

2013/2014

**Grand River Conservation Authority
Accessibility Plan**



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EXECUTIVE 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.

This is the Grand River Conservation Authority's (GRCA) first year Accessibility Plan (2013/2014), prepared to meet the requirements of the AODA. The 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.

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

1.0 Background

1.1 The Legislation

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, also known as the AODA, which became law in June 2005, 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; and Transportation. In addition to these standards which have now been legislated, there remains one more standard to be enacted, the Built Environment standard. The accessibility standards apply to both private and public sector organizations across Ontario.

The purpose of the AODA is to:

- Develop, implement and enforce accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises by January 2025; and
- Provide for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards.

1.2 Types of Disabilities

When we think of disabilities, we tend to think of people in wheelchairs and physical disabilities - - disabilities that are visible. But disabilities can also be non-visible and are not always apparent. The broad range of disabilities also includes vision disabilities, 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 non-visible disabilities.

1.3 Overview of the Accessibility Standards

The AODA is made up of five Standards, each covering an aspect of daily living:

The **Accessibility for Customer Service Standard** (Ont. Reg. 429/07) was the first standard to be developed and released. This standard addresses business practices and training needed to provide better customer service to people with disabilities.

The **Integrated Accessibility Standards** (Ont. Reg. 191/11) brings together three standard areas into one Regulation: Information and Communications, Employment and Transportation.

- **Accessible Information and Communications** standard addresses the removal of barriers in access to information. The standards could include information being provided in person, through print, a website or other means.
- **Employment Accessibility** standard addresses paid employment practices relating to employee-employer relationships, which could include recruitment, hiring and retention policies and practices.
- **Accessible Transportation** standard is addresses aspects of accessible public transportation.

The **Accessible Built Environment Standard** addresses barriers in public spaces and buildings. The Standards for public spaces will apply to new construction and planned redevelopment. The Built Environment Standard has not been legislated but when it is it will apply to new construction and extensive renovation projects. It is expected that the Built Environment Standard will be released in 2013 and will be incorporated into the Ontario Building Code where possible.

2.0 Description of the Grand River Conservation Authority

The Grand River flows 300 kilometres through southwestern Ontario from the highlands of Dufferin County to Port Maitland on Lake Erie.

The GRCA manages water and other natural resources on behalf of 39 municipalities and close to one million residents.

Our Vision:

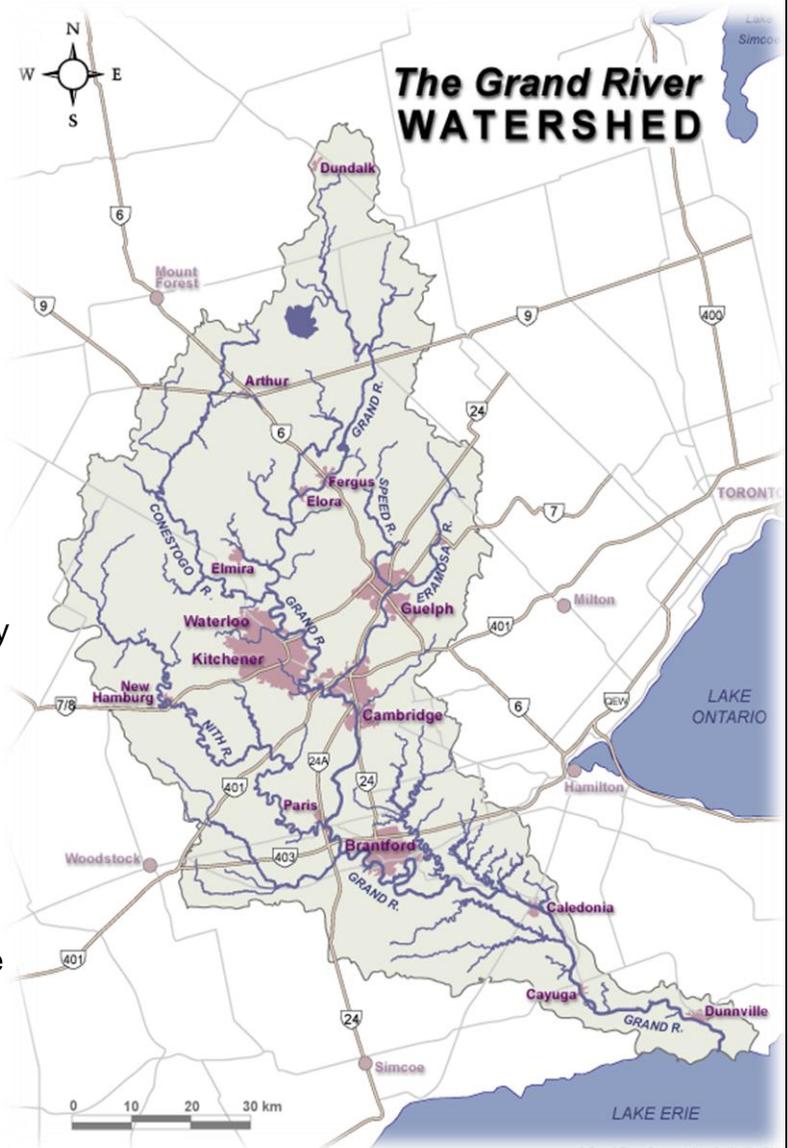
A healthy and sustainable natural environment in the Grand River watershed.

Our Mission:

- We will develop and implement programs, directly or with our partners, to improve water quality, reduce flood damages, maintain a reliable water supply, facilitate watershed planning, protect natural areas and biodiversity and provide environmental education.
- We will be an environmentally responsible provider of outdoor recreation opportunities.
- We will maintain a responsive, innovative, accountable and financially sustainable organization.

Our values:

- We will strive for clear and respectful communication within our organization, with our partners and members of the public.
- We will make decisions that reflect integrity, fairness and sensitivity to the parties affected by our actions.
- We will conduct our work in an efficient and effective manner, exercising creativity and innovation.
- We value the trust of our stakeholders, which will be gained through our commitment to openness and accountability.



3.0 Objectives and Commitment to Accessibility Planning

This report describes the measures that the GRCA will take during the years 2013 and 2014 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.
- The participation of people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans.
- Annually reviewing the accessibility plan and incorporating elements of accessibility into all future projects and activities.

4.0 Barrier Identification

4.1 Barrier-Identification Methodologies

In 2012, the following methodologies were used to identify accessibility barriers:

Methodology	Description
Staff meetings	Accessibility legislation and barrier identification was discussed at Management, Human Resources and Joint Health & Safety Committee meetings. These meetings gave various departments an opportunity to discuss legislative requirements and brainstorm accessibility initiatives.
Conservation area site visits	Several GRCA Conservation Areas were visited by the Human Resources team to review accessibility barriers. During site visits Superintendents provided feedback and discussed barriers they, or members of the public, had identified in their work areas.
Public feedback forms	Members of the public are able to provide accessibility feedback: in person, by speaking directly with a member of the GRCA staff; by completing a feedback form on-line through the GRCA website; or by submitting a hardcopy (paper) feedback form at Conservation Area gatehouses.
Staff checklist for barrier identification	Key staff members were provided with a communication outlining the different types of barriers and a reference checklist to assist in identifying barriers in their work environments. The checklist mainly addressed physical barriers in Conservation Areas, Nature Centres and the Administration Centre.

4.2 Barriers Identified in 2012

In 2012, the following barriers and possible corrective actions were identified:

Administration Centre

Barrier	Barrier Type	Strategies for Removal or Prevention
Customer service	Attitudinal/ Organizational	All current employees have received training in accessibility standards for customer service. Training will be ongoing for new employees or as needed when new practices or policies are implemented.
Recruitment processes	Organizational/ Technology	Research to identify best practices in similar organizations for inclusion of accessible formats and communication supports.
Procurement of goods, services or facilities	Organizational	Review procurement and purchasing practices to incorporate accessibility criteria and requirements. Educate staff on these requirements. Research options when acquiring point-of-sale (POS) devices and other types of self-serve kiosks.
Lack of signage	Information/ Communication	Where applicable, post universal signage to direct people to accessible entrances, washrooms, etc.
Main lobby	Physical/ Information/ Communication	Assess current layout of the main lobby (i.e. location of public telephone, furniture placement, etc.). Where feasible, make improvements to increase accessibility.

Information Systems, Technology and Communications Departments

Barrier	Barrier Type	Strategies for Removal or Prevention
Current GRCA website not compliant with accessibility standards	Technology	Currently evaluating design of website, with AODA compliance as a priority. Redesign website and web content according to WCAG 2.0 Level A, AA.
Readability of printed materials (i.e. brochures, tabloids, minutes, forms)	Information/ Communication	Educate staff on creating accessible documents. Research alternatives and redesign new printed materials to make them accessible. Provide alternative accessible formats when requested.
Phone lines	Communication/ Technology	Research and evaluate TTY services for deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

Conservation Areas and Recreational Properties

Barrier	Barrier Type	Strategies for Removal or Prevention
Gatehouses	Physical/ Architectural	Evaluate gatehouses to determine accessibility; make improvements as feasible. Provide exceptional customer service to persons who may not be able to access the gatehouse.
Washrooms and Change rooms	Physical/ Architectural	Post universal signage to direct people to accessible washrooms and stalls. Where feasible, make improvements to existing washroom facilities to make them accessible or build accessible washroom facilities in locations that currently do not have any.
Picnic areas	Physical/ Architectural	Conduct a detailed review of the barriers at picnic areas and shelters. Improve accessibility as needed at each location.
Parking	Physical/ Architectural	Create accessible parking spots. Post universal signage.
Campsites	Physical/ Architectural	Investigate the possibility of accessible campsites, identify current barriers, and develop accessible campsites where feasible.
Trails	Physical/ Architectural	Review trail systems; promote accessible trails through website and printed documents; work towards improved trail accessibility.

Nature Centres

Barrier	Barrier Type	Strategies for Removal or Prevention
Entrances, doors and walkways	Physical/ Architectural	Review facilities for ease of access. Where feasible make improvements.
Parking	Physical/ Architectural	Designate accessible parking spots and post universal signage.
Washrooms	Physical/ Architectural	Post universal signage to direct people to accessible washrooms and stalls. Where feasible, make improvements to existing washroom facilities to make them accessible or build accessible washroom facilities in locations that currently do not have any.
Programs	Physical/ Architectural/ Communication	Review programs and activities for accessibility; determine ways to improve accessibility.
Emergency Procedures	Physical/ Communication	Review emergency procedures and notification systems. Where needed make improvements to emergency systems with consideration to accessibility standards.

4.3 Action Items for 2013/2014

- Reestablish an accessibility working group that is representative of the departments most impacted by the accessibility standards. The work group will meet at regular intervals.
- Key aspect of improving accessibility will continue to be training and education of staff to ensure they have the knowledge and tools necessary to assist persons with disabilities. The GRCA will continue to provide training and strive to ensure services are provided to all persons in an accessible manner.
- Continue to build elements of accessibility into all practices, procedures and policies.
- Solicit feedback from persons with disabilities regarding the GRCA facilities, services and programs. Make improvements to feedback forms, and communication methods to encourage and make it easier for persons with disabilities to provide feedback.
- Ongoing identification of barriers and development of the accessibility plan.
- Develop a long term strategy to bring facilities to current standards by removing and preventing physical/architectural barriers.
- Research accessible facility design to determine requirements for the designs and construction of facilities (things such as: heights of tables, floor space requirements, number of accessible parking spots needed and number of accessible washrooms needed).
- Post universal accessibility signage to direct people to accessible facilities (i.e. washrooms, parking, trails, etc.). Incorporate this information into the website.
- Implement and maintain a multi-year accessibility plan. Follow up on action items and provide annual status update on previous years initiatives. Establish a plan of activities for the following year. Post updated plan on the GRCA website.
- Redesign the website to improve accessibility (conform to WCAG 2.0 guidelines).
- Develop new accessible design standards for printed materials and provide alternative formats upon request.

5.0 Plan Review and Communication Processes

5.1 Review and Monitoring Process

In 2013/2014, the GRCA will reestablish an accessibility working group, with representation from key departments, to continue to identify barriers and review progress on removal and development of barrier prevention strategies.

This working group will meet quarterly throughout the year to evaluate progress of the plan and develop accessibility initiatives.

An annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the plan will be 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.

5.2 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.

APPENDICES

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

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 as defined by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, is:

- 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*.

Customer Feedback Form

Thank you for visiting a facility or taking part in a program of the Grand River Conservation Authority. We value all of our customers and strive to meet everyone's needs. If you have any comments, suggestions, questions or complaints, we want to hear from you.

Please tell us the date and time of your visit: _____

Was there a specific program or event that was the reason for your visit? YES NO
(If you answered 'Yes', please provide the name of the program or event) _____

Did we respond to your customer service needs today? YES NO

Was our customer service provided to you in an accessible manner? YES SOMEWHAT NO
(If you answered 'Somewhat' or 'No', please explain below) _____

Did you have any problems accessing our goods and services? YES SOMEWHAT NO
(If you answered 'Yes' or 'Somewhat', please explain below) _____

Please provide any other comments you may have: _____

If you would like us to contact you, please provide your contact information below. We will respond as quickly as possible.

Contact information (optional): _____
