

I will declare that I am not bilingual, however I received a certificate at the end of my high school career (many many years ago), saying that I was. When I move to Ottawa and applied for jobs that required true bilingualism, I quickly learned that I could speak French, but I was not bilingual. After living in Ottawa for 15+ years, the importance of being truly bilingual became increasingly evident from the perspective of career progression as well as truly being part of the community and social networks that I was part of. Professionally, the importance of recognizing both official languages in services and documentation was not optional in Ottawa, and while I worked at the more English-speaking Civic Hospital, I was employed by the University of Ottawa and occasionally participated in meetings that required a level of proficiency in French. In my personal life, and after my experience in Ottawa, it was important to me that my children both completed their school in Thunder Bay in the French Immersion program so that they would be able to contribute to their work as adults in both official languages. Twenty years later, one of my boys is maintaining his DELF certification while he completes post-secondary, and the other continues to use his French language skills, primarily in his travels. I have 'in-law' family who teach French immersion in the public schools and others who teach at École Catholique Franco-Supérieur, and more importantly, through them I have seen more of Francophone culture as it relates to closeness of family and the importance of tradition.

Questions:

- What place should the francophone community have in Thunder Bay?

The Francophone community in Thunder Bay is growing and the municipality has an important role in the vitality of the community, outside of federal or provincial frameworks. Recognizing and supporting official language minority communities requires a strategic and multifaceted approach and is an important step toward ensuring that the Francophone community IS part of the broader Thunder Bay community, rather than thinking about ways to recognize it.

- What sort of policies would you put forward to make available or to improve access to municipal information in French?

In 2029 the District of Thunder Bay will become one of the Ontario communities that will be required to offer services in French. While the Francophone population is relatively small - as I understand, it's approximately 2.5% within the city, however the population leaps to 21% when looking at the broader Thunder Bay district and people who access services in Thunder Bay. Given this official shift in 2029, bilingual signage and services must be in place by 2029 for provincial offices in Thunder Bay and City Council will have a role in determining how this shift will happen within City Hall and throughout the community.

It's important to consider the cost associated with translation and the more material costs associated with signage etc., and given the Francophone population is relatively small within

the city, I have to be honest that I don't know that I would push strongly to have all street signs updated to a bilingual format. I would however strongly advocate that signage on and within City-run facilities be updated, core services and associated documentation/websites be translated, and bilingual personnel be available throughout the City to support active offer of services as needed. These ideas are off the top of my head, and at the start of planning for the changes in 2029, I'd want to hear from members of the Francophone community and together develop a prioritized list of changes that would benefit the community, while recognizing that there will be a designated budget that changes would need to work within.

I'm familiar with, and have supported processes that broaden the reach of the Active Offer program to health professionals in northern Ontario communities, with an objective of improving the patient care experience and outcomes. I think there is an opportunity to ensure that the same type of Active Offer approach is taken with various core city services to ensure that services, greetings, and municipal forms are available in both languages, so that it is not necessary to request them. It was pointed out to me that the recent candidate panels being hosted at the library would have benefitted from the opportunity for interested candidates to be asked or to answer questions in French, or to have had a screen that was translating the English responses to French, for Francophone community members in the audience, and I think that was excellent feedback. I've also learned that Francophone people are experiencing a reduction in the French reading material both in the libraries, and in the local bookstores. This may be beyond policy, however I would look into this feedback further and advocate to grow the resources available in French, both for the general population, and to support Francophone learners looking for resources for school projects.

In the work that I do, accessibility is about much more than the needs of differently-abled people being integrated into planning. It includes considerations like geography/remoteness, different learning styles, culture, and language opportunities, among other things. I would advocate for an expanded definition of accessibility at the City, to ensure equity for the full Thunder Bay community, including Francophone members of the community.

I'm looking forward to chatting more - hopefully as a member of council!

Kind regards,

Julie Colquhoun