circular hologram sticker adhered to a SaskAbilities placard, is optional for users of the SaskAbilities placard. An example placard and Program permit can be found in Appendix 1.

City Council, at its Regular Business meeting on May 27, 2019, approved amendments to [Bylaw No. 7200, The Traffic Bylaw, 1991](#) (Traffic Bylaw), to increase the maximum amount of time vehicles can park on a street from 36 hours to 72 hours. By extension, this amendment lengthened the amount of time Program users can park on the street. Appendix 2 details the provisions of the Program permit in various types of parking stalls. The Traffic Bylaw further stipulates the Program permit must be attached to the SaskAbilities placard and displayed in such a way that they are clearly visible from outside the vehicle.

The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, at its meeting on August 8, 2023, received the Pilot Project – Accessible Loading Zone Ramps [report](#). Administration will be completing a one-year pilot project regarding the installation of accessibility ramps for loading zones, complete with accessible side clear zones at three locations, to review design standards for three scenarios: combined curb and sidewalk, separate curb and sidewalk, and wide sidewalk. If the pilot project is successful, Administration will report back on a proposed accessible loading zone policy for public right of ways. A new policy would provide guidance and regulation regarding installation of accessibility ramps and other features, to provide loading zones that are accessible to all users.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### Accessible Parking Permit Program

The Review was completed to improve the Program by aligning with the needs of the community, best practices elsewhere, and to mitigate program risk.

In terms of Program usage, since 2018, an average of 2,960 Program permits have been sold every year. Since the Program permits are attached to a SaskAbilities placard and move with the user, not necessarily the vehicle, tracking usage of permits in an automated way is not currently possible. Based on parking enforcement observations, it is common to see the same vehicles, with the Program permit, parked in a pay parking zone for an entire day, which is currently permitted as per the Traffic Bylaw, but was never the intent for use when the Program was established. Based on manual counts undertaken in the downtown pay parking zones in 2023, approximately 8% of parked vehicles have a Program permit.

Given the current Program rate of \$20 per year and the on-street parking rate of \$2 per hour, the Program offers up to 10 hours of recovered pay parking revenue per year per permit sold. At a parking rate of \$2.50 that, pending budget approval, will come into effect in 2024 and no corresponding change to the Program fee, the recovered pay parking revenue per year will be only eight hours per permit sold. In other words, a Program user utilizing more than eight hours in a pay parking zone per year will lead to foregone parking revenue for the City.

#### Accessible Parking Review/Audit

A review was undertaken to identify potential deficiencies with accessible parking inventory in pay parking areas and to inform the need for additional design specifications related to accessible parking infrastructure.

Loading zones are permitted to be used for accessible parking. The SaskAbilities placard alone allows users to park in a loading zone for time limit posted on the street, while the placard plus a Program permit allows users to park in a loading zone for up to 72 hours. The purpose of allowing parking, for disabled parking permit holders, in loading zones is due to a lack of designated parking stalls, for people with disabilities, in pay parking areas. [Council Policy C07-025, the Loading Zones Policy](#) details provisions related to loading zones, such as the dimensions, number and placement. Loading zone dimensions are typically 7 metres in length by 2.5 metres in width and are located near accessible entry points, such as driveway accesses or pedestrian ramps.

[Council Policy C07-026, the On-Street Accessible Parking Areas Policy](#) defines criteria for installation of on-street accessible parking areas and provides a process for applicants to have an accessible parking space installed on the public right-of-way in the street in front of or flanking their property. This policy addresses the dimensions of a typical accessible parking area as being 7 metres in length and 2.5 metres in width.

### ENGAGEMENT

While conducting the Review, Administration worked closely with stakeholders. Refer to Appendix 3 for a list of the stakeholders consulted. Consultation consisted of two phases:

**Phase One** – this phase sought to develop an understanding of the community and stakeholder feedback and to assist Administration with forming recommendations. This was conducted by meeting with stakeholder organizations individually throughout Q1 2023.

An Engage Page was setup for the Review and directed people to an online survey. Letters were sent to current users of the Program in March 2023, and the online survey was open until the end of May 2023, to receive feedback from users. Results from the survey's 356 respondents can be found in Appendix 4. The response rate on the survey was 14% of current Program Permit holders.

**Phase Two** – based on key themes identified during Phase One, proposed recommendations were made for modification of the Program and feedback was sought on these proposed recommendations. Stakeholder organizations were notified of the draft recommendations in June 2023, and letters were sent to Program users in September 2023. The draft recommendations were then finalized, based on results from these consultations.

The Saskatoon Accessibility Advisory Committee was consulted in February 2023 for Phase One and in September 2023 for Phase Two.

### FINDINGS

#### Accessible Parking Permit Program

Following the first phase of consultation with stakeholders, key themes were formed and are identified below:

- **Inadequate on-street accessible stalls** – Users and stakeholder organizations cited a lack of on-street accessible parking stalls that are appropriately designed;
- **Lack of awareness about the Program** – Most organizations consulted were not aware the Program existed. Furthermore, many users were not aware of the various parking permissions the permit provided;
- **Desire to continue the Program in some way** – most users and organizations that knew about the Program were appreciative of its existence and would like to see it continued;
- **Streamlining the Program purchasing process** – those consulted believed improvements could be made to the Program's purchasing process to make it more convenient for users; and

- **Larger accessibility related questions** – Users indicated a desire for a holistic accessibility strategy around the public right-of-way and snow clearing standards to ensure Saskatoon’s streets are more accessible for everyone. Some examples were snow clearing processes and levels of service, locations and design of accessibility entry ramps between the street and sidewalk and incompatibility between bike lanes and parking accessibility. Users also desired for the Program permit to be usable in off-street parking areas, such as at hospitals or in other private parking lots where the City does not have jurisdiction. Stakeholder feedback that falls outside the scope of this review, and is related to City services, has been shared with the appropriate internal Departments.

### Accessible Parking Review/Audit

Visual confirmation and measurements were taken of all on-street accessible parking stalls within the pay parking areas in the Downtown, Riversdale, Broadway and Sutherland BIDs. Accessible parking stalls averaged 5.7 metres in length and 3.3 metres in width. Access between the accessible stall to the nearest curb cut varied between 5 to 45 metres, depending on location, and averaged 18 metres in distance. This distance usually involves traversing into or across traffic. The lack of standardized proximity between curb ramps and accessible parking stalls indicates a potential gap in the current infrastructure and may pose a safety concern for users of accessible parking stalls.

As loading zones can be used as accessible parking alternatives, visual confirmation of loading zones was also completed over the summer of 2023. A count of loading zones and accessible parking zones, by BID, can be found in Appendix 5. Appendix 6 provides a map of the locations of the parking stalls.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Administration is recommending several ways in which on-street accessible parking could be enhanced by aligning with the needs of the community, incorporating best practices and mitigating program risk. Furthermore, the recommendations align with the key themes expressed during the first phase of consultation, for which a summary table is provided in Appendix 7. Findings from the accessibility audit have also been used to inform these recommendations.

- **Develop on-street accessible parking standards** – standards can be applied to improve on-street accessible parking conditions as per the accessible parking review/audit and users indicating a need for more on-street accessible parking stalls. Standards could include accessible parking stall location and size, frequency, stall demarcation and location of the curb cuts in relation to the stall.
  - During the standards development period, it is recommended to continue allowing SaskAbilities placard users to park in loading zones, where vehicles displaying a valid SaskAbilities placard may park up to the maximum time limit for the area, instead of the time limit on the loading zone;
  - This recommendation aligns with the City’s Accessibility Action Plan; and
  - Development of the noted on-street accessible parking standards and specifications can occur throughout 2024.

- **Enhanced communication of the Program** – improvements can be made to enhance user awareness of Program provisions and the Program itself:
  - **Program provisions** – improve awareness about Program provisions by initiating the following actions:
    - Improve take-away informational sheets upon point of purchase at City Hall. These sheets, which already exist, can be improved by better informing users where they can park and for how long. Distribution to users, at point of purchase, can also be made more consistent; and
    - Renewal notices and communication can be sent to users via email. This will require additional data collection to be undertaken at the point of sale at City Hall.
  - **Awareness of the Program** – as many potential users are not aware that the Program exists, the following actions can be taken:
    - Provide SaskAbilities with informational pamphlets and posters related to the Program;
    - Improve the Program website to be more user friendly and informative; and
    - Make the “Accessible Parking Permit Program” naming standard, consistent across all public communication modes.
- **Program Fee** – phased-in fee increases for a permit year that runs from November 1 to October 31. With the new annual fee increased to \$60 for the 2024-2025 permit year and further increased to \$100 per annual Program permit for the 2025-2026 permit year, or \$30 and \$50 on a prorated six-month basis:
  - In 1981, the Program fee was set at \$20, and the pay parking rate was \$0.50 per hour. Since 1981, costs to administer the program have also increased, resulting in significant Program subsidization at the current permit fee of \$20;
  - To help address cost as a barrier for low income users of the Program, an application process is proposed to be developed where qualified users can apply for a subsidized permit, based on 50% of the annual permit fee. Furthermore, a phase-in approach to the fee increase is also recommended;
  - The proposed fee of \$100 per year is still on the low end of the range but more comparable to other cities that charge a fee for accessible permits, including Regina’s fee of \$150 per year and Victoria’s fee of \$60 per month and helps achieve a higher rate of Program cost recovery. A municipal scan is provided in Appendix 8;
  - The increase in the fee amount may mean the Program no longer makes financial sense for those who seldom park in a pay parking area. As the Program is optional, payment through the mobile parking application provides a payment solution for users who only have the SaskAbilities placard, thereby avoiding the need to navigate to a parking pay station; and
  - Amendments to the Traffic Bylaw are required to incorporate the proposed fee schedule.

- **Time restrictions** - from 72 hours to 4 hours:
  - The intent of the pay parking zones is to promote parking turnover to ensure adequate parking options exist for all those who require it. By reducing the time, an appropriate balance is being found between the needs of Program users and other users of the pay parking zones, and would be more aligned with the original spirit and intent of the Program;
  - Rather than parking in a pay parking zone for up to 72 hours without moving, users will need to move their vehicles every four hours, during enforcement hours;
  - During Phase Two consultation, given mobility challenges, the Program users expressed the need for more time than initially proposed in the recommendation, of time-on-the-street, such as the 90 minutes to two hours in Riversdale, and three-hours in most other pay parking zones;
  - The proposed four-hour time restriction is comparable to other cities, as highlighted in the municipal scan; and
  - Amendments to the Traffic Bylaw are required to incorporate the proposed time restrictions.
  
- **Automation:**
  - This recommendation facilitates the option for users to purchase permits online, creating a more convenient and streamlined process for purchasing the accessible permit that does not involve coming into City Hall;
  - Users who prefer an in-person point of purchase will still be able to come to City Hall to purchase their permit; and
  - The Parking Technology project, which will include automation, is scheduled to begin in Q2/Q3 2024. No immediate action items are currently identifiable, as the project is in its preliminary stages.

Following Phase Two consultations, initial proposed recommendations were modified to align with the desires of users more appropriately.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Approximately \$60,000 in revenue is recognized from Program permit sales. The recommended changes to the Program fee will yield increases in annual Parking revenue. Precise revenue impacts are difficult to identify given the low-income application option and potential changes in consumer behaviour, which may result from the fee and Program changes. If warranted, a budget adjustment will be included with the 2026/2027 Operating Budget submission. Any capital and/or operating expenses associated with modifying existing infrastructure in accordance with the proposed on-street accessible parking standards will be identified in future reporting and addressed through future budgets requests.

### **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

The Province of Saskatchewan introduced *The Accessible Saskatchewan Act* in November 2022, which received Royal Assent in May 2023, but has not yet come into force. This Act will outline rules which governments and organizations must follow to remove barriers for persons with a disability. This includes rules for the built environment, involving buildings, places and spaces.

Advice on rules will be developed by an Accessibility Advisory Committee, which is currently being established by the Province of Saskatchewan.

Currently, an interdepartmental accessibility working group is preparing a 2023 Accessibility Action Plan Status Report to review the City's current standards and implementation of the 2008 Accessibility Action Plan. This report will provide an update on the status of the 2008 Accessibility Action Plan initiatives and key recommendations. The preparation of this report will inform the next steps required to move the City's Accessibility Action Plan forward and will be used to prepare a request for future budget requests.

The City is developing a user-fee/corporate subsidization policy aimed to create a principles-based approach to all subsidies and fees so requests for subsidies can be considered in the appropriate policy context. Development on this policy item is expected to commence in 2024, and results of this work will inform any future considerations related to subsidized rates for this Accessible Parking Permit Program.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Proposed Traffic Bylaw amendments, related to Program fee and time restrictions, are anticipated to be tabled at a City Council agenda in early to mid 2024 and come into effect in October 2024 for the 2024-2025 permit year. Recommendations, related to developing on-street accessible standards and enhancing communication of the program, can occur in 2024. Automating the permit purchasing process is a component of the Parking Technology project, which is currently underway.

Stakeholder organizations were notified of the finalized recommendations. Finalized recommendations were also posted on the Accessible Parking webpage and on social media. Communication on City Council's decision related to Program changes will be shared with users of the Program in 2024.

### **APPENDICES**

1. SaskAbilities Placard and City Program Permit Example
2. Program Parking Provisions, by Stall Type
3. List of Stakeholders Consulted
4. Results from User Survey
5. Count of On-Street Loading Zones and Accessible Parking Zones in Pay Parking Zones by BID
6. Locations of On-Street Loading Zones and Accessible Parking Zones in Pay Parking Zones by BID
7. Recommendations - Key Themes Alignment Table
8. Accessible Parking Permit Programs – Municipal Scan

**REPORT APPROVAL**

Written by: Mitch Nemeth, Parking Policy and Permitting Manager

Reviewed by: Wayne Sum, Parking Services Manager  
Matt Grazier, Director of Community Standards  
Jay Magus, Director of Transportation

Approved by: Lynne Lacroix, General Manager of Community Services

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