

2023 Accessibility Annual Status Update



Accessibility Annual Status Update: 2023

Accessibility Status Report

This Accessibility Status Report serves as an update on progress made towards meeting the initiatives listed in Haldimand County's 2022-2027 Accessibility Plan, the implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (Ontario Regulation 191/11).

Under the AODA, municipalities are required develop Annual Accessibility Status Reports yearly and make those reports publicly available through the website.

Every two years, municipalities are required to submit additional AODA compliance reports directly to the Government of Ontario. The last AODA compliance report submitted to the Province will be in December 2023, and as such, there will be no further compliance reporting requirements to the Government of Ontario until 2025.

Haldimand County's Commitment to Accessibility Planning

Through accessibility planning and with the advice of the County's Accessibility Advisory Committee, Haldimand County will strategically identify, remove and prevent as many barriers as possible.

Haldimand County is committed to:

- Continuously improving access to all municipally owned facilities, premises and services for all those with disabilities.
- Providing quality services to all members of the community with or without disabilities.

Development of the 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan

Under the AODA, municipalities are required to develop multi-year accessibility plans with input from the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the public. The 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan – approved by Council in January 2023 – outlines the actions that Haldimand County will undertake to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who utilize the goods, services, and facilities of Haldimand County.

To ensure the 2023-2027 plan was informed by community needs and insight from individuals with disabilities, a survey was conducted to gather input on what elements members of the public would like to see included in the plan, as well as areas of importance to focus on. With consideration given to community input received, the 2023-2027 Plan identifies a number of

areas where improvements can be made to increase accessibility, as well as next steps to ensure barriers are removed, no new barriers are formed, and

that an inclusive community is created and sustained. The 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan is available on the county website.

2023 Summary of Accessibility Accomplishments

General

- 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan officially ratified by Council in January 2023
- Accessible Design Standards completed and awaiting Council review/ratification in January 2024
- Accessibility Advisory Committee Terms of Reference expanded to include more members (Note: The current Accessibility Advisory Committee is the largest in the County's history (9 dedicated members)
- Celebrated National Accessibility Week with an accessibility event at the Cayuga Arena
- Posted accessibility policies and procedures on the website and provided them in an accessible format, upon request.
- Continued to implement purchasing policy, which requires suppliers and their staff to comply with the AODA when acquiring goods, services and facilities.

Prepared the Annual Accessibility Status Report of measures set out in the multi-year accessibility plan, posted it on the County's website and provided it in an accessible format, upon request.

Customer Service Standard

- Updated the Accessible Customer Service Policy (No. 2009-02) to reflect current legislation and more appropriate, gender neutral language.
- Overhauled and streamlined the Service Disruption Notification process to ensure members of the public are informed of impacts to regular service, as required by the AODA.
- Reviewed and updated AODA contractor and volunteer training requirements
- Continued to provide access to alternate facilities or services wherever possible.
- Continued to promote the use of enhanced training provided around accessibility to all new hires through orientation.
- Continued to promote staff training materials and introduced new learning resources via employee intranet.

Information and Communications Standard

- Commenced new website re-design project with an anticipated launch date of December 2024. A vendor was selected and work has begun to set up and develop a new website with the goal of meeting or exceeding the AODA standards.
- Developed PDF remediation strategy to remove non-compliant and outdated PDFs from the current website.
- Installed and activated closed captioning software within E-Scribe. Live closed captioning transcription is now available for all council meetings.
- Continued to monitor and review the current website to achieve as much compliance as possible under the current structure.
- Continued to receive and follow up on feedback in regards to municipal goods, services and facilities.
- Continued to ensure processes for receiving and responding to feedback are accessible for persons with disabilities by providing/arranging for accessible formats and communications supports, upon request.

Design of Public Spaces Standard

- Completed the Accessible Design Standards document and it will be presented to council January 2024. This plan will help inform our expectations for the built standard that in several areas go above and beyond the minimums outlined in the Ontario Building Code
- Installed Accessible Parking signs throughout the county.
- Reviewed site and floor plan designs for major public spaces with internal staff and the Accessibility Advisory Committee (Hagersville Library & Active Living Centre, Caledonia Fire/EMS Station, pedestrian cross overs, Tree Planting Strategy, Seasonal Patio Program applications)
- Continued to provide guidance to staff with regard to the built environment of County owned assets.

Employment Standard

- Developed emergency management plans and safety plans for Human Resources to accommodate individuals with a disability or accommodation.
- Continued to notify the public about the availability of accommodations for applicants with disabilities in the recruitment process.
- Explicitly acknowledged the availability of accessibility accommodations throughout the recruitment process.
- Offered support to employees who require temporary or permanent work accommodations and return to work.
- Continued to inform new employees of policies and procedures to support employees with disabilities, and about the AODA generally, during on-boarding and orientation.

Transportation Standard

- Continued to communicate and advise private transportation companies (Taxicab Operators and Drivers) on the requirements of the Transportation Standard including fare restrictions and the posting of vehicle registration and identification information.
- Monitored Taxi industry and ensured compliance with Accessible Taxicab requirements.
- Ensured Accessible Taxicabs meet all safety requirements stipulated through the County's Hired Vehicle Licensing By-law.
- Continued to ensure every licensed driver of an Accessible Taxicab notifies passengers upon arrival, offers such assistance as the passenger requires, and properly and safely handles passenger mobility aids.

2024 Goals and Next Steps

Goals

- Obtain Council approval for the Inclusive Spaces Fund to facilitate more accessibility enhancements to county assets, over multiple years, to meet community needs.
- Develop a multi-year work plan to implement the Inclusive Spaces Fund, identifying priority projects through consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Collaborate with key internal stakeholders to ensure that the newly adopted Accessibility Design Standards are being utilized.
- Ensure Web Governance Policy and web content guidelines developed by external vendor comply with current WCAG standards.
- Continue to work collaboratively with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to identify key issues and support the development of a more inclusive community.
- Continue to support the redevelopment of the County's website.
- Monitor and update existing accessibility policies, as appropriate.
- Review customer feedback and make changes to programs or services, where appropriate.
- Continue to keep abreast of accessibility issues, innovations and trends.
- Consult the public, persons with disabilities and the Accessibility Advisory Committee as required under the AODA.

Next Steps

- Develop and obtain approval for a multi-year work plan to implement the Inclusive Spaces Fund, working collaboratively with key internal stakeholders and the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Continue to develop and enhance training materials for all staff, volunteers, and new hires as AODA standards and regulations evolve.

- Continue to take a 'people-focused' approach to work towards barrier reduction by engaging with diverse populations across the County.
- Ensure that Haldimand County's digital footprint is in compliance with regulated standards by supporting the website redesign project as needed.
- Develop a Accessible Design Audit checklist in collaborating with Engineering and Capital Assets teams.
- Conduct a County wide audit of all Haldimand County-owned facilities to identify where there are barriers.
- Report and work towards correcting the gaps that have been identified through the audit.

Contact Information

For more information about accessibility initiatives within the County or to obtain a copy of this presentation in an alternative format, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator.

Phone: 905-318-5932 ext. 6186

E-mail: accessibility@haldimandcounty.on.ca