
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CEC-01-2023 Accessibility Plan 2023-2027

For Consideration by Council in Committee on January 17, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

To obtain approval to formally adopt Haldimand County's 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CEC-01-2023 Accessibility Plan 2023-2027 be received;
2. AND THAT the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2027 be adopted as required by Section 4 of O. Reg 191/11 Integrated Accessibility Standards, and to reiterate the County's commitment to persons with disabilities who live, work, visit and play in Haldimand;
3. AND THAT staff be directed to bring forward annual status reports, providing updates on the Accessibility Plan, as required by regulation.

Prepared by: Kyra Hayes, Supervisor, Customer Experience & Communications

Reviewed by: Trish Cardwell, Manager, Customer Experience & Communications

Respectfully submitted: Cathy Case, General Manager of Corporate & Social Services

Approved: Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In order to be fully compliant with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) legislation, Haldimand County must prepare a multi-year Accessibility Plan every 5 years outlining the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers for persons with disabilities. Under Section 4 of the Integrated Accessibility Standards (O. Reg. 191/11, s. 4), Haldimand County must also:

- Establish, review and update its accessibility plans in consultation with persons with disabilities, as well as the established Accessibility Advisory Committee (O. Reg. 191/11, s. 4 (2));
- Post the accessibility plan on its website and provide the plan in an accessible format upon request;
- Prepare an annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the strategy referenced in clause (1) (a), including steps taken to comply with this Regulation; and
- Post annual status reports on its website and provide the report in an accessible format upon request. O. Reg. 191/11, s. 4 (3); O. Reg. 413/12, s. 3 (1).

The 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan outlines Haldimand County's strategy to prevent and remove barriers for individuals with disabilities and reaffirms its commitment to providing inclusive and accessible services, programs and facilities.

The 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan was developed to meet all legislative requirements under the AODA, while taking into account Accessibility Advisory Committee priorities and feedback gathered from residents of Haldimand County.

BACKGROUND:

The purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is to ensure that all Ontarians have fair and equitable access to programs and services, and to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The Government of Ontario, the Legislative Assembly, every designated public sector organization, and every other person or organization that provides goods, services or facilities to the public or other third parties and that has at least one employee in Ontario must follow the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities.

The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) is a grouping of five standards that the AODA encompasses:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces

There are also the General Requirements that apply across the IASR. The requirement to have an Accessibility Plan in place is one such requirement. The 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan outlines what steps Haldimand County will take to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities that utilize Haldimand County's facilities and services.

Annually, a status report is completed to outline the progress of measures taken to implement the multi-year Accessibility Plan – as required by the AODA. Additionally, an annual review of the plan will be conducted as required to include any newly identified priority action items, and/or as new legislation is brought forward.

Haldimand County's 2017-2022 multi-year Accessibility Plan was the first long-term planning document required under the AODA. This plan set the basis for the County's commitment to ensuring accessible and inclusive services. Each year since the Plan's adoption, staff have provided an annual Accessibility Report to Council and the community.

The 2023-2027 Plan highlights successes, challenges and action items that the County will take to become a more inclusive and accessible community.

ANALYSIS:

The AODA was introduced in 2005 with the goal of removing barriers to make it easier for persons with disabilities to participate in their workplaces and communities. The legislation introduced various standards related to information, communications, transportation, public spaces, customer service and employment. Under the AODA, Haldimand County is responsible for complying with the "public sector" standards.

The 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan takes into account these legislated standards, the needs of the community, input provided by the County's Accessibility Advisory Committee, as well as best practices for accessibility within the public sector.

To develop a Plan informed by community need, an online survey was developed to obtain feedback from residents and collect unique insights on accessibility within Haldimand County.

Some survey questions included were:

- When seeking information or accessing services with Haldimand County, has your experience been fully accessible and inclusive?
- Have you encountered barriers to participating in a County led program or activity?
- What changes do you think would help Haldimand County be a more accessible and inclusive community?

Physical copies of the survey were available at all library branches and at the Haldimand County Administration Building.

From the survey feedback received, some of the most common elements that the community perceived as barriers include:

- Not enough accessible parking spots at municipal facilities.
- Interior doors at arenas do not have electric accessible door openers.
- Inadequate accessible seating at arenas and baseball diamonds around the County.
- A lack of fully accessible parks and playgrounds across the County.
- Maintenance and poor quality of paths of travel around County-owned trails/beach accesses.
- A lack of accessible features/supports at municipally-operated pools.
- A lack of accessible transportation across the County.

A draft copy of the Plan was sent to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for preliminary review on September 28, 2022 and discussed in detail at the October 5, 2022 Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting. Insights and suggestions were received and incorporated into the draft Plan. A final draft was subsequently presented to the County's Senior Management Team on December 5, 2022 and deemed appropriate to bring forward for Council's consideration.

At a high level, the Plan reinforces Haldimand County's commitment to meeting the accessibility needs of people with disabilities in a timely and proactive manner and providing equitable access to programs, goods, services and facilities in a way that takes into account the following key principles:

Dignity: Service is provided in a respectful manner consistent with the needs of the individual.

Independence: Services for persons with disabilities shall support their independence while respecting their right to safety and personal privacy.

Equity/Equality of Outcome: Service outcomes will be the same for persons with disabilities as for persons without disabilities.

Integrated: Services allow people with disabilities to fully benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as other customers.

Sensitive: Service is provided in a manner that is respectful to an individual's needs.

Responsive: Service is delivered in a timely manner, considering the nature of the service and the accommodation required.

Inclusive: We are committed to an inclusive environment as one where people experience both the feeling and reality of belonging and where, as a result, they are able to fulfill their potential.

Taking into account feedback from the community and Accessibility Advisory Committee, along with the aforementioned legislative requirements and the principles outlined above, staff have developed a

number of actionable steps within the Plan that can be taken to further enhance accessibility and inclusivity of programs, services and facilities.

At a high level, these include:

Customer Service Standard

- Revising the Accessible Customer Service Policy (# 2009-02) to capture recent changes to AODA legislation;
- Establishing a Corporate Accessibility Policy;
- Reviewing, developing and implementing further training materials for County staff and Council to help promote and encourage standardization of accessibility.

Information & Communications Standard

- Implementing improvements to the current County website to fully meet AODA legislated standards;
- Redesigning and launching a new County website that meets AODA-legislated WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliance by 2025.

Design of Public Space Standard

- Completing a Facilities Accessible Design Standards document to outline the minimum accessible design standards that will be used across the County;
- Completing a parks and facilities audit to identify areas of County owned parks and facilities that require updating to promote a more accessible and inclusive community;
- Identifying and developing an action plan and budget pending the results of a facility audit in regards to addressing accessibility concerns on a go-forward basis;
- Reviewing and obtaining feedback regarding capital projects with the Accessibility Advisory Committee;
- Proactively inspecting and maintaining walking paths and curb cuts to ensure a smooth path of travel for all residents;
- Continuing to engage the Accessibility Advisory Committee and consult members on applicable Master Plans, Neighborhood Plans, and major projects to ensure barrier-free access for all residents.

Transportation Standard

- Ensuring that the County continues to meet standards within our accessible taxi program and have an on-going review of the service to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of our community.

General

- Ensuring that both preventative and emergency maintenance of accessible elements in public spaces is conducted as required;
- Celebrating and promoting National AccessAbility week on a go forward basis annually.

These activities will be led by the Accessibility Coordinator in collaboration with departments across the organization and progress updates will be shared with Council on annual basis, or as requested.

Furthermore, staff intend to develop an internal review process as part of staff budget preparations to assess public feedback and assist with prioritizing key accessibility-related concerns related to the built environment of municipal facilities (i.e. parks, arenas, trails, service). Additionally, staff will work closely with the 2022-2026 Accessibility Advisory Committee once established to develop criteria for prioritizing accessibility-related enhancements across the County – taking into account both areas of greatest need and fiscal practicality.

While the County is legislatively required to abide by the AODA's Design of Public Spaces Standard, the benefits of investing in accessibility enhancements extend beyond meeting regulatory requirements. Rather, making expenditures that support an inclusive, barrier-free community will ensure Haldimand remains and continues to evolve as a great place to live, work and play for individuals of all abilities.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are significant financial and legal penalties associated with AODA non-compliance. A corporation/organization that is found to be non-compliant can be fined up to \$100,000 per day, while directors and officers of a corporation/organization that is found to be non-compliant can be fined up to \$50,000 per day.

There are currently no additional funds within the Capital Forecast for added or augmented programs or projects. Any future costs should be incorporated into future Capital budgets for review and evaluation within the corporate priorities and ranking system established for the capital budget process. Any additional projects will ultimately impact the County's existing long range capital funding plan and potentially associated operating costs.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Not applicable.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

1. [Policy No. 2009-02 Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy](#)

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 2023-2027 Accessibility Plan.