To: Mayor and Members
    Committee of the Whole

From: Tim Nolan, Chair
      Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities

Date: July 28, 2006

Re: Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities Report re Audible Pedestrian Signals

Recommendation:

The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities for the City of Hamilton respectfully recommends:

i) That, effective immediately, audible signals be installed with all new traffic signal installation and, upon request following a complaint process;

ii) That priority be given to intersections at schools, hospitals, community centres and agencies dealing with persons with disabilities;

iii) That a plan be developed so that by 2025 all traffic signals be converted with audible signals in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act standards.

Executive Summary:

The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities has had several discussions since 2003, concerning the location, process, and implementation of the use of audible pedestrian signals for the use of persons with visual disabilities. In order to assist the residents with visual disabilities in achieving a higher level of independence in their daily life, it is necessary to move the City forward with the installation of audible pedestrian signals in a more consistent and planned approach. Therefore, the
Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities recommends that the City start by installing audible pedestrian signals on all new installations of signalized intersections and pedestrian crosswalks, give a priority for installation of audible signals upon request, in a complaint process and at intersections at schools, hospitals, community centres and agencies dealing with persons with disabilities, and that finally, a plan be developed to ensure that by 2025 all traffic signals are enhanced with audible signals.

Background:

In 2003, the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities discussed concerns about the audible pedestrian signals and the lack of differentiation between the tones which allow people to distinguish them between the direction of the signals. At that time, the committee discussed this concern with Mr. Hart Solomon, which informed the committee of a review process which was planned for the National Standards; a process which is currently underway.

Further discussions have taken place since about the city’s use and implementation of audible signals on pedestrian signals, with concerns having been raised by the advisory committee about specific locations and the lack of audible signals, and the lack of a specific criteria and process for the installation of audible signals.

On January 10, 2006, at the request of the committee, Mr. Hart Solomon and Mr. Ron Gallo, of the Traffic Engineering & Maintenance Division of the Public Works Department provided an update to the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities regarding audible and pushbutton pedestrian crosswalk signals.

Mr. Solomon advised that he currently Chairs a committee that is responsible for developing Canadian standards for signs and traffic signals, who were at the time in the process of hiring a consultant. He noted that he anticipated that it would take until approximately 2007 to reach an approved policy.

The committee felt very strongly that a consultation process should take place and that they be consulted. They also expressed concern that a committee establishing Canadian standards may overlook the Ontario Act (AODA). Mr. Solomon assured the committee that the ODA requirements have been noted and that a consultation process has not yet been defined. He also advised that the consultation team has a wide range of knowledge and experience.

Analysis/Rationale:

During this update, the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities noted a concern that the City only consults with the CNIB for intersections that should have audible signals, and not with the advisory committee, or with other service providers who provide support for persons with visual disabilities, and that audible signals are installed only on request, and with the recommendation of the CNIB, and not on a planned basis.
The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities also noted concerns with push button signals at crosswalks, specifically with the location of push buttons on the poles, sometimes being too high for persons using mobility devices, as well as sometimes being in locations that are off of a paved surface and therefore, not accessible at all for persons utilizing mobility devices. They noted that there should also be a standard location for the push buttons for persons with visual disabilities, so that they can easily locate the buttons, and the poles that contain the buttons. In addition, the committee noted that there is some confusion, as pedestrians do not always get a walk signal on the green light.

Mr. Gallo provided the members of the committee with a copy of a brochure on push buttons pedestrian signals and asked that members contact him with any additional concerns.

On March 7, 2006, the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities held a follow-up discussion about the use and installation of audible pedestrian signals. The committee members noted that members of the community with visual disabilities require audible pedestrian signals to assist them in maintaining a level of independence in their daily lives. They discussed possible ways of achieving a higher level of installation of audible signals in order to ensure that the City of Hamilton continues to work towards the installation of more audible signals, to ensure that they are provided at areas of higher need on a priority basis, and to ensure that a plan is developed to have them installed at all intersections over an extended period of time. The committee also recognized that the province may, as part of their standards development under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, develop standards for installation of audible pedestrian signals, but believe that the City of Hamilton should have a clearer plan in place to start working towards complete installation of audible pedestrian signals in the City of Hamilton.

Following their discussion, they passed the following motion:

> The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities for the City of Hamilton respectfully recommends:

i) That, effective immediately, audible signals be installed with all new traffic signal installation and, upon request, in a complaint process;

ii) That priority be given to intersections at schools, hospitals, community centres and agencies dealing with persons with disabilities;

iii) That a plan be developed so that by 2025 all traffic signals be converted with audible signals in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act standards.
In addition, the committee expressed concerns about the ability of persons with visual disabilities to safely cross the streets where roundabouts are in place, as the roundabouts do not have signals, so audible signals are not available to assist persons in the community with safely crossing the streets. The committee has commenced a review of the impact on persons with disabilities and pedestrians in regard to roundabouts, and are having discussions with staff of the Traffic Engineering & Maintenance Division of the Public Works Department about the use and implications of roundabouts for pedestrians with disabilities.