

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2027



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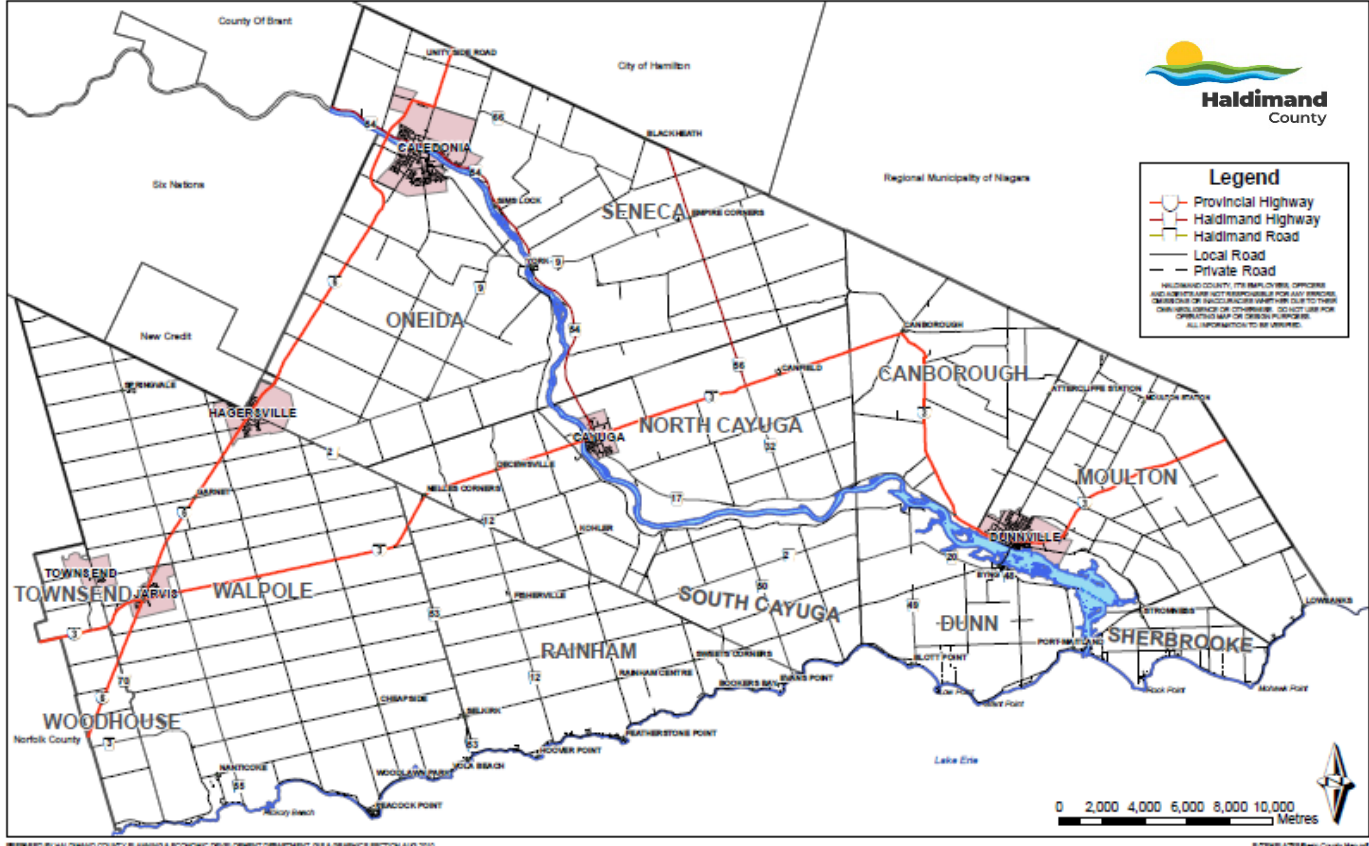
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Introduction

Haldimand County is located on the north shore of Lake Erie and is bordered by Norfolk County, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Mississauga’s of the New Credit First Nation, Brant County, City of Hamilton and the Region of Niagara, and is well connected by a series of provincial highways. Highway 6 runs north-south from the City of Hamilton through Haldimand County. Highway 6 also links Haldimand County to the 400 series highway (the major highway system in Ontario), which is within a 15-minute drive. Highway 3 passes through Haldimand County and runs east west from Fort Erie to Windsor.

Haldimand County is a single tier municipality with a population of approximately 50,000. The County operates under the authority of the Municipal Act of Ontario as well as other applicable legislation.



Creating an Accessible Haldimand County

Our vision for Haldimand County is that it grows to be a well-designed community that is safe, convenient, and comfortable for all persons, with or without disabilities. By implementing the requirements of the AODA, we are all working towards a more accessible and inclusive County.

The 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan outlines Haldimand County's strategy to prevent and remove barriers across the county. This Plan is written to ensure that Haldimand County meets the legislative requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). The AODA requires the development of a multi-year plan to ensure that long-term planning for accessibility is in place. The Plan requires that consultation takes place with the County's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and persons with disabilities within the community.


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 will discuss our successes and challenges as we move forward towards becoming a more inclusive and accessible community.

Haldimand County's Organizational Commitment

Haldimand County is a progressive and caring community that is committed to being responsive to the needs of its citizens. We pride ourselves on our sense of community, its diversity, unique mix of urban and rural interests, and high standard of public service. We are cognizant of the diverse needs of our residents and strive to provide services and facilities that are accessible to all. Our vision for Haldimand County is that we support a well-designed community that is safe, convenient and comfortable for all persons, with or without disabilities. We strive to maintain and build a high quality of life for our current and future residents.

Haldimand County, as an employer and provider of services, is committed to barrier free access and will:

1. continue to take a leadership role in achieving and setting an example as a barrier free community to the business, institutional and volunteer sectors of our community;
2. continue to identify barriers and gaps in existing services and facilities and continuously improve the level of accessibility of existing municipal services and facilities; and
3. actively encourage input from all segments of the community in the design, development and operation of new and renovated municipal services and facilities.



Haldimand County is committed to meeting the accessibility needs of people with disabilities in a timely and proactive manner and will use reasonable efforts to provide 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.

Background About the Accessibility Advisory Committee

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005) municipalities with a population of 10,000 or more were required to set up an Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). Haldimand County established a committee to review, assess, and make recommendations around accessibility issues in our community.

Based on the requirements of the AODA, the Committee:

- advises Council about the preparation and implementation of its accessibility plan;
- evaluates the County's progress annually and the plan is updated to identify further barriers to people with disabilities and ways to remove and prevent them;
- gives advice to the Council on the accessibility of buildings, structure or premises that the Council purchases, builds or renovates, or generally, makes available as municipal building.

While the AODA (2005) sets out new requirements for multi-year planning for accessibility, the AAC plays a major role in recommending and helping shape the content of the plan and will continue to evaluate the measures that the County has put in place to remove barriers and comply with AODA standards.

The AAC meets four times a year and as needed in cases of emergent concerns. The minutes of each meeting will be posted for public viewing on the County's website.

Legislation

On December 14, 2001 the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (AODA) was passed to improve access and opportunities for persons with disabilities, by identifying and removing barriers to full participation. Under the ODA a municipality had to develop an annual accessibility plan, consult with people with disabilities to develop a plan, make the plan available to the public and establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee.


The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) laid out a comprehensive road map to make Ontario accessible to all people through the development, implementation and enforcement of new, mandatory accessibility standards for some of the most important aspects of people's lives. The aim of the AODA legislation is to make the province fully accessible by 2025. The following standards are mandatory for both the public and private sector:

1. Customer Service (Integrated Accessibility Standards, O. Reg. 191/11) – governs how we provide accessible customer service.
2. Information and Communication (Integrated Accessibility Standards, O. Reg. 191/11) – aims to identify and consider the nature of barriers experienced by people with a wide range of disabilities in the area of information and communication.
3. Employment (Integrated Accessibility Standards, O. Reg. 191/11) – governs how we recruit, hire and accommodate individuals in the workplace.
4. Transportation (Integrated Accessibility Standards, O. Reg. 191/11) – aims to remove barriers to public transportation, so people with disabilities can travel more easily in Ontario.
5. Design of Public Spaces - (O. Reg. 413/12) – aims to make public spaces in Ontario accessible for all new construction and extensive renovations.

Accessibility Plan

Section 4 of Ontario Regulation 191/11 made under the AODA, 2005 requires:

- the establishment, implementation, maintenance and documentation of a multi-year accessibility plan, which outlines the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers and meet its requirements under the legislation;
- the posting of the plan on the website and making the plan available in accessible format, upon request;

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- review and update of the plan at least once every five years;
 - the plan must be established, reviewed and updated in consultation with persons with disabilities and the Accessibility Advisory Committee; and
 - an annual status report must be prepared on the progress of the measures taken to implement the strategy outlined in the multi-year plan and be posted on the website and made available in accessible format, upon request.

Accessible Achievements Around the County Notable Achievements: 2017-2022

Haldimand County Administration Building

In February 2020, Haldimand County opened its fully accessible administration building to the public. This building serves as a one-stop shop for all municipal services and provides an inclusive, centrally-located space for residents of all abilities to access services and participate in local government. In addition to its overall accessible design, the building is also equipped with a Hearing Loop system for individuals with auditory impairments.



Cayuga Library and Heritage Centre



The newly built Cayuga Library and Heritage Centre officially opened to the public in August 2019. The new facility offers fully integrated and accessible facilities. This new building offers a unique blend of current and historic information available to the public.

Dunnville Farmers Market and Waterfront Park

In April 2019 the newly renovated Dunnville Farmers Market and Waterfront Park opened for business. This new facility has more space to promote and incorporate more opportunities for local farmers and artisans to sell their products. This new facility offers inclusive and accessible amenities all while creating a greater sense of community because of the equitable access and multi-use space setup.



Public Playground Upgrades



A number of parks around Haldimand County were either newly constructed or had playground equipment replaced to meet accessibility standards. These parks include Lions Playground, Thistlemore Playground, Kinsmen Playground, Oswego Park, and Burke Park Playground.



Future Projects Around the County

Haldimand County is looking at the following projects in future to help build and grow a more inclusive and accessible community. All future projects will be in compliance with the AODA and fully accessible.

- New Active Living Centre and Library in Hagersville – Estimated Early 2025
- Update the Trails Master Plan – 2023
- Revitalization of Outdoor Play Spaces Around the County - Ongoing
- Renewal of the Selkirk Waterfront Way parkette – Estimated Summer 2024
- Building of a New Community Recreation Centre – TBD

Compliance with the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005)

Compliance Actions: AODA Standards

General

Completed Required Action items

- **Multi-Year Accessibility Plan**
 - Haldimand County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and annual status reports have been provided to Council. The 2023-2027 Multi-Year Plan, once approved, will supersede the previous Plan.
- **Training on Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation and the Ontario Human Rights Code**
 - All employees, including new hires, members of Council, volunteer fire fighters, boards and committees have been trained on the IASR Standard and on the Ontario Human Rights Code, as it relates to persons with disabilities.

Customer Service

Completed Required Action Items

- **Accessible Customer Service**
 - Haldimand County is committed to offering excellent accessible customer service. Ongoing compliance with the customer service standard includes the training of new hires as part of their orientation and volunteers who interact with the public on the County's behalf.
- **Accessible Customer Service Policy**
 - Policy number 2009-02 adopted Haldimand County's Accessibility Policy. The Accessible Customer Service Policy guides efforts to achieve compliance with AODA requirements and establishes the County's core accessibility principles. The Policy's statement of commitment affirms the County's commitment to meet the accessibility needs of all people. This Policy will be reviewed and updated in the coming year.

Information and Communication

Completed Required Action Items

- **Accessible Information**
 - Accessible formats of information or communication supports are provided upon request, including emergency and public safety information made available to the public. Compliance requirements are also included in the Accessibility Policy.
- **Making feedback processes accessible**
 - The Accessibility Policy outlines the feedback process. Staff are also trained to respond to feedback in a way that takes into account the individual's needs.

Pending/Ongoing Required Action Items

- **Ensure that all internet websites operated by the County and any new web content that gets posted on those sites conform to WCAG 2.1, Level AA at a minimum**
 - A new website will be designed or the current County website will be remediated on a go forward basis to comply with all accessibility requirements including conforming to WCAG 2.1 Level AA standards at minimum

Employment

Completed Required Action Items

- **Individualized Workplace Emergency Response Information for Employees**
 - Safe Work Standard for Workplace Emergency Response Information Plan was developed and distributed to all staff and included in all Fire Safety Plans
- **Accessible Employment Practices**
 - Continue to prevent, identify and remove barriers across all cycles of the employment lifecycle for all employees of the County

Transportation

Completed Required Action Items

- **Availability of accessible Taxi services**
 - Under By-Law No. 2139/20 Haldimand County will continue to ensure that fair and equitable practices are being carried around the use of accessible taxis

Design of Public Spaces

Completed Required Action Items

- **Completion of a Facility Accessibility Design Standard document**
 - Participate in the creation of a Facility Accessibility Design Standard document in collaboration with departments across the organization and present to Council for adoption.
- **Removal of, and/or prevention of barriers in county owned and leased facilities**
 - Continue with accessibility improvements/enhancements as identified in facility audits.
- **Removal of and/or prevention of barriers in county parks**
 - Ensure new parks are built to compliance standards. Retrofit with new play equipment where required to meet compliance. Ensure pathways are clear and accessible.

Public Consultation on Improving Access in the Community

As the County continuously works to achieve compliance in all areas under the AODA, public consultation and two-way dialogue will be integral in ensuring the needs of residents are understood and met.

To develop the next multi-year plan, members of the community were asked to provide suggestions and feedback around what they would like to see undertaken over the next five years.

A survey was created, in consultation with the AAC, and shared with residents through a variety of promotional channels to encourage participation. Questions posed included the following:

- How often do you visit County-owned facilities or buildings? (Libraries, Administration Buildings, Arenas, Court, Parks, etc)
- How often do you use and access County led programming and activities?
- How would you rate Haldimand County for being accessible and inclusive ?
- 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?
- Have you encountered any barriers to accessing any County-owned facility, building or outdoor space?
- What changes do you think would help Haldimand County be a more accessible and inclusive community?

The survey ran from August 8, 2022 to August 29, 2022. Below is a summary of key findings obtained from the community responses received:

- Majority of respondents were individuals who support a person with a disability or someone who has a disability
- Over 67% of respondents indicated that they access County owned facilities weekly
- In regards to accessing County led programs and activities, 50% of respondents use them several times a year whereas 35% reported never participating in these programs
- The most-used resource to access information on programs and services is the County website
- There are challenges around specific elements of the website such as permits, the property tax portal and reporting of concerns
- 85% of respondents reported not experiencing barriers when participating in county-led programming

- The majority of respondents were between the ages of 30-49 (38%) and 50-69 (41%)
- There was fairly equal representation from every ward

Some of the most common elements that were identified as barriers:

- Not enough accessible parking spots at the County’s arenas
- 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 and beach access
- It was mentioned that some felt that not all County pools are fully accessible
- A lack of accessible transportation across the County
- Signage posted by the County would benefit from larger print and alternative braille formatting

Multi-Year Plan Next Steps and Recommendations 2023 - 2027

As noted, Haldimand County has met almost all of the AODA compliance requirements set out in the previous Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. Focusing on the future, and the target date of 2025 to create an Accessible Ontario, it is important for Haldimand County to expand its reach out into the community to ensure that barriers are removed, no new barriers are formed, and that an inclusive community is created and sustained.

The following recommendations, when enacted, will lead us closer to the goal of an accessible and inclusive Haldimand County.

Customer Service Standard

- Revise policy # 2009-02 – Accessible Customer Service Policy. Update to current codes, standards and practices. The goal will be to complete in 2023.
- Establish a Corporate Accessibility Policy. The goal will be to complete in 2024.
- Haldimand County will review, develop and implement further training materials for County staff and Council to help promote and encourage standardization of accessibility.
- Ensure compliance of staff training materials on an ongoing basis.

Information & Communications Standard

- Implement improvements on the current County website to further meet AODA legislated standards.
- Redesign and launch a new County website that meets AODA legislated WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliance by 2025.

Design of Public Space Standard

- Complete a Facilities Accessible Design Standards document to outline the minimum accessible design standards that will be used across the County. This goal should be completed by 2024.
- Complete 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.
- Identify and develop an action plan pending the results of a facility audit in regards to addressing accessibility concerns on a go-forward basis.
- Haldimand County will continue to review and share capital projects with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Haldimand County will proactively inspect and maintain walking paths and curb cuts to ensure a smooth path of travel for all residents.
- Continue 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

- Ensure that we continue 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

- Ensure that both preventative and emergency maintenance of accessible elements in public spaces is conducted as required
- Celebrate and Promote National AccessAbility week on a go forward basis annually.

Feedback and Contacts

Haldimand County welcomes feedback on the 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility plan, and the accessibility of our programs, services, and facilities.

Feedback may be provided directly to:

Haldimand County – Accessibility Coordinator

53 Thorburn Street South

Cayuga, ON, N0A 1E0

Telephone: 905-318-5932 x 6186

Email: accessibility@haldimandcounty.on.ca

All feedback will be held in strict confidence and used to improve the way we do business. In addition, the author of the feedback will be provided a response in the format in which the feedback was received outlining actions deemed appropriate, if any.

Compliance, Ongoing Review and Monitoring of the Plan

Failure to comply with the AODA regulations can result in administration of penalties as defined in Part V: Compliance of the Integrated Accessibility Standards, Ontario Regulation 191/11.

Annual status reports on the implementation of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2027 will be provided to Council each year, as required, and made available on the County's website, and in an alternative format, upon request.

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years.