

2025 – 2030
City of Waterloo
Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

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Territorial acknowledgement:

Waterloo is situated on the land traditionally cared for by the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabe and Chonnonton peoples. We acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge and philosophies of the Indigenous Peoples with whom we share this land today.

Introduction/commitment to accessibility:

The City of Waterloo's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) is a public-facing strategic roadmap designed to guide the City in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility across its programs, services, and spaces. This plan is developed under the guidelines of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). It reflects the City's ongoing commitment to creating a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible community for all residents, workers, and visitors, especially those living with visible and invisible disabilities. This commitment is further strengthened through its recognition as a guiding principle and priority in the the City's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan's, as well as a priority area in the City's Get READI Plan.

The focus area and initiatives detailed in this MYAP come from the City's Get READI Plan (2024) and Get READI Benchmarking and Implementation Plan (2025). Only initiatives and actions related to accessibility have been identified here to provide a streamlined Plan.

Alternative formats:

Accessible formats and communication supports for this MYAP are available upon request. If you need a document or communication support in another format, call 519-747-8780. This includes Braille, large print, audio, closed captioning or ASL interpretation. These requests are sent directly to project managers or support staff that can help.

Definitions:

City of Waterloo: A city in the Regional Municipality of Waterloo.

GRAAC: The Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) works with local municipalities to create barrier-free communities and services. GRAAC is a cross-disability municipal advisory committee whose members advise the municipal Councils of the Cities of Kitchener and Waterloo, the Region of Waterloo, and the Townships of Woolwich, Wellesley, Wilmot and North Dumfries. Members are chosen for their experience in the field of disability and are people with lived experience with disability issues. Members must be willing to work within the framework of a municipal advisory committee (Region of Waterloo).

Lived and living experience: Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people (Mental Health Commission of Canada).

Disability (as defined under the AODA) includes:

1. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation, or disfigurement caused by bodily injury, birth defect, or illness, including but not limited to:
 - a. Diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, brain injury
 - b. Paralysis, amputation, lack of physical coordination
 - c. Blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment
 - d. Muteness or speech impediment
 - e. Physical reliance on a guide dog, service animal, wheelchair, or assistive device
2. A condition of mental impairment, developmental disability, or mental disorder
3. A learning disability or dysfunction in one or more processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language

Persons with disability: Refers to individuals who experience one or more of the above conditions, including visible and invisible disabilities.

Interpretation and Communication services: Supports that ensure full participation, including sign language interpretation, captioning, alternate formats, translation, and assistive technology tools.

DEI: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) encompasses the symbiotic relationship, philosophy and culture of acknowledging, embracing, supporting, and accepting those of all racial, sexual, gender, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, among other differentiators (Inclusion Hub).

Focus areas and initiatives:

The City of Waterloo aims to meet AODA obligations and remove and prevent barriers through initiatives that fall into the focus areas as set out below:

Priority area 2: Enhance the built environment

Goal: Ensure that the physical and digital environments of the City of Waterloo are accessible, inclusive, and proactively designed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

Multi-Year Initiatives:

- 2.1 Work towards a funding plan to upgrade interior spaces to be accessible and inclusive for all community members.
- 2.2 Work towards a funding plan to upgrade exterior spaces to be accessible and inclusive for all community members.
- 2.3 Continuously assess the needs of the built environment, ensuring that proactive actions are taken to meet complex needs of the broad spectrum of disabilities.

Actions (2025-2029):

Planning and Funding

- Encourage Finance to collaborate with department leads and the Finance Committee to establish clear budget lines for accessibility and inclusion in both corporate and departmental budgets.
- Clarify annual and 3-year capital allocations for accessibility upgrades and create a sustainability plan for continuous accessibility improvements.

Construction and Facilities

- Require construction companies to provide:
 - Accessible on-site signage for sidewalk disruptions and detours
 - Accessible online postings of disruptions and alternate routes
- Add and maintain universal washrooms equipped with:
 - Grab bars
 - Child-friendly step stools
 - Adult change tables
- Recruit a Construction Coordinator role tasked with advancing accessibility in City facilities.
- Provide quiet or prayer rooms in municipal buildings for breastfeeding, personal reflection, or de-escalation needs.
- Install tactile wayfinding to support people with low or no vision.
- Develop a sensory room at the Albert McCormick Community Centre based on feedback gathered from focus groups of people with lived and living experiences.
- Ensure emergency, evacuation, and lockdown procedures are highly visible to staff and the public and provide training to staff to follow them.
- Enforce a scent-free policy for both the public and staff in City facilities.

- Continue enhancing accessibility features in cross-departmental, council, and all staff meetings, based on feedback and accessibility best practices, such as:
 - Accessible seating and layouts
 - Proper audio systems and live captioning
 - Accessible documents and presentations
 - Hybrid and virtual participation offerings
- Re-purpose the municipal right-of-way (e.g. bike lanes, multi-use trails and wider sidewalks) where possible, to provide barrier free pathways and roads and City parks.
- Develop audio improvements that support individuals who are Deaf and/or hard of hearing:
 - At service counters and meeting rooms across City facilities
 - Hearing Loops at City Hall
 - Installation of meeting room OWLs to support hybrid capacities for meetings

Digital and Document Accessibility

- Research and develop accessibility guidelines for construction projects, digital technology, and document creation to assess vendors' compliance with AODA.
- Require consultants, contractors, and vendors to produce accessible documents in compliance with AODA, including:
 - Word, PDF, PPT, and Excel formats
 - Accessible website postings and alternate formats upon request
- Provide guiding documents and online/in-person training for staff, offered quarterly and repeated annually.
- Encourage peer-to-peer training where administrative coordinators teach colleagues to create accessible documents.

Community Engagement

- Use multiple communication methods to engage staff and residents with disabilities, including:
 - Focus groups, emails, phone calls, and text messaging
 - Outreach through frontline staff, community of practice networks, and equity-denied organizations
- Develop an awareness campaign to inform community members about the importance of accessible snow clearing in the City and how they can be involved.

Audits

- Conduct regular facility audits with persons with lived experience of disability to hold the City accountable for continuous improvements.
- Ensure audit reports clearly show progress and remaining gaps, tied to the overall accessibility upgrade schedule.

Priority area 3: Cultivate a culture of belonging

Goal: Create inclusive, welcoming, and accessible community spaces where residents of all abilities feel a sense of belonging and can participate fully.

Multi-Year Initiatives:

3.1 Develop, promote, and/or evaluate free/low cost, accessible, inclusive, age-friendly public spaces for equity-denied community members.

3.3 Identify and remove barriers that prevent participation of equity-denied groups in municipal-led programming.

Actions (2025-2029):

Inclusive Spaces and Programs

- Form employee affinity groups to provide peer support to employees from equity-denied groups, fostering a sense of inclusion and allyship.
- Modify the Seniors Community Champions program to adopt an advisory role that provides input on current accessibility and DEI initiatives.
- Consider creating a separate Waterloo Accessibility Advisory Committee (WAAC) with members representing diverse disabilities.
- Develop disability-inclusive programs where persons with and without disabilities participate together, often in partnership with community organizations that have specialized expertise.
- Install non-verbal communication boards in public parks, beginning in 2025 as a pilot project.
- Introduce sensory backpacks in City facilities.
- Collaborate with GRAAC to introduce the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program, using Sunflower lanyards as a tool to help individuals self-identify the need for additional supports in City facilities.

Participation Supports

- Provide volunteer honoraria or recognition to compensate persons with lived experience of marginalization for their subject matter expertise.
- Include accessibility features and additional supports on request in meeting invitations and announcements.
- Ensure unemployed or under-employed persons with disabilities can participate in consultations by offering:
 - Accessibility supports
 - Transportation assistance
 - Child-minding or personal support services
- Promote accessible programs and participation opportunities through organizations serving the disability community.

Representation

- Compile a library of authentic and diverse images of Waterloo residents for online and print communications.

- Portray persons with disabilities and marginalized communities in a positive, dignified, and representative way across City communications.

Digital Inclusion and Decision-Making

- Consult the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), accessible technology experts, and persons with lived experience before selecting any mobile application, software, or online platform.
- Involve disability organizations and end-users in regular digital technology audits to identify barriers and improve usability.

Priority area 4: Reflect diversity in staff and leadership

Goal: Achieve meaningful representation, inclusion, and equitable advancement for persons with disabilities across all levels of the organization, including collaborating with council members and leadership, and providing training and educational awareness opportunities.

Multi-Year Initiatives:

4.1 Work with Council and leadership to provide training on READI principles with the intention of reducing harmful biases, perceptions, and worldviews that impact equity-denied community members.

4.2 Support Council and leadership to build and enhance meaningful connections with equity-denied communities.

4.3 Review and reconstruct the employment life cycle, where required, to remove barriers for equity-denied groups.

4.4 Enhance and promote leadership career advancement opportunities to increase diversity in management positions.

Actions (2025-2029):

Awareness and Training

- Schedule regular General Staff Meetings where divisions share how they are enhancing accessibility and DEI, encouraging best practice exchange.
- Collaborate with READI Division to develop mandatory and optional accessibility and DEI training topics for all staff.
- Offer various training formats and approaches: in-person, online, self-paced, team-based, one-on-one or in groups, based on managers' recommendations.
- Through the Learning Project Team develop microlearning programs, ensuring facilitation by people with lived experience.
- Frequently and strongly encourage staff to participate in upcoming trainings, including Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) webinars, mentioning benefits for their personal and professional development.

Informing

- Organizational strategies, including accessibility and DEI strategies, are shared widely and referenced, keeping all departments on track and accountable.
- Educate/inform vendors, contractors, and consultants on accessibility and DEI requirements during procurement.
- Report back to staff on survey findings and action plans for improving on diverse representation, and accessibility and inclusion in the workplace.

Priority area 5: Equitable distribution of resources

Goal: Providing resources to meet the unique needs of every community member.

Multi-Year Initiatives:

5.1 Expand opportunities for equity-denied groups to find meaningful employment throughout the Waterloo community.

5.2 Advocate towards providing accessible and affordable housing options that enable movement for people with disabilities.

5.3 Evaluate and expand availability and accessibility of interpretation services.

5.4 Explore, advocate for, and make available accessible and affordable resources that support aging in place.

Actions (2025-2029):

Employment Participation

- Review and update job postings to be welcoming to under-represented population groups, including qualified candidates with disabilities.
- Expand job posting locations to encourage applications from under-represented populations.
- Staff is aware of and implements program and service development templates that consider accessibility and DEI from the outset.

Programs and Service Access

- Enhance and develop existing and new programs using:
 - Universal design principles.
 - Reduced segregation between persons with and without disabilities.
- Ensure equitable program registration and payment processes, including:
 - Priority registration for youth with disabilities.
 - Promotion of disability-specific and disability-inclusive programs through disability-serving organizations highlighting accessible features and available accommodations.

Priority area 6: Systems of accountability

Goal: Build trust, transparency, and measurable progress through engagement frameworks, processes, monitoring, and reporting on accessibility outcomes.

Multi-Year Initiatives:

6.1 Develop a Community Engagement Framework that considers trusted practices for consulting with equity-denied groups.

6.2 Adopt community-based research approaches when engaging with the Waterloo community towards a more collaborative engagement process.

6.3 Appropriately compensate community representatives for their time, efforts, and knowledge.

6.4 Support community organizations and groups with collecting their own data on the populations they serve.

6.5 Build City of Waterloo's capacity to effectively implement the MYAP.

6.6 Build an Implementation Plan to monitor progress of the goals listed in the MYAP.

6.7 Develop a Measurement and Monitoring Framework to track progress on the outcomes of the MYAP.

Actions (2025-2029):

Community Engagement and Transparency

- Continue to engage diverse and under-represented community groups in:
 - Strategy development
 - Plan dissemination
 - Ongoing review and updates
- Provide annual reports to Council and GRAAC, detailing:
 - Progress achieved
 - Barriers identified
 - Next steps for each priority area
- Make status reports publicly available alongside the MYAP.
- Continuously inform Council on key accountabilities in strategy development, report on input from diverse communities which are incorporated throughout the planning and implementation process.

Data and Monitoring Systems

- Review and update employee demographic surveys to include disaggregated data on disability and intersectional identities.
- Develop a system-integrated way to track participant demographics and feedback, including pre- and post-program evaluation.
- Demonstrate to staff and the public how feedback has been incorporated in decision-making.

Continuous Improvement

- Review and update the Accessibility Plan to move beyond minimum AODA compliance toward excellence in inclusion.
- Engage staff and persons with lived experience in plan review and updates to ensure authenticity and relevance.

- Prioritize facility upgrades apart of the multi-year accessibility work plan in consultation with the internal DEI advisory team and community partners with lived experiences.

Roles and responsibilities:

A successful implementation of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) requires support and commitment across all levels of the organization. Each department is responsible for integrating accessibility, equity, and inclusion into its planning, operations, and decision-making processes.

City Leadership and Council

Priority Areas: 4, 6

Responsibilities:

- Proactively include accessibility and inclusion as core organizational values.
- Participate in mandatory accessibility and DEI/anti-bias training to support informed decision-making.
- Ensure accessibility and equity are embedded in Council decisions, policy approvals, and strategic planning.
- Support and resource departmental initiatives outlined in the MYAP.
- Review and endorse annual MYAP progress reports, identifying future priorities.
- Engage with equity-denied communities to maintain meaningful connections and foster trust.

Community Programming and Outreach Services

Priority Areas: 3, 4, 5, 6

Responsibilities:

- Design and deliver inclusive programs and services using universal design principles to reduce segregation.
- Develop disability-inclusive programming in partnership with community organizations and service providers.
- Offer supports for community participation, including:
 - Accessible transportation
 - Child-minding and personal support services
 - Honoraria for participants with lived experience
- Conduct program evaluations and engagement sessions to identify barriers and measure inclusion.
- Promote accessible programs and services through outreach to organizations serving equity-denied communities.
- Encourage community advisory participation and feedback in ongoing program development.

Corporate Communications

Priority Areas: 3, 4, 5, 6

Responsibilities:

- Ensure all public-facing communications (digital and print) are AODA-compliant and available in accessible formats on request.

- Publicize construction notices, detours, and service changes using accessible and multiple communication channels (online, signage, phone, email).
- Build and maintain a library of authentic and diverse images portraying City of Waterloo residents in positive and dignified ways.
- Promote program accessibility features in marketing and outreach materials.
- Collaborate with IT Services to maintain accessible websites and digital platforms.
- Include accessibility supports and contact options in all event or meeting invitations.

Facility Design and Management Services

Priority Areas: 2, 5, 6

Responsibilities:

- Conduct regular accessibility audits of municipal buildings and facilities, documenting gaps and progress.
- Prioritize renovations and upgrades that meet or exceed AODA and universal design standards.
- Ensure maintenance and visibility of accessibility features, including ramps, lifts, automatic doors, and clear interior wayfinding.
- Integrate accessibility considerations into early-stage design of new builds and capital projects.
- Communicate construction detours and facility disruptions via accessible on-site and online postings.
- Engage persons with lived experience of disability in facility reviews and annual audits.
- Install and maintain universal washrooms, quiet/prayer rooms, tactical wayfinding, and scent-free policies in facilities.

Financial Planning and Asset Management

Priority Areas: 2, 5, 6

Responsibilities:

- Work with departments and Council to allocate and track budget lines for accessibility upgrades and DEI initiatives.
- Develop a sustainable multi-year financial plan for continuous accessibility improvements.
- Track capital budget allocations for accessibility upgrades and report on spending progress.
- Ensure funding plans include:
 - Interior and exterior facility upgrades
 - Program and service accessibility enhancements
 - Community supports such as interpretation, transportation, and honoraria

Human Resources

Priority Areas: 4, 5, 6

Responsibilities:

- Review and enhance the employment life cycle (recruitment, hiring, retention, advancement) to remove barriers.
- Post inclusive job descriptions to attract equity-denied and underrepresented candidates, including persons with disabilities.
- Coordinate mandatory and optional accessibility and DEI training for all staff and leadership.
- Support and resource employee affinity groups and lived-experience networks.
- Conduct regular demographic surveys with disaggregated data to track diversity and accessibility progress.
- Share results and actions from surveys with staff to build accountability and trust.

IT Services

Priority Areas: 2, 3, 4, 6

Responsibilities:

- Ensure digital platforms, websites, and software are AODA-compliant.
- Conduct annual digital accessibility audits with feedback from persons with lived experience.
- Support staff training for creating accessible digital content and documents (Word, Excel, PPT, PDFs).
- Provide technical support for assistive technologies, including captioning, screen readers, and alternate formats.
- Collaborate with Communications to ensure digital communications and online services remain fully accessible.

Parks, Forestry, and Cemetery Services

Priority Areas: 2, 3, 5

Responsibilities:

- Provide accessible seating, clear wayfinding, and barrier-free pathways in outdoor spaces.
- Conduct annual outdoor accessibility inspections and address deficiencies.
- Support inclusive community events in public spaces, ensuring accessibility features are communicated in advance.
- Integrate age-friendly and inclusive designs into parks and open space planning.

Recreation Services:

Priority Areas: 3, 4, 5, 6

Responsibilities:

- Ensure all recreation programs and facilities are accessible and inclusive using universal design principles.
- Offer priority registration for youth with disabilities and ensure equitable program access.
- Partner with community organizations to develop disability-specific and inclusive recreation programs.
- Provide staff training in accessibility awareness and inclusive program delivery.
- Collect feedback from participants with lived experience to guide future programming.

- Ensure communication of accessible program features to the public through multiple channels.

Review and update schedule:

As prescribed under the AODA, the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) must be updated every five years. The new City of Waterloo MYAP is in effect from 2025 to 2029.

Communication of the plan:

The City of Waterloo is committed to transparent, accountable, and community-informed implementation of this Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP). To ensure the plan remains a living document that guides real progress, the following communication mechanisms will be in place:

- Integration in Municipal Operations
 - The MYAP will serve as the foundational workplan for the City's Accessibility advocate
 - Departments across the City will align their accessibility efforts with the strategic areas and initiatives outlined in this plan
- Public Availability
 - The MYAP will be published on the City of Waterloo's website and made available in accessible formats
- Annual Updates
 - A formal status update will be presented each year to both council and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee outlining progress made, barriers identified, and next steps
 - Status updates will be made publicly available alongside the MYAP

Feedback mechanisms:

The City of Waterloo welcomes feedback to improve accessibility:

- Email: accessibility@waterloo.ca
- Mail: Accessibility Services, Waterloo City Hall, 100 Regina St S, Waterloo, ON N2J 4P9

Feedback will be reviewed and addressed in line with the City's Accessibility Standards and will inform future updates to the MYAP.

Status update:

The City of Waterloo is committed to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR).

This status update provides an overview of progress made during 2025 toward implementing the actions outlined in the 2025-2029 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. The update supports accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers for people with disabilities. It reflects work undertaken across City departments to improve accessibility in programs, services, facilities, employment practices, and communications. Actions were implemented through collaboration across departments and in consultation with people with disabilities and the Accessibility Advocate at the City.

Progress on individual actions is summarized in the [Get READI Benchmarking and Implementation Plan](#). Actions have been categorized as being completed before 2025, during 2025, or to be completed in coming years. Some accessibility initiatives are ongoing.

In developing and updating this status report, the City considered feedback from people with disabilities, community partners, and GRAAC. This input helped to ensure that accessibility initiatives respond to lived and living experiences and evolving community needs in Waterloo.

Accessibility is an ongoing process. The City is committed to:

- Monitoring progress annually;
- Identifying new barriers as they arise;
- Adjusting actions and timelines where needed; and
- Reporting publicly on progress in accessible formats.

The next status update will be published in 2026, and the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated no later than 2029, in accordance with AODA requirements.