

Appendix B: Overview of Accessibility Actions in 2024

This section details the actions the Region took in 2024 to achieve the goals in the 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP) and what we did to improve the accessibility of our services, programs and public spaces to meet the needs of people with disabilities in our community.

Standard 1: Design of Public Spaces

The Region strives to remove barriers to accessing our public spaces to ensure that residents and staff feel welcome and safe in Regional facilities. In this section, we identify what we did this year to achieve the goals we set for the organization under the Design of Public Spaces Standard in our 2023-2027 MYAP.

Goal 1A: Continue auditing Regional facilities for accessibility, prioritizing facilities with the highest occupancy and public visitors.

Actions 1A:

- As a result of recent accessibility audits, Provincial and Federal grant applications were submitted in 2024 to assist with funding accessibility improvements at two Waterloo Region Housing locations in Cambridge and one location in Waterloo.

Goal 1B: Update the Region of Waterloo Accessible Design Standards and inform applicable program areas of changes made to the design standards.

The Region of Waterloo Accessible Design Standards is a document that describes best practices and features to incorporate in physical spaces to ensure spaces are accessible for people with disabilities. This document was developed in collaboration with GRAAC.

Actions 1B:

- The Provincial Design of Public Spaces Standards Development Committee has completed a review of the accessible built environment standards in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), and the barrier-free accessibility requirements under the Ontario Building Code (OBC). Recommendations have been submitted to the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility. Regional staff await any potential regulatory changes.

Goal 1C: Incorporate accessibility practices and principles into the optimization and redesign of our Regional buildings for office and public spaces.

Actions 1C:

- Accessibility design standards continue to be incorporated into Regional renovations and new construction projects. Accessibility improvements are implemented within existing spaces based on accessibility audit findings. In 2024,

accessibility improvements were made to the Multi-Faith, Nursing and Quiet Room at 150 Frederick.

Goal 1D: Continue to ensure the Region complies with having procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance on accessible elements in our public spaces and appropriately addresses temporary disruptions, should they occur.

Actions 1D:

- The Region has preventative and emergency maintenance procedures for accessible elements in the following public spaces:
 - Recreational trails and beach access routes
 - Outdoor public use eating areas
 - Outdoor play spaces (if applicable; area municipalities are typically responsible for outdoor place spaces)
 - Sidewalks or walkways
 - Ramps, stairs, curb ramps and depressed curbs
 - Accessible pedestrian signals
 - Rest areas
 - Off-street and on-street accessible parking
 - Service counters, fixed queuing guides and waiting areas
- The Region has ensured compliance through integrating AODA requirements into relevant standard specifications, updated standard operating procedures, and in consultation with guiding stakeholders such as the Transportation Association of Canada and the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC).
- The Region periodically reviews and updates its standard specifications and standard operating procedures to ensure updated AODA legislation requirements are incorporated, as well as new products and supports that are integrated into those documents with the goal of continuously improving accessibility in all areas.

Standard 2: Customer Service

The Region strives to deliver services that meet the needs of our residents. The Region plans to rethink and redesign our services using human-centred and equity-based principles, and by leveraging digital capabilities to better meet the community's service expectations and needs. We describe what we did in 2024 to deliver better services to meet the needs of our residents and what achievements we made on the goals under the Customer Service Standard in the 2023-2027 MYAP.

Goal 2A: Evolve the existing Resident Experience Program based on human-centred and equity-based design principles for a consistent approach for service delivery across the organization and to better meet the needs of residents in our community.

Actions 2A:

- Developed a draft Service Design Framework, which includes a service design standard and service assessment tool, that provides a roadmap for how to design services from end-to-end that are built on a foundation of accessibility and equity to better meet the needs of residents. The next phase is working with residents and staff to refine and implement the Framework.
- Continued partnering with service areas on service design and redesign initiatives, such as Community Services, Public Health, Libraries and Automated Speed Enforcement (ASE), using human-centred design principles to improve accessibility and equitable access of services. For example, the ASE payment process was designed with accessibility first to ensure the steps to making a payment are simple and easy to understand, there is plain language, and residents can complete payments digitally, by phone or in-person.
- Completed a community survey of Waterloo Region residents that sought feedback on experiences with Regional services, barriers residents experience when accessing our services and input into the budget. Accessibility was identified as a barrier to our services, which will be examined further in 2025.

Goal 2B: Continue supporting Community Services clients by improving employment opportunities through distribution of refurbished computers, referrals to community agencies for technology literacy, and increasing access to chiropractic care for musculoskeletal illness in the Health2Work project.

Actions 2B:

- Within the last year, 600 laptops have been provided to participants.
- Within the last year, 35 participants have received chiropractic care for musculoskeletal illness through the Health2Work project.

Goal 2C: Increase the number of accessible housing units available for people with disabilities through the Waterloo Region Housing (WRH) Master Plan that goes beyond the minimum Ontario Building Code requirements.

Actions 2C:

- The Langs Drive building in Cambridge, which started construction in September 2024, will have 29 units (21 percent of total units) that achieve the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) accessibility definition.
 - Accessible features include bathrooms with roll in showers and roll under sinks, kitchens with lower countertops and wall ovens that can be accessed by someone using a mobility device.
 - The building is anticipated to be occupied by Spring 2027.
- The Mooregate Crescent building in Kitchener is still in the design stage. Twenty-one percent of units will meet CMHC's definition of accessibility. This building is anticipated to be occupied in early 2029.

Goal 2D: Review and update the Region’s interpreter and translation guidelines, which include American Sign Language (ASL), to improve service experiences for residents.

Actions 2D:

- The interpreter and translation guidelines are updated as needed, when there is new information or changes in processes. The Region uses LanguageLine, which offers on-demand phone interpretation in over 240 languages and video interpretation in over 40 languages, including ASL.

Goal 2E: As part of evolving the Resident Experience Program, ensure that payment processes and payment machines are reviewed to improve service delivery, where applicable.

Actions 2E:

- The Region reviewed payment processes with the development of the Automated Speed Enforcement (ASE) program in 2024. Digital, phone and in-person payment options were reviewed to ensure PCI compliance and that the processes are accessible and easy to use.

Standard 3: Information and Communications

The Region strives to meaningfully engage diverse members of the community for feedback and advice on Regional programs, services and public spaces, and ensures that information provided by the Region to residents is accessible. To do this, we set goals in the 2023-2027 MYAP and this section identifies what we have done, and continue to do, to make our information accessible for our residents.

Goal 3A: Review, evaluate and update guidelines on creating accessible social media content (e.g. text, images, videos) on an ongoing basis to stay current on best practices.

Actions 3A:

- Social media best practices continue to be used by all communications staff. The guideline will be reviewed and updated as necessary in 2025.

Goal 3B: Continue auditing communication distribution channels (e.g. Canva, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook) and documents for accessibility and plain language.

Actions 3B:

- Modifications were made to the placement of name keys within corporate videos, so they do not interfere with captioning. This work has continued in 2024 with the existing standards. These standards will be reviewed again in 2025 and updated as necessary.

Goal 3C: Review, update and continue training communications staff on accessible social media content, writing in plain language and creating accessible PDF documents (e.g. Adobe) to stay current on best practices.

Actions 3C:

- New communications staff completed 2-day training on InDesign: Creating Accessible PDF's for WCAG 2.1.

Goal 3D: Participate in updating the GRAAC Terms of Reference with the local municipalities represented on the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Actions 3D:

- Review and updating the GRAAC Terms of Reference started in the second half of 2024 and is ongoing. An updated version of the Terms of Reference is expected in the first half of 2025 for approval.

Standard 4: Employment

The Region strives to recruit and retain diverse staff who feel that their knowledge and skills are valued. Our goals for the Employment Standards in the 2023-2027 MYAP demonstrate what we want to accomplish to make our workplace more accessible, and this section discusses what we have done to achieve those goals.

Goal 4A: Review, evaluate and update Human Resources policies to embed accessibility into the policies for each stage of the employee lifecycle.

Actions 4A:

- The initial review of Human Resources policies has taken place, however additional work is required to finalize and operationalize the policies. This will continue to be a priority into 2025.
- The recently implemented HXM system allows for the collection of demographic data and some data is currently being collected. Further exploration of the system's capabilities is underway to expand the data collection and capture more demographic information. This will be continued in 2025.

Goal 4B: Conduct a comprehensive review of existing Abilities Management processes, including short- and long-term abilities management protocols and work accommodation program to provide a seamless employee centric service when disability management support is required.

Actions 4B:

- Accommodation program review was completed.
- Updated Accommodation policy was completed and posted in March 2024.
- Standard operating procedure for accommodation was updated.
- A Website for Abilities Management has been published to allow employees to have convenient access to this information.

Goal 4C: Review and expand Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) training, including accessibility, for Regional staff to increase DEIB knowledge, awareness and practical application of concepts.

- Provide disability, neurodiversity and accessibility training, which includes introductory concepts, a review of the AODA, and frameworks for disabilities, neurodiversity and enhancing accessibility in the workplace.

Actions 4C:

- Offered an additional series of the five-part Disability, Neurodiversity and Accessibility training program.
- In recognition of National Accessibility Week (May 26- June 1), hosted a virtual Come to Work Awareness Training in collaboration with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB).
- In recognition of National Accessibility Week, Regional staff were invited to attend a special screening of Life Made Accessible “Dismantling Ableism in Health Care” webinar.

Goal 4D: Continue to implement a comprehensive mental health strategy for employees, which includes:

- Delivering the Working Minds Training through the Mental Health Commission of Canada to create a supportive work environment.
- Continuous assessment and implementation of mental health benefits.
- Access to resilience and coping sessions, skill-building sessions focused on mental health and a wellbeing app.
- Implementing the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace for employees.

Actions 4D:

- A peer support program for Paramedics services was collaboratively launched in April 2024. Through a partnership with the Breakwater Institute, which provides clinical direction for the program, 25 peer supporters were recruited and trained to be able to support their colleagues.
- A request for proposal process was completed for the Region’s Employee and Family Assistance Program. The Region will continue to work with Homewood Health, and as of October 2024, employees and their families have access to a range of extended resources.
- Approximately 914 employees participated in 32 Health and Wellbeing sessions from January 2023 – August 2024.
- Planning has occurred to develop an employee health and wellbeing survey. Survey results will help the organization implement the National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.
- Approximately 40 percent of employees have completed the half-day Working Mind staff training and approximately 55 percent of management staff have completed the full-day managers training.

Goal 4E: Review the hiring process to ensure accessibility requirements are built into key recruitment steps to improve the candidate hiring experience.

Actions 4E:

- The Region is currently developing an Equitable Recruitment and Selection Practices Guide.
- The guide is paired with other initiatives to address historic and ongoing oppression and reflects the Region's commitment to provide equitable employment opportunities for all.
- The guide includes processes and resources to support management and candidates throughout the employment journey.

Standard 5: Transportation

The Region strives to prevent and remove barriers to transportation services for residents and visitors. Accessible transportation is an important service for residents in our community and this is reflected in the goals we have outlined in the 2023-2027 MYAP under the Transportation Standard. The actions taken throughout 2024 to improve the accessibility of our transportation services and to achieve the goals are described in this section.

Goal 5A: Develop and implement a plan for accessible taxi vans provided by local taxi services for the community, including assessing the number of accessible vans required in the bylaw to meet local needs, conducting a safety audit of accessible vans and evaluating and updating driver training.

Actions 5A:

- Licensing and Enforcement Services implemented the approved revisions to the Accessibility Fund dispersal formula to increase subsidy for accessible taxi owners. This resulted in an increase of accessible taxi vans, which now meet the percentage prescribed by the by-law.
- Licensing and Enforcement Services completed safety inspections of all accessible taxis and continue to inspect new vehicles added to the fleet.

Goal 5B: Assess the wheelchair curbside to airport terminal entrance gate service at the Region of Waterloo International Airport and transfer responsibility from the airline providers (e.g. West Jet) to the airport authority (the Region) when there are at least 200,000 passengers at the airport per year for two years.

Actions 5B:

- An Airport Accessibility Plan covering current accessible services and the 2024-2027 roadmap for further actions has been implemented and published. YKF is subject to the requirements of the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) and Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (ATPDR).
- Our website has been updated to assist passengers in understanding our accessible services which include:
 - Accessible parking and designated curbside drop off spots

- Curbside assistance by the ROWIA staff to the airline with information published on how to request it
- Two pet relief areas located curbside and once through security screening
- Tactile and braille signage
- Accessible kiosks for self-service check-in
- Accessible bathrooms
- Designated seating
- A copy of the plan can be found on the Airport's website: [Accessibility Plan - Region of Waterloo International Airport](#)

Goal 5C: Implement the Grand River Transit (GRT) Business Plan recommendations to determine service levels, expansion plans and update the bus stop design guidelines to improve accessibility features across all GRT business lines (MobilityPLUS, conventional bus and light rail transit).

Actions 5C:

- Phase 1 of engagement for MobilityPLUS services was completed in Summer 2024 to be used for GRT's 2030 business plan. Phase 2 of engagement is set for November 2024 and will show preliminary feedback, with the plan ready in early Spring 2025.
- Updated bus stop guidelines were released in 2024, which standardize how stops should be constructed and factoring in accessibility requirements.
- MobilityPLUS areas of focus will be on improving ride availability.

Goal 5D: Improve GRT system accessibility by upgrading transit stops, shelters, and landing pads.

Actions 5D:

- In 2024, 42 landing pads were constructed and/or upgraded.
- 81 percent of GRT's stops have concrete or asphalt landing pads, an increase of 13 percent from 2023.
- Of the remaining 19 percent, 9 percent of these stops will require additional enhancements, such as lighting and improved sidewalk connections.
- GRT will continue to coordinate upgrades with other road infrastructure projects to maximize accessibility enhancements.

Goal 5E: Improve the transit journey by co-designing with customers and GRT staff the elements of MobilityPLUS transit vehicles that can be adjusted based on the manufacturer's specification, to ensure passenger comfort and the best overall experience.

Actions 5E:

- In 2024, changes were made to the ARBOC (MobilityPLUS vehicle) layout to address ongoing concerns:

- Rear flip seats were repositioned to the front of the bus.
- Two seats were removed to allow for a larger rear area. This improves wheelchair positioning and securement.
- The configuration changes also ensure that weight is kept at the rear for stabilization.

Goal 5F: Increase community participation by reducing barriers to transit services and positioning Grand River Transit as a major transportation enabler of employment, social and other life activities.

Actions 5F:

- Based on feedback, the following changes were made to the MobilityPLUS application in 2024:
 - Simplified introduction and instructions.
 - Questions streamlined for comprehension and ease of completion.
 - Some questions were removed as they are no longer needed.
 - Clarified the two portions which make up the application (medical and personal information).