

2021

The Corporation of the City of Waterloo Status Update on the Accessibility Plan

The City of Waterloo Accessibility Plan for 2018-2022 describes how the Corporation will continue to prevent and remove accessibility barriers. The Status update provides the progress on the implementation of the plan.

Highlighted below are the 2021 Status updates.

General Requirements Commitments:

Accessibility Policy

- The City of Waterloo Accessibility Policy was, updated in May 2017 and continues to be reviewed and updated as required.
- The Accessibility Policy is available to the public on the city website.

Accessibility Plan

- In 2018, Council approved The City of Waterloo Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2018-2022. The Accessibility Plan is available to the public on the city website.
- The annual status update is presented to the City of Waterloo's Accessibility Advisory Committee at the end of each year.
- The annual status update is available to the public on the city website.

Procurement

- In 2021, one on one Procurement training with new Project Managers continued with a section highlighting accessibility in the training.
- The City of Waterloo Buyer's Guide that is distributed to all new staff includes accessibility requirements to follow.
- The Purchasing By-Law, approved by council in 2019 also references the need to incorporate accessibility requirements.
- All City of Waterloo RFX's include an AODA clause.
- Project Managers are requested to include accessibility requirements in the RFP and RFT on a project specific basis.

Training

- New staff receives mandatory accessibility training through corporate orientation or through e-learning modules.
- Part time and seasonal staff receive mandatory accessibility training through an e-learning module created specifically for City of Waterloo staff.
- The Corporate accessibility training brochures were updated in late 2017, and are provided to staff and volunteers.

- The City of Waterloo is providing training for staff in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and has an Introduction to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training program for all staff along with numerous webinars throughout the year addressing a variety of topics specific to DEI.

Standards Commitments:

Information and Communications Standards

- The City of Waterloo has statements on the website informing people that accessible formats and communication supports are available upon request.
- Staff are trained to provide accessible formats and communication supports upon request. Resources to assist staff are posted on the City of Waterloo intranet.
- Given the amount and complexity of websites that municipalities manage, the City of Waterloo was not in a position to report compliance with the AODA requirements for websites. A significant portion of city websites do meet the standard. A comprehensive review completed in December 2021 indicated a 90/100 score for WCAG AA compliance for the main website, Waterloo.ca. The largest issue is technical PDF content that may not be perceivable or operable for all users. The city's plan to work toward compliance is as follows:
 - Address issues identified by the review noted above
 - Review the city's other website properties in 2022
 - Moving forward, conduct reviews on a quarterly basis, allowing staff to pinpoint and address content that is non-compliant in a timely manner
 - Continue to provide training to staff with regard to creating accessible content
- In June 2021, the neighbourhoods team completed user experience testing for the new neighbourhoods microsite.
 - A call was put out the broader community for a paid participation opportunity to complete a series of user test questions.
 - All applicants were asked to identify diverse characteristics.
 - Approximately 12% of applicants identified having a disability. From this pool 2 applicants were randomly selected to participate.
 - Accessibrand was hired to complete an audit with a screen-reader user.
 - Feedback from all user experience testers was compiled for microsite improvements before launch.
 - Content is written and maintained by team staff in plain language

Employment Standards

- Policies and practices are reviewed on an ongoing basis with respect to recruitment, hiring and interviewing as per the requirements under the employment standards.
- The City of Waterloo job postings advise applicants that accommodations are available through all stages of the recruitment process and candidates who are selected for an interview are advised again when invited for the interview.
- The City of Waterloo notifies successful applicants of accommodations available to them through the offer of employment letter.
- The City of Waterloo notifies all employees through mandatory staff accessibility training that if they do require an accommodation or accessible formats/communication supports to do their job that this can be available to them and that employees need to let their supervisor know. The supervisor and staff person work together towards an accommodation plan.
- Individualized workplace emergency response plans are created for employees with disabilities.

- The City of Waterloo has 2 procedures to support the early and safe return to work of employees recovering from non-occupational or occupational injury/illness (Sick Leave and Medical Accommodation Procedure and WSIB Return to Work Procedure).
- The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) working groups continued their work to review current practices and procedures related to accessing policies, procedures and to address systemic and structural barriers.
- In 2020, The City of Waterloo introduced the Respect in the Workplace Policy and Program which sets expectations of respectful behaviour and to prevent disrespectful, harassing, or discriminatory workplace behaviours.
- Development and implementation of accommodation plans continue to be informed by the Human Rights Accommodation procedure which outlines the process for requesting, reviewing and implementing accommodations and supports.
- In 2021, The City of Waterloo hired a new Director, Indigenous Initiatives, Anti-Racism, Accessibility and Equity. A significant focus of the work this year was to hire the three-person team to implement this work. The Director worked alongside three community-based panels to recruit and interview candidates for all three positions. The Indigenous Initiatives Advocate, Anti-Racism and Social Justice Advocate and the Accessibility Advocate began their work to support the community and the corporation in early 2022.

Design of Public Spaces Standards

- City of Waterloo staff consult with GRAAC, before constructing new or redeveloping existing municipal recreational trails, outdoor play spaces, and exterior paths of travel, rest areas and on-street parking spaces. GRAAC has developed an accessibility comments sheet for each of these areas to help staff with accessibility considerations.
- City of Waterloo public consultations are open to all members of the public.
- The City of Waterloo Accessibility Standards document, approved by council in June 2016 prepared to assist in implementing the Design of Public Spaces Standards, and is used under the City of Waterloo's Site Plan Approval process and shared with developers.
- Annually review and update the chart, the City of Waterloo 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.

Customer Service Standards

- The customer service standards are included in the Accessibility Policy.
- The corporate training brochures for staff and volunteers include the customer service standards.
- The mandatory accessibility training for staff includes the customer service standards.
- Staff resources related to customer service standards are available on the staff intranet.

The Province of Ontario reviews all standards, which may require updates to existing policies, training, manuals, bylaws etc. Because of the reviews, revisions to current standards or new standards may be introduced which will include new requirements and compliance deadlines. Those revisions and any actions related to them will be captured in the City of Waterloo annual status update. No revisions to the current standards were introduced in 2021.

Consultation with the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC):

As municipal projects arise, the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee review site plans and provide suggestions on how to best improve and achieve accessibility.

In 2021, GRAAC advised on:

- Waterloo Memorial Recreational Complex expansion
- City of Waterloo East Side Library Branch Expansion
- City of Waterloo Button Factory elevator installation
- Parkland Strategy
- Waterloo Park Logo concepts
- Waterloo Park wayfinding project
- Roger Street Park
- Northdale Parkettes
- Sundew Park
- Feedback on Accessibility Audit tool – which included GRAAC’s washroom comments sheet
- Provided a letter of support to accompany grant application for accessibility upgrades to an existing play space

The impact of COVID-19 on GRAAC

The pandemic continued to have an impact on GRAAC in 2021. Having successfully shifted to online meetings in the fall of 2020, GRAAC was able to hold its usual complement of meetings in 2021 via Zoom. As in 2020, member attendance was higher overall as some barriers related to transportation and childcare were removed in the virtual format. Some site visits were resumed, which allowed for improved consultation on city construction projects. At this time, virtual meetings are planned once again for 2022 and will remain until public health officials deem that it is safe to gather in person.