

# Grand River Conservation Authority Accessibility Plan 2025-2028



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## Summary

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) became law in 2005. The purpose of this Act is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities by identifying, preventing, and removing barriers that may otherwise limit their abilities to fully participate in society. Accessibility simply means giving all people opportunities to participate fully in everyday life.

The Accessibility Plan describes measures the GRCA will take to remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities who use the facilities and services of the GRCA, including employees and members of the public, and highlights changes and improvements made to date.

The GRCA is committed to the continual improvement of accessible services, facilities, and information.

### 1.0 Background

#### 1.1 Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, known as the AODA, is intended to develop, implement and enforce mandatory accessibility standards in key areas of daily living. Standards have been developed in Customer Service; Information and Communications; Employment; Transportation and Design of Public Spaces. The accessibility standards apply to all organizations in Ontario.

The purpose of the AODA is to develop, implement, and enforce accessibility standards so that all Ontarians will benefit from accessible services, programs, spaces, and employment.

## 1.2 Types of Disabilities

Disabilities may be clearly evident, such as physical disabilities, but they also may be invisible and are not always apparent. The broad range of disabilities also includes vision impairment, deafness or being hard of hearing, intellectual or developmental, learning, and mental health disabilities. The AODA uses the same definition of “disability” as the Ontario Human Rights Code, which includes both visible and invisible disabilities.

## 1.3 Overview of the Accessibility Standards

The five standards of the AODA are combined under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR). The five standards are:

- Information and communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of public spaces
- Customer Service

The GRCA does not operate or provide public transportation thus the Transportation Standard does not apply.

## 2.0 Objectives and Commitment to Accessibility Planning

This report describes the measures that the GRCA has taken and will continue to take to identify, remove and prevent barriers for all people, including those with disabilities who use the facilities and services of the GRCA.

The GRCA is committed to:

- Continuous improvement of access to facilities and services for employees and members of the public with disabilities.
- Providing accessible customer service.
- Incorporating feedback from people with disabilities in the development and review of its accessibility plans, when constructing new or redeveloping existing recreational trails and play spaces, and in other programs and services where practicable.
- Annually reviewing the accessibility plan and incorporating elements of accessibility into future projects and activities.

## 3.0 Barrier Identification

### 3.1 Barrier-Identification Methodologies

The following methodologies are used to identify accessibility barriers:

Methodology	Description
Staff meetings	Accessibility legislation and barrier identification is discussed at Management meetings, Department meetings, and Joint Health & Safety Committee



Methodology	Description
	meetings. These meetings give various departments an opportunity to discuss legislative requirements and brainstorm accessibility initiatives.
Site visits	All worksites are visited periodically by Managers, Directors, and other applicable staff to review accessibility barriers. During site visits, staff and supervisors are invited to provide feedback and discuss barriers they, or members of the public, have identified in their work areas.
Public feedback forms	Members of the public are invited to provide accessibility feedback in a variety of formats: in person, by speaking directly with a member of the GRCA staff; by completing a feedback form online through the GRCA website; or by submitting comments in writing to any of our facilities. Visitor surveys conducted periodically invite suggestions for improving accessibility which are incorporated into work plans as applicable.
Capital inspections for physical barrier identification	Annual capital inspections are completed in our various work locations. The inspections include identification of physical barriers to be considered in capital planning and facility upgrade discussions.
Public Consultation	Public consultation will be conducted when required. The methodology will be determined as appropriate to the project, and may include site visits.

### 3.2 Barriers Identified & Status of Corrective Actions from the 2022-2024 Plan

The following barriers and status updates on corrective actions taken to date are listed below:

#### Organizational

- Continue to build elements of accessibility into all practices, procedures and policies - ongoing
- Ensure advance consultation on proposed projects by posting project details on the website and circulating to consulting partner agencies to invite feedback on accessibility - completed
- The corporate signage strategy will begin to be implemented in 2022 with updated, accessible signage phased-in - ongoing
- Accessibility page created in Sharepoint for staff will continue to be populated with additional resources, as they become available - ongoing

#### Administration Centre

Action Items	Status Updates
Main lobby – accessible layout e.g. seating, phone - - Conduct an updated needs assessment and incorporate into any future renovation plans.	New furniture was purchased that is more accessible and the small meeting room has been modified to be more accessible
Accessibility throughout building - The feasibility of installing an elevator to provide access to all levels in the building	A consultant has been engaged to review the feasibility of installing an elevator or suitable alternate

Action Items	Status Updates
will be evaluated. Additional signage requirements and other improvements to reduce accessibility barriers will also be documented and incorporated into future capital plans.	option(s) and improved accessibility in employee washrooms

**Information Systems, Technology and Communications**

Action Items	Status Updates
<p>GRCA Website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website updates will be done to ensure ongoing accessibility.</li> <li>• Some additional historical content will be updated into accessible format and reposted to the website</li> <li>• Accessibility webpage to be updated with additional content as needed</li> </ul>	<p>The new website has been implemented and meets accessibility requirements - completed</p> <p>Historical documents continue to be remediated and reposted to the website - ongoing</p> <p>The accessibility webpage is reviewed regularly and relevant content is posted as applicable - ongoing</p>

**Conservation Areas and Other Recreational Properties**

Action Items	Status Updates
Physical Facilities - General- Design criteria for accessible campsites will be finalized and a plan for implementation will be developed in 2022-2024, and a plan to identify barrier-free campsites will be discussed	Discussions continue and a plan will be developed - ongoing
Trails - Investigate the feasibility of a loaner program for off-road wheelchairs and accessible beach/flotation chairs at some Conservation Areas.	A grant was received for Shade’s Mills CA for an accessible wheelchair for use in water and on trails. An additional grant has been submitted for Pinehurst CA and Shade’s Mills CA. Grants and funding opportunities will continue to be explored – completed and ongoing
<p>Programs, Policies and Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guideline for accessibility in CAs will be developed</li> <li>• Information on accessible features at each CA will be identified on the website</li> </ul>	<p>Discussions have commenced and additional guidance will be developed as applicable - ongoing</p> <p>This project will be deferred to 2025 - deferred</p>

## Nature Centres

Action Items	Status Updates
New Guelph Lake Nature Centre - Construction of new building is expected to commence and will be built in conformance with AODA requirements	The new building will be open for use in 2025 and will meet all Building Code accessibility requirements - ongoing

Additional actions taken in 2024 that were not previously included in the plan include:

- Three (3) all-terrain wheelchairs were purchased for use in Nature Centre program delivery
- A ramp was installed at the entrance into Shade’s Mills Nature Centre
- An internal review was conducted of GRCA-led events, e.g. water festivals, and accessibility for participants is a consideration when planning new and existing events.

### 3.3 Action Items for 2025-2028

- Continue to build elements of accessibility into all practices, procedures, and policies.
- The corporate signage strategy will continue to be developed and implemented.
- Ongoing updates/remediation of documents posted to the GRCA and Lake Erie Source Protection Region websites
- GRCA-led outreach events – review the volunteer workday event planning templates to ensure they incorporate accessibility considerations
- Administration Centre:
  - Feasibility study will be conducted to install an elevator
  - Improved accessibility in staff washrooms as part of a renovation
  - Review staff entrances and consider additional automatic door openers as part of an upcoming door replacement project
- Conservation Areas:
  - Guidelines for accessibility in CAs will be developed
  - Information on accessible features at each CA will be identified on the website
  - Design criteria for accessible campsites will be finalized and implemented
  - Add accessible washrooms at all CA’s
  - Review all gatehouses for accessibility
  - Specific projects, subject to grant approval:
    - Guelph Lake CA - Beach Mats and Trail improvements
    - Rockwood CA - Accessible washroom at the pavilion
    - Shade’s Mills CA – Improvements to the service window and addition of barrier-free parking space at gatehouse
    - Laurel Creek CA – Create an accessible picnic area
    - Pinehurst CA – Create an accessible picnic area; install an accessible beach mat and dock; trail extension to amenities

In addition to the action items identified above, should any other changes to programs or facilities occur, accessibility will be addressed in conformance with AODA requirements.

## 4.0 Plan Review and Communication Processes

### 4.1 Review and Monitoring Process

The GRCA reestablished an internal accessibility working group, with management representation from key departments, to continue to identify barriers and review progress on barrier prevention, mitigation, and removal strategies. This working group meets at least twice per year to evaluate the progress of the plan and develop accessibility initiatives.

An annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the plan is prepared. This status report will be made available on the GRCA website and in an alternate accessible format upon request. The accessibility plan will be updated at least once every five years.

### 4.2 Communication of the Plan

Copies of this plan are available to staff and members of the public on the GRCA website. Alternative accessible formats will be available upon request.

## Appendix

### Glossary of Key Terms and Definitions

**BARRIER** as defined by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communication barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice. There are many kinds of barriers. Some are visible, but many are not visible.

#### Barriers to accessibility

Type of barriers	Examples
<b>Attitudinal</b> barriers are those that discriminate against people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• thinking that people with disabilities are inferior</li><li>• assuming that a person who has a speech impairment cannot understand you</li></ul>
<b>Information</b> or <b>communication</b> barriers happen when a person cannot easily understand information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• print is too small to read</li><li>• websites that cannot be accessed by people who are not able to use a mouse</li><li>• signs that are not clear or easily understood</li></ul>
<b>Technology</b> barriers occur when a technology cannot be modified to support various assistive devices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a website that doesn't support screen-reading software</li></ul>
<b>Organizational</b> barriers are an organization's policies, practices, or procedures that discriminate against people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a hiring process that is not open to people with disabilities</li></ul>
<b>Architectural</b> and <b>physical</b> barriers are features of buildings or spaces that cause problems for people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• hallways and doorways that are too narrow for a person using a wheelchair, electric scooter or walker</li><li>• counters that are too high for a person of short stature</li><li>• poor lighting for people with low vision</li><li>• doorknobs that are difficult for people with arthritis to grasp</li><li>• parking spaces that are too narrow for a driver who uses a wheelchair</li><li>• telephones that are not equipped with telecommunications devices for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing</li></ul>

**BARRIER-IDENTIFICATION METHODOLOGIES** are processes or practices used to determine what barriers exist, where barriers exist, and any other information. Examples of barrier identification methodologies may include: customer feedback surveys or questionnaires, and discussions with employees or members of the public.

**DISABILITY** means:

- 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 coordination, blindness, or visual impairment, deafness or hearing impairment, 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*.