

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

2024-2029



WHITEWATER

— REGION —

Introduction

Disabilities affect people of all ages and background. Some people are born with one or more disabilities. Many others develop disabilities through illness, injury or aging. People with disabilities represent a significant and growing part of our population. 1 in 7 people in Ontario has a disability. That's almost 2 million Ontarians. By 2036, that number will rise to 1 in 5 as people age. Over the next 20 years, aging Ontarians and people with disabilities will represent 40% of total income in Ontario. That's \$536 billion. People with disabilities are a growing market that businesses can't afford to overlook.

Enhancing the ability of people with disabilities to live independently and contribute to the community will have positive effects on future prosperity in Ontario.

The law requires that barriers are identified, and removed, in order to provide customer service that is more accessible to people who have disabilities. The Province of Ontario recognized that accessibility is a shared responsibility and passed the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) on December 14, 2001 to require provincial and municipal governments and key broader public sector organizations to review their policies, programs and services.

In June 2005, the Province of Ontario furthered its commitment to accessibility by expanding previous legislation to include the private sector with the goal to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities by 2025. The purpose of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, is to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities in five important areas of their lives within specified time limits:

- customer service
- transportation
- access to information
- outdoor public spaces
- employment

The multi-year plan sets out strategies to identify and remove barriers to accessibility as required by the AODA. It also positions the Township as a leader in accessibility matters in the community.

Multi-Year Strategies

Information & Communication

The standard outlines requirements for organizations to create, provide, and receive information and communications that are accessible for people with disabilities. The Township is committed to providing accessible information and communication and will:

- Ensure that the Township's website is compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA so that all members of the public can access information easily. This will be completed based on the timelines outlined in the IASR.
- Ensure that documents created by the Township are in accessible formats (using proper fonts, headings and graphics).
- Publicize more frequently that Township information and communication is provided in alternative formats upon request, and including this statement in key documents and plans.
- Continue to work with the Township's consultants in providing documents requisitioned by the municipality, in an accessible format.

Employment

The standard requires that employers must make their workplace and employment practices accessible to potential or current employees with disabilities. The Township employment programs and policies are developed to ensure inclusivity of people with disabilities. To continue meeting the requirements within the Employment Standard the municipality will:

- Review Township policies and procedures and make updates as needed to remove barriers in the workplace.
- Frequently review the recruitment process for improvement to ensure participation of all candidates. This includes articulating the availability of accommodation during the recruitment process and having alternative methods to propose to candidates.
- Support training of staff in Management positions and in Human Resources on current Human Rights law and the Duty to Accommodate.

Transportation

For transportation, the standard sets out the requirements for transportation service providers. Particularly, features and equipment on vehicles, routes, and services offered must be accessible to people with disabilities. Although the Township does not directly provide municipal transportation services, the Township is still committed to the requirements outlined in the Transportation Standard and will:

- Stay current on new initiatives of how to provide accessible transportation, and learn from experiences and programs provided by other municipalities.

Design of Public Spaces

The design of public spaces standard outlines the need for newly constructed or redeveloped public spaces to be accessible for people with disabilities.

The Township is committed to meeting the requirements outlined in the IASR Design of Public Spaces Standard including:

- Ensure that newly constructed municipal outdoor play spaces are accessible to all members of the public and meet standards set out in the AODA and applicable regulations.
- Provide information to developers through the planning process on the construction of new recreational trails and the accessibility requirements, specifically accessible types of trails surfaces and design.
- Ensure that all municipal building plans, new construction and significant renovations, are reviewed for comments and feedback on accessible design features. • Support local businesses in finding solutions to provide unimpeded access to their buildings. This can be through exploring programs and initiatives that design and construct portable ramps.
- Participate in annual accessibility reviews of municipal buildings
- Reviews provide the opportunity for the Township to see different accessible layouts and features, such as barrier free washrooms, and understand how people with disabilities are able to move and access the space.

Customer Service

The standard outlines requirements for removing barriers for people with disabilities so they can access goods, services, and/or facilities. The Township will maintain compliance with the Customer Service Standard including:

- Actively encouraging public feedback about the manner in which goods, services and facilities are provided to persons with disabilities.
- Provide refresher training to employees and volunteers on requirements under the customer service standard through the AODA.
- Conduct monthly reviews of accessible features within Township facilities to ensure they are working properly and to address any maintenance that needs to be undertaken, for example checking automatic doors. Reviews will also include identifying any barriers that will impede persons with disabilities in accessing goods within our facilities.
- Upon request, providing a copy of a document in an accessible format based on the needs of the requester. Ensuring that customer service staff understand that this can be as easy as reading a document to a member of the public. General Outside of legislative requirements the Township can promote accessibility and inclusive communities through a multitude of actions and engagement of stakeholders to improve the quality of life for citizens, such as:
- Promote how to make public events more accessible and provide resources to local organizations and businesses on best practices for accessible events.
- Explore partnerships with community organizations for funding opportunities to upgrade existing infrastructure to make more public spaces accessible.

- Offer support to local businesses and institutions such as churches, on accessible customer service practices and compliance with regulations, including how to make their place of business accessible to all patrons.

Publication and Availability

The Township always encourages feedback from the public on accessibility, including suggestions about new initiatives and how we can better provide our services. This is everyone's community and there's value in our experiences and how it provides different perspectives.

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2024-2029) will be available on the municipal website. Paper copies of the plan are available at the Township Office. This document is available in alternative accessible formats and with communication supports as soon practicable and upon request.

Contact / Inquiries

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