



Council Report 2020-04

Title: 2019 Accessibility Annual Status Report

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Reviewed by: Lisa Ainsworth, Director Corporate Services

Approved by: Jennifer Moore, CAO

Strategic Plan: Thriving and Inclusive Communities, Leadership in Change

Council Date: January 29, 2020

Recommendation

“Whereas the Council of the County of Northumberland received Report No. 2020-04 (2019 Accessibility Annual Status Report);

And Whereas the Corporation of the County of Northumberland is committed to complying with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and all the standards under it in order to create a more inclusive Ontario;

And Whereas section 4 of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation requires the County to establish, implement, maintain and document a multi-year accessibility plan and to prepare an annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and to post the status report on the County’s website;

Now Therefore Be It Resolved That the Council of the County of Northumberland accept and approve the 2019 accessibility annual status report and updated Multi-year Accessibility Plan.”

Purpose

This report is the County of Northumberland’s annual update on the measures taken during 2019 to improve accessibility and to report on the progress made under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA).

Background

Statement of Commitment

The County of Northumberland is committed to complying with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and all standards under it in order to create a barrier-free Ontario. The County is committed to and guided by the four core principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity, and supports the full inclusion of persons as set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the AODA.

Accessibility Legislation in Ontario

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 sets out a road map for creating an accessible Ontario by 2025. The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) under the AODA provides the standards that businesses and organizations in Ontario must follow to identify remove and prevent barriers. In addition to the General Requirements, which include the development of accessibility policies and plans, procuring goods, services and facilities and requirements for training, the IASR contains mandatory and enforceable standards in five key areas:

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

The Design of Public Spaces Standard focuses on removing barriers in areas not covered by the Ontario Building Code such as exterior paths of travel, on- and off-street parking, recreational trails, pedestrian crossings and service counters. It applies to new construction or redevelopment of existing spaces. It does not require organizations to retrofit in order to be compliant.

The Ontario Building Code (OBC) regulates the minimum building standards for the construction of all new buildings and buildings that undergo a significant renovation. The OBC includes requirements for minimum accessibility within buildings. In 2015, the OBC was amended to include enhancements to accessibility in buildings. Most new construction and extensive renovations will be subject to these updated requirements; existing buildings where no work is planned, are not affected by these new requirements.

Consultations

The 2019 accomplishments outlined in this annual status report were determined by the County's Human Resources and Accessibility Coordinator in collaboration and consultation with the County departments.

The Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee has reviewed and provided input on this annual status report and will continue to do so on an on-going basis to ensure we are meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

To meet the legislative requirements of the AODA, the County must comply with the IASR and prepare an annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the multi-year accessibility plan. O. Reg. 191/11: Integrated Accessibility Standards, Section 4.

Accessibility Annual Status Update

Northumberland's Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee (NAAC) is a citizen committee that provides advice, recommendations and support to County Council and all County departments regarding the development, implementation and maintenance of the County's Accessibility Plan in accordance with the AODA. The NAAC advises on the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to people with disabilities when accessing County goods, services and facilities.

Each member of the NAAC is a volunteer and the majority of NAAC membership is held by persons with disabilities. The NAAC is supported by the Accessibility Coordinator and the Corporate Services Department.

In March 2019, the Committee grew to 12 members bringing a wide range of personal and professional experiences and perspective related to the challenges faced by people with disabilities. They provide invaluable advice and support as we continue to work toward a barrier-free community.

Under the AODA, the County is required to consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee when new County projects are being planned. In 2019, the NAAC reviewed site plans for:

- Trent Hills shared Emergency Services Base
- Golden Plough Lodge and Northumberland County Archives and Museum

In 2019, the NAAC also:

- Participated in a department accessibility review of the County Archives, providing feedback on service-related elements and accessible public spaces elements.
- Users tested the County's new accessible website, providing feedback on accessibility and WGAC standards.
- Awarded Helping Hands certificates to County employees who championed accessibility (Susan Brown, Deputy Chief Paramedics; Website Refresh Team: Kate Campbell, Shana Tinson, Tony Paulic, Devon Silhanek.)
- Presented to Council in support of the proclamation of National AccessAbility Week (May 26 – June 1, 2019).
- Supported National AccessAbility Week by submitting inspirational videos and cartoons related to accessibility and inclusion, which were shared on the County's internal website with the theme of "Rethink Access and (dis)Ability".
- Completed the Digital Strategy Survey and provided items for consideration for the Digital Strategy

- Participated as volunteer evacuees in the Joint Emergency Exercise Training and provided feedback on accessibility related to customer service, information and communications, and the emergency shelter's public spaces used during the exercise.
- Submitted quotes and photographs to be used in an awareness campaign video for International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3, 2019) based on the theme "Promoting the participation of persons with disabilities and their leadership".
- Provided feedback on the County's new recycling program, making recommendations on how to support people with disabilities.
- Completed Accessibility Training in IASR General Requirements, Information and Communications, Customer Service, Design of Public Spaces

Accessibility Governance/Compliance

The Accessibility Coordinator acts as a resource for all County service areas and facilitates compliance with the AODA. To ensure that the County continues to meet or exceed the requirements of the AODA, the Coordinator continued to stay informed about legislation and participated in accessibility networks such as the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals (ONAP).

The Accessibility Coordinator facilitates the inter-municipal accessibility advisory committee meetings 3 times a year, bringing the County and member municipalities together to support AODA compliance by sharing information, discussing issues, problem solving and collaborating.

In 2019, the Accessibility Coordinator supported County departments by consulting and educating staff in a variety of areas including: invisible disabilities, service counters, trails, trail maps, picnic tables, pedestrian crossings, speech to text software, signage and conducting accessible meetings and public engagement. In addition, the Coordinator provided training and staff support on creating accessible documents, provided accessibility-related information to support grant applications, and consulted regarding employee accommodations.

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation

General Requirements

The County has accessibility policies in place and continues to monitor and update policies as necessary.

The County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2012-2021 outlines the initiatives the County has taken to ensure compliance with the AODA. Additionally the Plan outlines how the County will continue to meet its legislated obligations under the AODA and address the accessibility needs of our community. The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is posted on the County's website.

The County continues to include accessible design, features and criteria when purchasing goods, services or facilities. If the County is not able to purchase accessible goods, services or facilities, the County provides an explanation as to why, upon request.

We continue to ensure that training is provided on the requirements of the accessibility standards and the Human Rights Code as it pertains to persons with disabilities to all

employees, volunteers, persons who participate in developing policies and persons who provide goods, services or facilities on behalf of the County. Training is appropriate to the duties of the employees, volunteers and other persons.

In 2019,

- Our policy template was updated to an accessible format so that all new or revised policies are created in an accessible format.
- Spot checks were conducted to ensure that accessibility information notices at County customer service desks were still in place at County facilities.
- Provided in-depth AODA training to Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee on General Requirements, Customer Service, Information and Communications, Design of Public Spaces Standards
- Several accessibility policies were reviewed, combined and revised in preparation for approval in 2020.

Information and Communications

The County of Northumberland's main website was redeveloped and launched in April 2019 and now complies with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA. The Northumberland Partners website was also migrated to the main website bringing it to the same compliance level. We continue to work on the remaining departmental websites to ensure the sites will be WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliant prior to the January 1, 2021 deadline.

The County's new website features BrowseAloud assistive technology software. BrowseAloud has a number of tools to further enhance accessibility such as: highlighting, reading out loud and language translation. For the period of April 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019 there were:

- 1190 BrowseAloud downloads, and
- 1058 speech requests.

Employees across all departments continue to work hard to ensure that all web content is in an accessible format. In some situations we have not been able to post content due to format. When information is not accessible to a person, County employees work with the person to find a suitable accessible format.

In support of accessible documents for our website, we continue to provide training to County staff on how to create accessible documents. The Accessibility Coordinator continued to train and support employees that need assistance creating accessible documents.

We encourage individuals who find a document inaccessible to contact us to request it in an alternative format.

Employment

The County of Northumberland remains committed to accessible and equitable hiring practices and continued to meet the Employment Standard requirements under the AODA. All job postings include a statement about the availability of accommodations for applicants with disabilities throughout the recruitment process.

Offers of employment notify successful candidates that job accommodations are available for people with disabilities. All employees are informed of policies regarding job accommodations. The County continues to provide workplace and emergency response information in accessible formats to employees who require it. The County provides accessible formats and communication supports in consultation with the employee, upon request.

Transportation

The County of Northumberland does not provide or operate conventional or specialized transportation services, school transportation or ferries, nor does the County license taxicabs; therefore, the transportation standards do not apply to the County.

Design of Public Spaces

The County continues to ensure that all new and redeveloped public spaces meet or exceed the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard. The County continues to meet the consultation requirements when carrying out the construction or redevelopment of public spaces, such as when new recreational trails are developed.

In consultation with the Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee, we completed a department accessibility review of County Archives, looking at accessible public spaces-related elements.

Although the County is not required to retrofit public spaces under the AODA, we continue to make accessibility improvements. In 2019, we:

- Installed power door operators
 - 2 at 860 William Street (Cobourg) Courtroom 5
 - 2 at the Material Recovery Facility (Grafton) main entrance
- Replaced power door operators
 - 600 William Street (Cobourg) “factory” door
 - 860 William Street, (Cobourg) crown attorney office
 - 330 King Street East (Cobourg) west entrance
 - 43 Wellington Street (Port Hope) front door
- Replaced exterior concrete staircase and handrail at 860 William Street, (Cobourg)
- Replaced stairwell flooring (treads and risers) in 4 stairwells at 330 King Street East (Cobourg) which included improved visibility of nosing
- Completed grinding of sidewalks at numerous locations to improve surface variations for people who use mobility devices and reduce slip, trip and fall risks.
- Improved the visibility of nosing on stairs at 555 Courthouse Road
- Installed additional grab bar in Golden Plough Lodge’s auditorium women’s washroom (accommodation request)
- Introduced priority seating for people with disabilities at Council meetings

Customer Service

The County of Northumberland continues to be in compliance with the Customer Service Standard. When accessing County goods, service and facilities, individuals may use their assistive devices. Service animals are welcomed in all areas that are open to the public,

unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. People with disabilities can access their support person when accessing County goods, services and facilities.

We continue to train all new employees and volunteers on Accessible Customer Service, including how to communicate with people with disabilities in a manner that takes into account their abilities. We work with the person with a disability to determine which methods of communication work best for them.

In 2019, we

- Completed 1 department accessibility review (County Archives) looking at customer service-related elements.
- Developed a tracking mechanism to report on accessibility feedback.

Next Steps

Throughout 2020, The County of Northumberland will continue meet, maintain and exceed its obligations under the AODA and the Integrated Accessibility Standards. In keeping with our goal of removing barriers to access our goods, services and facilities, and exceeding our legislated obligations, we will:

- Respond to requests for information in an alternate format
- Continue to support and educate staff on creating accessible documents
- Continue conducting accessibility reviews of county services and facilities
- Continue to review and update accessibility policies
- Provide current employees and volunteers with updated information on changes to our accessibility policies and continue providing accessibility training to all new staff and volunteers.
- Monitor accessibility trends, themes and actions at local, provincial and federal levels
- Seek out funding opportunities that support accessibility and inclusion
- Explore assistive technology and devices to improve access to County goods, services and facilities
- Continue to make accessibility upgrades our facilities including the installation of a lift at 8 King Street West (Colborne) and a new larger tactile warning surface at the upper level of the staircase at 555 Courthouse Road
- Update remaining department websites to WCAG 2.0 Level AA
- Continue achieving remaining goals within the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2012-2021
- Develop a new Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2021-2026 in consultation with people with disabilities.

Financial Impact

There is no provincial funding to support the implementation of the regulations under the AODA. Ongoing costs to administer and manage the implementation of the AODA requirements are integrated as a part of general operations.

Member Municipality Impacts

The County continues to collaborate with all member municipalities through the Inter-Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Conclusion/Outcomes

It is the recommendation of staff that the Council of the County of Northumberland accepts and approves this annual status report.

Attachments

Northumberland County 2012-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan – updated January 2020