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## Report 2024-062

**Report Title:** 2024 Accessibility Annual Status Report

**Committee Name:** Corporate Support

**Committee Meeting Date:** April 1, 2025

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**Approved by:** Jennifer Moore, CAO

**Council Meeting Date:** April 16, 2025

**Strategic Plan Priorities:**  Innovate for Service Excellence  
 Ignite Economic Opportunity  
 Foster a Thriving Community  
 Propel Sustainable Growth  
 Champion a Vibrant Future

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### Recommendation

“That the Corporate Support Committee, having considered Report 2025-062 ‘2024 Accessibility Annual Status Report’, recommend that County Council approve the ‘2024 Accessibility Annual Status Report and updated 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.’”

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### Purpose

This report is the County of Northumberland’s annual update on the measures taken during 2024 to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and to report on the progress made to meet the requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

## **Background**

The County is committed to accessibility and meeting or exceeding the legislated requirements.

## **Statement of Commitment to Accessibility**

The County of Northumberland is committed to ensuring that people of all ages and abilities enjoy the same opportunities as they live, work, visit and invest in our community. The County is 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 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (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 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 are subject to these amendments; existing buildings where no work is planned are not affected by the amendments.

## **Consultations**

The 2024 accomplishments outlined in this annual status report were determined by the County's Accessibility Coordinator in collaboration and consultation with the County departments.

The Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee (NAAC) has reviewed and provided input on this Accessibility Annual Status Report and will continue to provide input on the County's accessibility plans on an on-going basis to ensure the County is meeting the needs of people with disabilities. At its February 13, 2025, meeting, the NAAC endorsed the 2024 Accessibility Annual Status Update and recommended that Council accept and approve the 2024 Accessibility Annual Status Update.

## **Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations**

To meet the legislative requirements of the AODA, the County must comply with the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR). Therefore, the County must establish, implement, maintain, and document a multi-year accessibility plan which outlines the County's strategy to prevent and remove barriers and meet its obligation under the IASR. In addition, the County is also required to 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.)

## **Discussion / Options**

This Accessibility Annual Status update outlines the County's accessibility achievements for 2024, including the accomplishment of goals set out in the County's 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. Some of the 2024 goals have been adjusted to continue in 2025.

## **Northumberland's Accessibility Advisory Committee**

The Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee (NAAC) is a citizen-based 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, except for 1 member from County Council. The majority of NAAC membership is held by people with disabilities. The NAAC members bring a wide range of personal and professional experiences and perspectives 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.

The NAAC is supported by the Accessibility Coordinator and the Corporate Services Department.

Under the AODA, the NAAC reviews site plans and drawings described in section 41 of the Planning Act, and the County consults with the NAAC on other projects related to the design of public spaces. The NAAC members continued to provide input and feedback to County staff and Council based on their knowledge, expertise and lived experience.

In 2024, the NAAC also:

- Endorsed the 2023 Accessibility Annual Status Report.
- Awarded Helping Hands certificates to County employees who championed accessibility.
  - AJ Wood (Golden Plough Lodge)
  - Cara Timmermans (Communications)
  - Ashley Postma (Community and Social Services)
  - Jackie Diminie (Community and Social Services)
  - Jaclyn McDougall (Community and Social Services)
  - Jen Glover (Community and Social Services)
  - Kathryn Larcher (Community and Social Services)

- Supported and contributed to the awareness activities for National AccessAbility Week (May 26-June 1, 2024) and International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3, 2024).
- Reviewed applications for NAAC membership and selected 1 new member.
- Conducted a site visit at the Port Hope walk-in clinic (pilot) and provided recommendations on improving access for people with disabilities considering the user experience from the parking lot to the medical exam rooms.

### **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 2024, the Accessibility Coordinator supported County departments by consulting and educating staff in a variety of areas including: best practice for signage (including font size, style, colour contrast, and use of braille), assistive technology, security ID badge design, live auto captioning, accessible parking, eclipse awareness materials, interpretive panels, assistive listening devices, and recreational trails.

In addition, the Accessibility Coordinator:

- Acted as the liaison with the funder for the Employment and Social Development Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund 2022 grant award for the County headquarters accessible emergency exits project, to ensure that all elements in the funding agreement were met; Negotiated a project extension to November 2025.
- Coordinated awareness activities for National AccessAbility Week and International Day of Persons with Disabilities in consultation with NAAC and Communications.
- Monitored the 2024 goals within the 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, liaising with County departments.
- Provided feedback and recommendations on improving access for people with disabilities at the Port Hope walk-in clinic (pilot).
- Responded to resident and staff inquiries related to accessibility.
- Provided accessibility grant information to local business/organizations.
- Supported member municipalities regarding accessibility (including public surveys, multi-year accessibility plans, grant application, American sign language.)

### **Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation**

#### **General requirements**

The County has an overarching accessibility policy in place along with several operational policies related to accessibility.

The County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2025 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 2024, the County:

- Continued to monitor the status of and work towards the goals within the County's 2022-2025 Multi Year Accessibility Plan.
- Conducted an annual review of the Multi Year Accessibility Plan and updated the Plan as required (ongoing).

### **Information and Communications**

Northumberland County's main website and microsites have been developed to ensure WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliance. The County regularly monitors websites and web content to identify and remediate any areas of non-compliance.

The County's website features ReachDeck assistive technology software. ReachDeck has several tools to further enhance accessibility such as: highlighting, reading out loud, text magnifier and language translation.

The Web Content Accessibility Working Group members continue to support web compliance within their business units. To support ongoing document accessibility, all employees responsible for creating documents have received accessible documents training and new employees are assigned accessible documents training appropriate for their roles. The addition of a digital and document accessibility specialist in late 2022 has increased the support available to the working group in 2024.

In some situations, the County may not be able to post web content due to the format. When information is not accessible to a person, County employees work with the person to find a suitable accessible format. We encourage individuals who find a document inaccessible to contact us to request it in an alternative format.

In 2024, the County:

- Continued accessible documents training for all new employees, as appropriate.
  - Held 9 Accessible Word and PowerPoint Documents training sessions
  - 39 employees trained.
- Facilitated 1 accessible documents training session for member municipalities
  - 12 participants trained.
- Facilitated Equidox training (document remediation software).

- Held 4 Equidox training sessions; 9 employees trained.
- Held Equidox New User Interface training; 18 employees trained.
- Hosted 1 Plain Language Workshop.
  - 19 employees were trained to use clear straightforward expression to allow the reader to understand the message easily.
- Continued monthly audits on select webpages and documents posted on the County's website(s) to ensure WCAG2.0 AA compliance.
  - 11 webpages audited.
  - 14 documents audited.
- Implemented live auto-captioning for Committee and Council meetings and captions for meeting recordings.

## **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.

The County continues to share job postings directly with local agencies and other organizations that assist people with disabilities in their job search.

In 2024, the County:

- Reviewed and updated the general orientation and Health and Safety orientation presentations to improve accessibility and enhance the employee experience.

## **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. Although the County is not required to retrofit public spaces under the AODA, we continue to make accessibility improvements.

In 2024, the County:

- Formally opened the Porcupine Trail, a new 1-km universal trail within Northumberland County Forest.

- Redesigned and installed new road signage at the 5 trailheads within Northumberland County Forest improving readability.
- Redeveloped and installed new signage at Brighton, Bewdley and Seymour Community Recycling Centres (CRCs), enhancing accessibility for customers.
- Oversaw the design and installation of a universal washroom with shower facilities in the ground floor colling/warming space at 310 Division Street (Cobourg)
- Oversaw the installation of “easier access” shower spaces improving shower accessibility in occupant rooms at 310 Division Street (Cobourg)

The County worked with the Northumberland County Housing Corporation (NCHC) to make accessibility-related improvements including the following:

- Completed the installation of a new accessible entrance, ramp, patio and railing at 12 A Meade St (Brighton).
- Added an additional power door operator to an accessible unit at 299 Elgin Street East
- Added 2 new Type A and 1 Type B accessible parking spaces to the lot at 330 King Street (Cobourg)

### **Customer Service**

The County of Northumberland continues to comply 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.

We continue to offer a variety of ways for customers to provide feedback on the accessibility of our facilities, programs and services.

In 2024, the Accessibility Coordinator received, tracked and ensured responses to customer feedback, including:

- 4 concerns regarding a mailed request to complete a survey using a QR code; All were provided with a print-based survey.
- 1 concern related font size used in a County policy. Customer was provided with a larger print format.
- 1 concern regarding disposal of waste over the safety rail at a CRC. Customer was provided with the procedure for when assistance is needed.

The following accomplishments improved customer service in 2024:

- Prepared and presented AODA training on Service Animals to Community and Social Services team
- Hosted staff Lunch and Learn with John Draper “Believing in Possibilities” to challenge assumptions and reduce stigma related to disabilities.

- Accommodated 169 households through the Accessible Recycling Collection Program (increase of 18%).
- Accommodated 174 households through the existing Medical Waste Subsidy program (increase of 9%).

### **Other initiatives**

The County continued to participate the following initiatives in 2024:

- Recognized National AccessAbility Week (May 26 – June 1, 2024).
- Awarded Helping Hands certificates to County employees who championed accessibility.
- Recognized International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3, 2024).
- Reviewed and shared internally the key statistics within the latest Canadian Survey on Disability

### **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 and accessibility improvements are integrated as a part of general operations.

There is a financial risk for O. Reg. 191/11: Integrated Accessibility Standards non-compliance. The County may incur administrative penalties of \$500.00 up to \$100,000.00 per day, based on the impact of any contravention of the IASR.

Legal risks may occur if the County does not afford reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities, under AODA, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### **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 receives and approves this 2024 Accessibility Annual Status Report.

### **Attachments**

1. Report 2025-062 ATTACH 1 '2022-2025 MYAP - 2025 Update'