



Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2025-2030



This document is available in an alternate
format upon request.

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Message from Council of the Township of Essa

At the Township of Essa, we value accessibility and inclusivity and actively look to provide accessible options with our services. We are committed to creating and maintaining accessible environments where residents and visitors can have access to programs and services in a way that will respect their dignity and independence regardless of their abilities.

Council fully supports the goals of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and is committed to working with Staff to establish policies, practices, and procedures which are consistent with the accessibility standards established under the AODA.

Municipal governments play an important role in the planning and development of communities and through the dedicated efforts of the Essa's Healthy, Accessible Communities and Parks Committee (HACP), has established a wide range of municipal processes created to ensure that public services and facilities are accessible to everyone. It is a priority of the Township to ensure accessible customer service, information and communication, employment, streets, parks, meeting places, programs, services, public buildings and elections.

By making and ensuring that accessibility is a priority, the Township of Essa ensures that it continues to be a community for everyone.

Township of Essa Council 2022-2026



Message from the Healthy, Accessible Community and Parks Committee (HACP)

The Township of Essa's HACP Committee is pleased to introduce the Essa's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2025-2030). This plan ensures Essa's commitment to accessibility and provides a roadmap to considerably improving the lives of everyone living in Essa.

This year, the twenty-year period of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) has passed with promise of a truly accessible Ontario has yet to be achieved. Barriers still exist that prevent everyday Ontarians from participating in daily life and more has to be done to overcome them. At the same time, we value how far we have progressed in just two decades. Embracing the accessibility standards has eliminated obstacles and improved our awareness of the lived experience of our friends, family members and community members.

The Committee values Essa Council and Staff commitment to accessibility and recognize how much incredible work is being done to make our Township a fantastic place to live. This plan details the incredible progress that has been made in the last two decades and reinforces a firm commitment for improvement.

As members of the HACP Committee, we will continue to provide advocacy for people living with disabilities. We look forward to continuing our work with the Township to identify and eliminate the barriers people living with disabilities face so that we can be an open and accessible community for all.

As a Committee, we welcome and encourage comments, input, and feedback in our continuing efforts to make Essa a place for all. For more information, please contact:

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Committee Members:

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SMDHU Representative

Staff Resources:

Deputy Clerk

Essa Public Library Representative

Parks and Recreation Representative

Types of Disabilities and Barriers

The purpose of this accessibility plan is to outline the Township of Essa's strategy for the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

Disability means, as per the Ontario Human Rights Code:

- Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- A learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- A mental disorder; or
- An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997

When hearing the word "disability," it is common to think of visible disabilities, such as a person with a physical disability using a wheelchair or other mobility device, a person with a vision disability using a service dog or a white cane, or a person with a hearing disability using the services of a sign language interpreter. However, many disabilities are not as visible and may be hidden. Disabilities can be organized into the following categories:

Vision disabilities reduce a person's ability to see clearly. There are many degrees of vision loss, and many people have limited vision rather than no vision at all. Hearing disabilities reduce a person's ability to hear. People who have hearing loss may be deaf (a person with profound hearing loss), deafened (a person who has become deaf), or hard of hearing (a person with some level of hearing loss).

Deaf-Blind disabilities affect a person's ability to see and hear, making it challenging to access information. Many people with deaf-blind disabilities are accompanied by an intervener, a person who helps with communication. Physical disabilities affect a person's ability to perform physical tasks. Their mobility, including standing, moving, and sitting, as well as dexterity may be affected by their disability. There are many degrees of physical disability, and not all people require an assistive device.

Speech or language disabilities affect a person's ability to communicate. These disabilities are often due to other disabilities such as hearing loss, cerebral palsy or other conditions that make it difficult to pronounce words, cause slurring or stuttering or prevents someone from expressing themselves or understanding written or spoken language.

Mental health disabilities are less visible than many other types of disabilities, as many people do not show signs of their disability. There are varying degrees of disabilities, and some examples include depression, phobias, and bipolar, anxiety, or mood disorders.

Intellectual or developmental disabilities may affect, mildly or profoundly, a person's ability to learn, socialize or take care of their everyday needs. It may be difficult to do many things that most people take for granted each day.

Learning disabilities are information processing disorders that can affect how a person acquires, organizes expresses, retains, understands or uses verbal or non-verbal information.

Barrier means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability.

Barriers are often seen as physical obstacles that prevent or challenge persons with disabilities from accessing a building or facility. However, barrier are any obstacles that prevent a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of a disability. Barrier can be organized into the following categories:

Physical and architectural barriers are facilities, building, spaces or features that restrict or impede physical access. An example is a doorway that is too narrow to accommodate entry by a person using a wheelchair.

Communication barriers are obstacles with processing, transmitting or interpreting information. Examples include a brochure that has small print and cannot be read by someone with a vision disability and is not available in alternate formats.

Attitudinal barriers are prejudgments or assumptions that directly or indirectly discriminate against persons with disabilities. An example is assuming that all people with vision disabilities have no vision or read Braille. Technological barriers occur when technology cannot be or is not modified to support various assistive devices and/ or software. An example is a website that does not provide for increased text size or contrast options.

Systemic barriers are those within an organization's policies, practices and procedures that do not consider accessibility for those with disabilities. An example is listing a driver's license as an employment qualification for a position that does not actually require driving. This might prevent persons with disabilities from applying, even though they may be able to perform all duties of the position.

Guiding Legislation

Ontario Human Rights Code

The Ontario Human Rights Code provides for equal rights and opportunities and freedom from discrimination based on grounds of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or disability. It recognizes the dignity and worth of every person in Ontario and applies to employment, housing, facilities and services, contracts and membership in unions, and trade and professional associations.

It also states that customers, clients, and tenants with disabilities have the right to equal treatment and equal access to facilities and services such as restaurants, shops, hotels and movie theatres, as well as apartment buildings, transit and other public places.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Township of Essa has a legal obligation to accommodate any person with a disability, regardless of whether they are an employee, volunteer, or resident.

Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001

The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) was designed to improve opportunities for Ontarians with disabilities by identifying, removing and preventing barriers that may limit their ability to participate in society. This Act legislated municipalities such as the Township of Essa to prepare an annual accessibility plan. The Act stipulated that the plan needed to highlight the policies, procedures, programs, services, and building improvements that were done to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities as well as any planned initiatives and that the annual plan be made available to the public. The Act also legislated the formation of an Accessibility Advisory Committee to advise Council in each year about the preparation, implementation and effectiveness of its accessibility plan.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

In 2005, the Ontario government passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA), which outlined a strategic direction to make the province accessible to those with disabilities by 2025. The Act reiterated the requirements under the ODA to maintain the completion of annual accessibility plans and Accessibility Advisory Committee (HACP). The AODA also provided for the province's implementation of various standards, including those for customer service, information and communication, employment, and transportation, and further indicated that additional standards could be developed over time and passed as Regulations under the AODA.

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11)

The Ontario government combined standards for information and communication, employment and transportation into the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11). This Regulation included a phased in approach to many standards that have now all passed. The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation also includes general requirements which includes a multi-year accessibility plan.

The Regulation requires the Township of Essa to establish, implement, maintain and document a multi-year accessibility plan that outlines the Township's strategy to prevent and remove barriers and meet the requirements of the Regulation. The regulation was amended in December 2012 to add a fifth AODA standard. The Design of Public Spaces Standards establish requirements for spaces in the built environment, including beach access routes, recreational trails, exterior paths of travel, outdoor play spaces, outdoor public use eating areas, parking, and areas for obtaining service.

Accessibility Progress

Facilities:

Essa Administration Centre:

The Essa Administration Centre accessibility improvements includes automatic door openers, accessible washrooms and entrances and parking.

Angus Recreation Centre:

The Angus Recreation Centre is a fully accessible facility, including change rooms, recreation room, banquet room, parking, automatic door openers and washroom facilities.

Thornton Arena:

The Thornton Arena had accessible washrooms were installed in 2020. It also includes a lift, accessible parking and automatic door openers.

Trails:

The Township is ensuring the use of accessible ground surfaces at all its outdoor recreation spaces including the use of crushed gravel for trails and walkways. Accessible parking is also a consideration when trails are being constructed or redeveloped.

Recreation Programing:

Inclusive Recreation Drop in

The Parks and Recreation Department has initiated inclusive recreation drop-in programming.

All Recreation Programing is accessible.

Community Parks:

Bob Geddes Park

Bob Geddes Park features an accessible play structure which includes a ramp for access and wood chips surround the structure which was constructed in 2020.

Burke Family Park

Burk Family Park features accessible play structure with multiple accessible features and includes ramp for access. Wood chips surround the play structure as well as pour in place rubber flooring underneath the accessible swing. This project was completed in 2024.

Community Park

In 2019 and 2020 the “Pathway to Inclusion” was constructed utilizing a portion of funds received through the Enabling Accessibility Funding opportunity. The recreational pathway is constructed of a hard compact surface which circles the play equipment and leads into the gazebo, which allows persons with disabilities to walk the recreational pathway in a safe manner with no barriers (tree stumps and roots). Additionally, cedar wood chips were added in all areas with play structures.

Community Park - Boat Launch

Council approved construction of a boat launch in the area of Community Park. The launch is located on the west side of the Nottawasaga River beside Community Park in Angus. The boat launch provides persons with disabilities the opportunity to launch their unmotorized boat into the Pine River, having removed barriers to person with disabilities. Opened May 18, 2022.

Dellbrook Park

Accessible play structure which includes a ramp for access and wood chips surround the structure was built in 2020.

Glen Eton/Wildflower Park

In 2025 Glen Eton/Wildflower Park will see the installation of a parking lot with the inclusion of accessible parking.

Greenwood Parkette

In 2024 Greenwood Parkette was constructed and features an accessible play structure which includes a ramp for access and wood chips surround the structure. Accessible parking was a consideration during the development.

Maplewood Community Park

In 2024 Maplewood Community Park was constructed and features modern play equipment and a thoughtfully designed layout, ensuring a safe and accessible environment for all. Accessible parking was a consideration during the development.

Nottawasaga Fishing Park

Nottawasaga Fishing Park parking area was updated in early 2025 and included an expansion and reconfiguration of parking area to allow for increased access and traffic flow, including accessible parking area.

Utopia Park

In 2020 an accessible play structure which includes a ramp for access and wood chips surround the structure was constructed.

The Parks and Recreation Department is continuing the inclusion of accessible picnic tables and parking spaces as well as installation of accessible trails, pathways and play structures at all its outdoor recreation spaces.

The Parks and Recreation Department is ensuring the use of accessible ground surfaces at all its outdoor recreation spaces including the use of crushed gravel for trails and walkways and woodchips in play structure areas.

Essa Public Library

Both branches of the EPL (Angus and Thornton) include accessible seating, design, automatic door openers and programming. EPL also includes accessible picnic tables and inclusive programs available at both branches. Both the Thornton and Angus branches have an accessible community garden plots available.

Website

Best practices and continued work towards ensuring all posted documents on the website meet accessibility standards. Multiple options for submission of documents are available including fillable PDF, online fillable form, printable option or available for pick up at the Administration Centre.

Communication

Staff continue to produce fully accessible materials, or alternatively upon request, the Township will continue to arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for persons with disabilities.

The Township continues to make use of social media platforms to communicate with residents and visitors alike.

Staff use Alertable when information requires specific attention and as part of the Township's emergency response and notification process.

The Township of Essa has a TTY phone that may be used to receive messages from both landlines and cell phones and play a crucial role in facilitating communication for those with hearing or speech difficulties.

2025-2030 Accessibility Plan

The Township of Essa continually strives to make a more inclusive and accessible community through the ongoing identification and removal of barriers and by planning for impactful change over time. Essa's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan aims to provide tangible targets for improvement while ensuring Essa is meeting its legislated requirements. All actions identified are not immutable, but subject to review and revision over time as new barriers or challenges are identified. This plan aims to be responsive and adaptable with the overall goal of breaking down barriers and ensuring the Township of Essa can be enjoyed equally by all that live and visit here. The following highlights the Township of Essa's priorities for the next five years to meet the requirements of accessibility legislation. The list is organized to reflect the five standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, as well as initiatives that address general barriers faced by persons with disabilities and the Essa's overall commitment to accessibility and accessibility awareness.

Township Initiatives

Identify and Bridge Technological Barriers

The Township of Essa recognizes the increased shift of information relayed over the internet and social media and the impact that may be felt by people living with disabilities. This changing manner in how we communicate can present difficulties for many residents of the Township of Essa unfamiliar with the technology or otherwise unable to engage with it. The Township will ensure a consistent, accessibility minded approach to communication to ensure clear messaging is provided to all its residents

Key Initiatives

- Ensure that the Township website is updated with a greater emphasis on ease of navigation and the inclusion of comprehensive accessibility features.
- Design technology with accessibility in mind from the start. This means considering the needs of users with disabilities during the development process and incorporating features that can help to address their unique challenges.
- Regularly review and evaluate Township technology and websites for accessibility issues and make necessary change.

Continue to Improve Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are negative beliefs or attitudes towards individuals with disabilities that can lead to exclusion or discrimination. Attitudinal barriers are the most pervasive barrier that exists and the hardest to overcome. They can frequently contribute or amplify other types of barriers and are exhibited as personal attitudes, feelings and behaviours that negatively impact how we interact with people living with disabilities. The Township will work to overcome attitudinal barrier in its operations and emphasize breaking down preconceived notions of people living with disabilities.

Better Obtain Feedback from People Living with Disabilities

The Township of Essa will continue to encourage the involvement and feedback from individuals living with disabilities in processes such as policy development and program planning. This can help to ensure that the perspectives and needs of all residents are considered and that the programs and services provided are accessible and inclusive. Wherever it is collected, feedback may be provided in alternative formats upon request. The Healthy, Accessible Community and Parks Committee is an invaluable resource for understanding the experiences of people living with disabilities. The Township is committed to working with the HACP Committee through the development of annual work plans, soliciting feedback on Township facilities and programs, and seeking advice on major accessibility matters and the identification and eradication of barriers.

Key Initiatives

- The Township will continue to expand many of its services to embrace new forms of communication such as website, email, text messaging, social media and more. This will limit the necessity for clients to visit Township facilities to receive the services they require and provide more responsive feedback to staff.
- Develop policies and procedures for the implementation and development of accessible and inclusive municipal programming, services and facilities.

Identify Gaps in Policy

The Township will undertake a review of its accessibility policies and update and improve them where gaps exist. The Township will also strive to include accessibility considerations in all its relevant policies to ensure that accessibility is never overlooked.

Key Initiatives

- Review and update the Township's Accessibility Standards Policy in conjunction with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (HACP).

Improve Accessibility of Township Facilities

The Township owns and maintains many facilities that are open to members of the public. Ensuring accessibility of these facilities allows all residents and visitors to equally access the services and programs that the Township provides. The Township will take an active role in building and retrofitting our facilities to meet or exceed the built environment standards in the IASR and Ontario Building Code.

The Township will continue to consult the Accessibility Advisory Committee (HACP) on newly constructed and redeveloped public spaces such as sidewalks, pedestrian signals at intersections, on-street and off-street parking spaces, service counters and trails.

Key Initiatives

- Design and install accessible electric vehicle charging stations at various Township owned facilities in anticipation of accessible electric vehicle charging station standards.
- Continue to consult the Accessibility Advisory Committee (HACP) on newly constructed and redeveloped public spaces such as sidewalks, pedestrian signals at intersections, on-street and off-street parking spaces, service counters and trails.

Focus on Accessible Employment

The Township recognizes the incredible barriers to employment that people living with disabilities face in their lives. Improving employment for people living with disabilities not only improves the lives of Essa Township residents, it makes strong business sense ensuring the widest field of qualified candidates are available for hire.

The Township will continue to document, monitor and update employment policies and procedures, where required, to provide the following as necessary:

- Accommodations in the recruitment, assessment, and selection process.
- Accessible formats and communication support for information needed to perform the job, and any information that is generally available to employees.
- Accommodation plans and workplace emergency response information.
- Return to work process and related accommodation plans.
- Accommodations in performance management, career development and redeployment.

The Township will inform staff and the public that accommodations are available throughout all stages of employment and advised of policies that support employees with disabilities.

Key Initiatives

- Review hiring and employment policies to ensure that people living with disabilities are given equal opportunity to excel.
- Improve external messaging in employment applications and position advertising to show the Township is committed to improving accessible employment.
- Improve internal messaging on accessible employment policies and employee accommodation.

Recognize and Promote Accessibility Awareness in Essa

Council will complete annual proclamations in recognition of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and National Access Awareness Week as well as other significant events that arise. The Township will explore novel ways to further celebrate these milestones and encourage greater awareness of people living with disabilities in the community

Key Initiatives

- Cultivate additional partnerships with organizations throughout the Township of Essa and the County of Simcoe to continue improvement of accessibility and disability awareness.

Legislative Requirements

The Township strives to remain fully compliant with all the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11). Since 2021, all the milestones in the IASR have passed and the Township now moves to ensure ongoing compliance in its accessibility planning. A selection of specific legislated requirements are detailed below, as appropriate.

Customer Service

Resident Feedback and Requests

The Clerk's Department will continue to respond to and track feedback, concerns, and requests from residents. Responses will be provided in a timely manner considering each person's needs and the Township's abilities to meet such needs.

Accessible Customer Service Policies and Procedures

The Township will continue to review existing Accessible Customer Service Policies and Procedures in addition to the general policy requirements, and develop new corporate policies, practices, and procedures in relations to the AODA requirements under the customer service standards as they relate to the provision of goods, services or facilities to persons living with disabilities.

Information and Communication

Accessibility Planning and Reporting

- Once approved by Township Council, this multi-year accessibility plan will be posted on the website and made available in accessible formats, upon request.

- An annual status report will be prepared on the progress of the multi-year plan's implementation and will be posted on the website and made available in accessible formats, upon request.
- A comprehensive review of this plan will be completed every five years unless significant changes require an earlier revision of the plan.
- Annual work plans will be developed for both the Accessibility Advisory Committee (HACP) and staff to assist with implementation and monitoring of the plan.
- Online compliance reports will be submitted to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario every year.

Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

Upon request, the Township will continue to arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for persons with disabilities.

The Township will continue to consult with the person making the request to determine the suitability of an accessible format or communication support.

Accessible website and web content

The Township will continue to ensure its website, intranet and web content meets Level AA compliance with the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. The Township will continue advising staff who contribute to the website as well as the intranet on ways to create accessible documents and manage the website in accordance with the standards.

Accessible Feedback Process

Under the customer service standard, the Township uses a customer service feedback process for receiving and responding to feedback with respect to the manner in which the Township provides accessible services to persons with disabilities. The forms are available in alternate format and with communication supports, upon request.

Customers have options for providing their feedback, and the responses are given in a manner that consider the disability needs of the person providing feedback. The Township will continue this practice. Employees and the public will be notified that accessible formats and communication supports are available, upon request.

Notice of Disruption

To the extent possible, notice regarding any disruption to accessible elements due to planned maintenance or repairs impacting customer accessibility will be posted in advance, including information about the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative accessible elements that may be available. This notice may be provided by posting notices in a public place on Township of Essa property, website and/or such other method as is reasonable under the circumstances. Procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of accessible elements will be reviewed and updated where applicable, along with processes for dealing with temporary disruptions. Barrier-free design features in Township facilities The Township will continue to meet or

exceed the minimum barrier-free design requirements of the Ontario Building Code when constructing any new buildings or completing any renovations on existing buildings.

Measuring Impact

In keeping with the requirements of the AODA, the Municipality publishes an annual Accessibility Status Update. Through this annual report, the Municipality will report on progress toward the goals and strategies outlined in this Plan.

Contact & Feedback

Removing barriers and ensuring accessibility is an ongoing process. We want to hear from members of the community ways in which we can make continual improvements to our services, programs, and facilities through to 2030 and beyond.

This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is available on the Township of Essa's website. Printed copies can be obtained from the Township of Essa's Administration Centre in Utopia.

This document is available in alternate format or with communication supports, upon request. This may include, but is not limited to, large print, and electronic formats.

The Township of Essa welcomes all questions, comments and feedback on the Township's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and accessibility in general.

Please contact:

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