

2023-2027
The Corporation of the City of Kitchener
Accessibility Plan – Accessibility First

The City of Kitchener Accessibility Plan for 2023-2027 describes how the Corporation of the City of Kitchener will continue to prevent and remove accessibility barriers. This new plan builds on the previous accessibility plan which was approved by Council in 2018.

With more than 2.6 million Ontarians with a disability and an aging population within the Region of Waterloo, the new plan will build on the previous plan by focusing on “how to think and plan accessibility first”.

Since there are no new accessibility legislation requirements, this new plan emphasizes on the continued work within each legislated Standard. The “New – Accessibility First” emphasizes how the new plan will go beyond accessibility legislation requirements.

Our Accessibility Commitment

The Corporation of the City of Kitchener values the contributions and participation of all citizens in the life of the City. To facilitate this involvement, the City is committed to providing goods, services and facilities that are accessible to all.

Introduction

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) organizations are required to develop multi-year accessibility plans. The Accessibility Plan addresses how the City of Kitchener will continue to meet the AODA requirements by focusing on thinking accessibility first.

Accessibility Legislation

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) focuses on improving accessibility in areas such as buildings, outdoor spaces, employment, procurement, training, customer service, information and communications and transportation. The AODA applies to all private, government and broader public sectors. The AODA intends to achieve a more accessible Ontario on or before January 1, 2025. To do so mandatory and enforceable standards have been created.

The five standards are:

- Information and Communications Standards
- Employment Standards
- Design of Public Spaces Standards
- Customer Service Standards
- Transportation Standards (responsibility of the Region of Waterloo)

The general requirements for all five standards include the development and implementation of an accessibility policy, accessibility plan, and training for staff and volunteers.

More information on the Standards can be found on the Province of Ontario website.

Inclusion Services – Coordinated Approach

The City of Kitchener, Community Services Department, Inclusion Services is responsible for coordinating all aspects of the Accessibility Plan. This includes, staff support to the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) and its built environment sub-committee, in order to ensure AODA compliance. It is important to note that while Inclusion Services staff play a facilitative role in this process, this work could not be accomplished without the involvement, dedication, and leadership of City of Kitchener staff across the Corporation.

Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC)

Under the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), municipalities with a population of 10,000 or greater are required to establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee to advise Council on the prevention, identification, and removal of barriers for persons with disabilities. The Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) is a joint committee of the Cities of Kitchener and Waterloo, the Region of Waterloo and the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Woolwich, and Wilmot and is appointed the task of advising the participating municipalities on the preparation, implementation, and effectiveness of their respective Accessibility Plans. Associated Councils also seek advice from GRAAC on the accessibility of buildings, structures, or premises that the municipalities purchase, build, renovate or lease. GRAAC reviews site plans and drawings for new municipal buildings or developments. The Built Environment Sub Committee of GRAAC was formed in order to manage the volume of municipal build projects.

More information on GRAAC can be found on the City of Kitchener website.

Accessibility Plan 2023-2027 Commitments

The new Accessibility Plan includes how the City of Kitchener will continue to meet its commitments in providing goods, services and facilities that are accessible to all, while focusing on accessibility first.

General Requirements of the AODA, Ontario Regulation 191/11 Integrated Accessibility Standards:

Accessibility Policy

- Continue to review and update the Accessibility Policy as required.
- Continue to make the Accessibility Policy available to the public on the city website.
- Update all staff on any revisions made to the Accessibility Policy.

Accessibility Plan

- Continue to make the Accessibility Plan available to the public on the city website.
- Continue to provide annual status updates to GRAAC.
- Continue to make the annual status update available to the public on the city website.

Procurement

- Continue to include accessible procurement practices in training materials as a resource for staff.
- Continue to incorporate accessibility features when designing, procuring, or acquiring self-service kiosks.

“New” – Accessibility First – develop an updated “on demand” procurement 101 training for staff.

Training

- Continue to provide mandatory accessibility training to all new staff.
 - Continue to update and provide accessibility training to staff as required.
 - Continue to review and update the corporate training brochures for staff and volunteers.
 - Continue to update and provide new resources for staff on the intranet.
 - Continue to provide staff leads to city affiliates and volunteers with updated training brochures.
- “New” - Accessibility First - creating a training video featuring persons with lived experiences that focus on the importance of accessible and inclusive customer service in the municipal sector.

Legislated Standards:

Information and Communications Standards

- Continue to achieve compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to ensure that websites and web content are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Continue to provide staff with resources on the staff intranet.
- Include an accessibility clause in RFPs to ensure documents prepared by consultants are delivered in an accessible format.
- Train staff on the creation of accessible documents.
- Review documents for accessibility before posting them on the website.
- Ensure website content is accessible and easy to understand.
- Coach and advise corporate wide staff on website accessibility requirements.

“New” - Accessibility First - use ALT-TEXT feature on social media.

“New” – Accessibility First - Include accessibility considerations as a part of the public engagement intake.

Employment Standards

- Review policies and practices with respect to recruitment, hiring and interviewing as per the requirements under the employment standards as required.
- Continue to notify employees and the public about the availability of accommodations for applicants with disabilities in its recruitment processes.
- Continue to notify successful applicants of policies for accommodating employees with disabilities.
- Continue to inform all current and new employees through the IASR training brochure and through the mandatory accessibility online training of procedures used to support employees with disabilities.
- Continue to provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for employees.
- Continue to provide individualized workplace emergency response information to employees who have a disability.
- Continue to have in place a written process for the development of documented individual accommodation plans for employees with disabilities.
- Continue to have in place a return-to-work process and plan for employees who have been absent from work due to a disability.

“New” - Accessibility First - Refresh management training on policies and practices with respect to recruitment, hiring, interviewing and performance.

Design of Public Spaces Standards

- Continue to consult with GRAAC, the public and persons with disabilities before constructing new or redeveloping existing municipal recreational trails, outdoor play spaces, exterior paths of travel, rest areas and on-street parking spaces.
- Continue to meet technical requirements when constructing new or redeveloping existing municipal recreational trails, outdoor public use eating areas, outdoor play spaces, exterior paths of travel, accessible parking both on and off street, service counters, fixed queuing guides and waiting areas.
- Continue to review and update the City of Kitchener procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of the accessible elements in public spaces and procedures for dealing with temporary disruptions when accessible elements are not in working order.

“New” - Accessibility First - Educating staff on accessibility barriers within outdoor spaces through on-site visits with agency experts and persons with lived experiences.

Customer Service Standards

- Continue to include the customer service standards in the Accessibility Policy.
- Continue to include the customer service standards in the corporate training brochures for staff and volunteers.
- Continue to include the customer service standards in mandatory accessibility training for staff.
- Continue to review and update staff resources related to customer service standards on the staff intranet.

“New” - Accessibility First - Providing centralized accessible customer service at city hall. In-person services for residents both drop-in and by appointment will be centralized in a single, accessible location on the main floor of City Hall by 2024. A newly constructed City Hall Service Centre will bring together eight service counters from six floors in an easy-to-find, central location right inside the front door of Kitchener City Hall. Built to AODA standards, the new centre will be a one-stop shop for access to all City Services. Residents will receive services at an accessible service counter, or within a customer lounge that includes a variety of meeting room options designed to accommodate the needs of residents. Interpretation services in 200+ languages, accessible signage, queuing areas, and wayfinding methods will be incorporated in the new centre.

How the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) helps ensure staff think accessibility first:

GRAAC has created position papers and accessibility comment sheets to guide the work of staff. These include:

- Position papers on In-Boulevard Shared Use Facilities, Signage, Sidewalk Snow Removal, Accessible Parking, and Installation of Sidewalks.
- Accessibility comment sheets for new construction and renovations on Washrooms, Outdoor Play Spaces/Playgrounds, Recreational Trails, Rest Areas, and Painted Crosswalks.

These position papers and accessibility comment sheets are created for staff to use in the early stages of design prior to bringing drawings to GRAAC for feedback. This will help remove and prevent barriers by ensuring feedback from residents with lived experiences is included from the beginning.

Provincial Review of Standards:

All Standards are reviewed by the Province of Ontario, therefore requiring updates to existing policies, training, manuals, bylaws etc. As a result of the reviews, revisions to current standards or new standards may be introduced by the Province of Ontario which will include new requirements and compliance deadlines. Those revisions and any actions related to them will be captured in the City of Kitchener annual status update.

As municipal projects arise, city site plans will continue to be reviewed by the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee for suggestions on how to best improve and achieve accessibility.

Consultation Commitment:

The City of Kitchener recognizes that broader public engagement along with GRAAC, agencies that provide services to persons with disabilities and citizens with disabilities is beneficial to the successful implementation of the Accessibility Plan. Staff will continue to work with GRAAC, local service providers and citizens throughout the duration of the Accessibility Plan in order to further identify, prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities.

Looking Forward:

As required by legislation, once approved, the Accessibility Plan will be posted on the City of Kitchener website so that it is available to the public. The Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated every five years or as determined by further changes to the legislation. An annual status update will be posted on the City of Kitchener website.

Staff Contact

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AODA, Accessibility legislation

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191>

The Corporation of the City of Kitchener Accessibility Policy

https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/COR_Accessibility_Policy.pdf

GRAAC webpage

<https://www.kitchener.ca/en/council-and-city-administration/grand-river-accessibility-advisory-committee.aspx>

Province of Ontario, Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessible-design-2022-2025-ops-multi-year-accessibility-plan>