

2022-2024

Grand River Conservation Authority Accessibility Plan



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Summary

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) became law in 2005. The purpose of this Act is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities by identifying, preventing and removing barriers that may otherwise limit their abilities to fully participate in society. Accessibility simply means giving all people opportunities to participate fully in everyday life.

The Accessibility Plan describes measures the GRCA will take to remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities who use the facilities and services of the GRCA, including employees and members of the public and highlights changes and improvements made to date.

The GRCA is committed to the continual improvement of accessible services, facilities and information.

1.0 Background

1.1 Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, known as the AODA, is intended to develop, implement and enforce mandatory accessibility standards in key areas of daily living. Standards have been developed in Customer Service; Information and Communications; Employment; Transportation and Design of Public Spaces. The accessibility standards apply to all organizations in Ontario.

The purpose of the AODA is to:

- Develop, implement and enforce accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises by January 2025; and
- Provide for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards.

1.2 Types of Disabilities

Disabilities may be clearly evident, such as physical disabilities, but they may be invisible and are not always apparent. The broad range of disabilities also includes vision impairment, deafness or being hard of hearing, intellectual or developmental, learning and mental health disabilities. The AODA uses the same definition of “disability” as the Ontario Human Rights Code, which includes both visible and invisible disabilities.

1.3 Overview of the Accessibility Standards

The AODA is made up of five Standards, each covering an aspect of daily living.

The **Accessibility for Customer Service Standard** was the first standard to be developed and released. This standard addresses business practices and training needed to provide better customer service to people with disabilities.

The **Integrated Accessibility Standards** brings together four standard areas into one Regulation: Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation and Design of Public Spaces.

- **Information and Communications** addresses the removal of barriers in access to information being provided in person, through print, a website or other means.
- **Employment Accessibility** addresses paid employment practices relating to employee-employer relationships, which include recruitment and hiring and retention policies and practices.
- **Accessible Transportation** addresses aspects of accessible public transportation.
- **Accessible Design of Public Spaces** addresses barriers in public spaces and buildings. This applies to new construction and planned redevelopment.

The GRCA does not operate or provide public transportation thus the Accessible Transportation Standard does not apply.

2.0 Objectives and Commitment to Accessibility Planning

This report describes the measures that the GRCA has taken and will continue to take to identify, remove and prevent barriers for all people, including those with disabilities who use the facilities and services of the GRCA.

The GRCA is committed to:

- Continuous improvement of access to facilities and services for employees and members of the public with disabilities.
- Providing accessible customer service.
- Incorporating feedback from people with disabilities in the development and review of its accessibility plans, and when constructing new or redeveloping existing recreational trails and play spaces, and in other programs and services where practicable.
- Annually reviewing the accessibility plan and incorporating elements of accessibility into future projects and activities.

3.0 Barrier Identification

3.1 Barrier-Identification Methodologies

The following methodologies are used to identify accessibility barriers:

Methodology	Description
Staff meetings	Accessibility legislation and barrier identification is discussed at Management meetings, Department meetings and Joint Health & Safety Committee meetings. These meetings give various departments an opportunity to discuss legislative requirements and brainstorm accessibility initiatives.
Site visits	All worksites are visited periodically by Managers, Directors and other applicable staff to review accessibility barriers. During site visits, staff and supervisors are invited to provide feedback and discuss barriers they, or members of the public, have identified in their work areas.
Public feedback forms	Members of the public are invited to provide accessibility feedback in a variety of formats: in person, by speaking directly with a member of the GRCA staff; by completing a feedback form online through the GRCA website; or by submitting comments in writing to any of our facilities. Visitor surveys conducted periodically invite suggestions for improving accessibility which are incorporated into work plans as applicable.
Capital inspections for physical barrier identification	Annual capital inspections are completed for all buildings in our various work locations. The inspections include identification of physical barriers to be considered in capital planning and facility upgrade discussions.
Public Consultation	Public consultation will be conducted when required. The methodology will be determined as appropriate to the project, and may include site visits.

3.2 Barriers Identified & Status of Corrective Actions from 2020/2021 Plan

The following barriers and status updates on corrective actions taken to date are listed below:

Organizational

- The accessibility working group will continue to meet at regular intervals.
- Continue to build elements of accessibility into all practices, procedures and policies.
- Conduct AODA refresher training for all staff
- Ensure advance consultation on proposed projects by posting project details on the website and circulating to consulting partner agencies to invite feedback on accessibility

Corporate Policies, Procedure & Processes

Potential Barrier	Action Items & Status Updates for 2020/2021
Procurement of goods, services or facilities	Continued to incorporate accessibility criteria and requirements into projects and processes. Procurement documents are posted on biddingo as applicable which is an accessible website.
Signage	The corporate signage strategy framework was approved in 2021 with accessibility as a component, and will be implemented in a phased-in approach going forward.

Procedures	Work to develop procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of the accessible elements in public spaces and for dealing with temporary disruptions when accessible elements required are not in working order did not occur to date –deferred to new plan
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Administration Centre

Potential Barrier	Action Items & Status Updates for 2020/2021
Signage	Due to COVID-19, a needs assessment was not conducted and will be deferred until at least 2022
Main lobby – accessible layout e.g. seating, phone	Due to COVID-19, a needs assessment was not conducted and will be deferred until at least 2022
Accessibility throughout building	The feasibility of installing an elevator to provide access to all levels in the building will be evaluated in the needs assessment. Additional signage requirements and other improvements to reduce accessibility barriers will also be documented and incorporated into future capital plans. Accessibility improvements have been incorporated into the planned Fire and Life Safety system upgrade

Information Systems, Technology and Communications

Potential Barrier	Action Items & Status Updates for 2020/2021
GRCA Website	All new documents posted to the website are in an accessible format. Older documents have been updated to conform with accessibility requirements or removed from the website and available upon request. Some documents cannot be made fully compliant; however, a description has been added to advise that these documents will be made available in an alternate format upon request. AODA training for the web was provided to all website editors and approvers in 2020 and 2021. Website upgrade was completed in 2020 to improve accessibility.
Readability of printed materials (e.g. brochures, tabloids, minutes, forms)	Accessible document creation training for applicable staff was conducted in 2021. Escribe meeting platform was upgraded to provide accessible board meeting agendas and minutes

Conservation Areas and Other Recreational Properties

Potential Barrier	Action Items & Status Updates for 2020/2021
Gatehouses	Accessible customer service training is provided to all staff. An updated accessibility assessment will be conducted and remediation of barriers will be incorporated into plans – this was deferred due to COVID.
Washrooms and Changerooms	Universal signage installation will continue. Continue to implement accessible washroom upgrades as new capital projects occur.
Picnic areas	20% of new outdoor public use tables are accessible and the area around the accessible tables are level, firm and stable.
Parking	No new parking areas were created but existing areas have designated accessible parking spots and related signage.
Campsites	Design criteria for accessible campsites will be finalized in 2022-2024 and a plan for implementation will be developed.

Trails	<p>Accessibility improvements were made to the Rotary Trail at Guelph lake and the Rockwood pothole trail in 2020. Design of the City Link Trail is ongoing and will improve the accessibility of this trail. Public consultation will be conducted.</p> <p>Assess all existing trails based on level of accessibility and include this information in signage and on the website – this was deferred to 2022-2024</p> <p>Investigate the feasibility of a loaner program for off-road wheelchairs and accessible beach/flotation chairs at some Conservation Areas – this was deferred to 2022-2024</p>
Outdoor Play Spaces	No new outdoor play spaces were constructed in 2020/2021; future spaces will be designed to be as accessible as possible and public consultation will be conducted as required.

Nature Centres

Potential Barrier	Action Items & Status Updates for 2020/2021
Entrances, doors and walkways	Laurel Creek NC – front door replaced with a fully accessible automatic door and stairway visibility strips were installed.
Parking	No changes to parking occurred
Washrooms	No changes to washrooms occurred.
Programs	Ongoing review of programs and activities for accessibility; determine ways to improve accessibility – due to COVID-19, the NC program did not operate for part of 2020 and programs were not conducted on site from mid-March-2020 and all of 2021. This was deferred at this time. Discuss accessibility at every staff meeting to highlight the importance and to share accommodation ideas.
Emergency Procedures	No changes to emergency procedures occurred.
New Guelph Lake Nature Centre	Due to COVID-19 and other factors, the new NC was not constructed in 2020. The preliminary design of the building is being reviewed and it will be designed in accordance with AODA requirements.

3.3 Action Items for 2022-2024

Organizational

- Continue to build elements of accessibility into all practices, procedures and policies.
- Ensure advance consultation on proposed projects by posting project details on the website and circulating to consulting partner agencies to invite feedback on accessibility. A process to solicit feedback will be developed. The corporate signage strategy will begin to be implemented in 2022 with updated, accessible signage phased-in
- Accessibility page created in Sharepoint for staff will continue to be populated with additional resources, as they become available

Administration Centre

Potential Barrier	Action Items for 2022-2024
Main lobby – accessible layout e.g. seating, phone	Conduct an updated needs assessment and incorporate into any future renovation plans.

Accessibility throughout building	The feasibility of installing an elevator to provide access to all levels in the building will be evaluated as part of the needs assessment.
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Information Systems, Technology and Communications

Potential Barrier	Action Items for 2022/2024
GRCA Website	Website updates will be done to ensure ongoing accessibility. Some additional historical content will be updated into accessible format and reposted to the website Accessibility webpage to be updated with additional content as needed

Conservation Areas and Other Recreational Properties

Potential Barrier	Action Items for 2022/2024
Physical Facilities - General	Design criteria for accessible campsites will be finalized and a plan for implementation will be developed in 2022-2024 and a plan to identify barrier-free campsites will be discussed.
Trails	Investigate the feasibility of a loaner program for off-road wheelchairs and accessible beach/flotation chairs at some Conservation Areas.
Programs, Policies and Processes	Guideline for accessibility in CAs will be developed Information on accessible features at each CA will be identified on the website

Nature Centres

Potential Barrier	Action Items for 2022/2024
Physical Facilities - General	No changes to physical facilities being proposed at this time
Programs	No changes to programs being proposed at this time
New Guelph Lake Nature Centre	Construction of new building is expected to commence and will be built in conformance with AODA requirements.

4.0 Plan Review and Communication Processes

4.1 Review and Monitoring Process

The GRCA reestablished an internal accessibility working group, with management representation from key departments, to continue to identify barriers and review progress on removal and development of barrier prevention strategies. This working group meets at least twice per year to evaluate progress of the plan and develop accessibility initiatives.

An annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the plan is prepared. This status report will be made available on the GRCA website and in an alternate accessible format upon request. The accessibility plan will be updated at least once every five years.

4.2 Communication of the Plan

Copies of this plan are available to staff and members of the public on the GRCA website. Alternative accessible formats will be available upon request.

APPENDIX

Glossary of Key Terms and Definitions

BARRIER as defined by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communication barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice. There are many kinds of barriers. Some are visible, but many are not visible.

Barriers to accessibility	
Type of barriers	Examples
Attitudinal barriers are those that discriminate against people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• thinking that people with disabilities are inferior• assuming that a person who has a speech impairment cannot understand you
Information or communications barriers happen when a person cannot easily understand information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• print is too small to read• websites that cannot be accessed by people who are not able to use a mouse• signs that are not clear or easily understood
Technology barriers occur when a technology cannot be modified to support various assistive devices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a website that doesn't support screen-reading software
Organizational barriers are an organization's policies, practices or procedures that discriminate against people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a hiring process that is not open to people with disabilities
Architectural and physical barriers are features of buildings or spaces that cause problems for people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• hallways and doorways that are too narrow for a person using a wheelchair, electric scooter or walker• counters that are too high for a person of short stature• poor lighting for people with low vision• doorknobs that are difficult for people with arthritis to grasp• parking spaces that are too narrow for a driver who uses a wheelchair• telephones that are not equipped with telecommunications devices for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing

BARRIER-IDENTIFICATION METHODOLOGIES are processes or practices used to determine what barriers exist, where barriers exist and any other information. Examples of barrier identification methodologies may include: customer feedback surveys or questionnaires, and discussions with employees or members of the public.

DISABILITY means:

- any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- a mental disorder; or
- an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.