



REPORT

Corporate & Legislative Services

TO: Mayor and Members of Council

FROM: Catalina Blumenberg, Clerk

DATE: February 13, 2025

REPORT: CLS-12-2025

SUBJECT: 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan - 2024 Progress Report

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** report CLS-12-2025 of the Corporate and Legislative Services Office be received;
2. **THAT** staff be directed to report back in Q2 2026 with the 2025 Progress Report on the 2022-2026 Accessibility Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The 2022-2026 Accessibility Plan is an assessment of the barriers to accessibility and inclusiveness within Prince Edward County (PEC). It serves as a strategic action plan to engage Council, staff, and residents in removing these barriers, ensuring that everyone, regardless of ability, can fully participate in the community. The plan was developed utilizing the findings of the 2020 accessibility community survey and outlines legislative requirements, strategic commitments, and planned capital projects.

This report provides an overview of the progress made in 2024 in implementing the Accessibility Plan, including key achievements by both the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the municipality, highlighting specific initiatives.

BACKGROUND

Everyone should have the opportunity to participate fully in society. In Ontario, approximately [2.6 million people](#) have a disability. This means roughly one in four Ontarians live with a disability and face various types of accessibility challenges in their everyday life, and at some point, most of us will likely face some type of temporary,

situational or permanent disability. People with disabilities can face multiple barriers to accessing goods, services, facilities and obtaining gainful employment and the need for accessible services will continue to rise as the population ages. Planning for accessibility helps create a more vibrant municipality that all residents and visitors can enjoy.

The goal of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is to identify, prevent and remove barriers to make Ontario accessible by 2025. Unfortunately, this deadline has been missed, with a recent review of implementation of the Act, most recently by Rich Donovan in his [2023 report](#) found the legislation is not being enforced and the state of accessibility in the province was in "crisis."

Nevertheless, the Act outlines accessibility requirements so people of all abilities can participate in all areas of daily life. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and Ontario Regulation 191/11: Integrated Accessibility Standards mandates that all public-sector organizations must establish, implement, and maintain a multi-year accessibility plan. The 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan must identify barriers to accessibility within the organization – and in The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward's (The County) case, within the community, and outline steps to remove those barriers. Depending on the severity of the violation, failure to comply with the AODA can result in fines up to \$50,000 per day for individuals, and up to \$100,000 per day for corporations. The 2022-2026 Multi-Year accessibility plan was approved on January 11, 2022. This is the third progress report to Council on the municipality's accomplishments to identify and remove barriers and enhance our commitment to accessibility and inclusiveness in 2024.

The 2022-2026 Accessibility Plan

[The 2022-2026 Accessibility Plan \(Plan\)](#) is a critical assessment of the barriers to accessibility and inclusiveness that exist within The County, and a strategic action plan to engage Council, staff, and residents in removing these barriers so that everyone, of every ability, can participate in the community. The Plan was created in part, utilizing the findings of the 2020 accessibility community survey, led by the former Accessibility Advisory Committee.

The 2022-2026 Plan outlines the following:

- AODA legislation and associated regulations and standards
- A statement of commitment from the Mayor, and Chair of the Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Highlights some of the accessibility challenges faced by The County
- Specific commitments from the Accessibility Advisory Committee to improve accessibility in various areas such as employment, procurement, digital services, infrastructure planning, and engage local business
- Direction for residents to assist in identifying and removing barriers to accessibility
- The review and monitoring process for the Plan
- The communication strategies for the Plan

- Specific legislative requirements of AODA and The County's compliance with those requirements
- Planned capital projects meant to remove physical barriers to accessibility within The County

The Plan includes a mandatory yearly report back to Council to identify progress of the Plan's implementation, accomplishments, and achievements. This annual progress report highlights key areas of progress made in 2024 and is not meant to be an inventory of all accomplishments.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Pillar: Support a community that cares

Council Priority: Community Equity

Objective: Be an active partner working with others to narrow socioeconomic gaps and reduce poverty in our community.

ANALYSIS:

Every municipality with over 10,000 must create a local accessibility advisory committee (AAC) and involve the committee in our planning processes. The Accessibility Advisory Committee provides information and advice to Council on identifying, proactively preventing and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, public spaces and facilities. The Committee plays an active role in helping Prince Edward County become a barrier-free community and ensuring obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) are met.

The goals and purpose of the Accessibility Advisory Committee are to:

1. Educate and promote awareness of accessibility to the municipality, community organizations, and local businesses;
2. Provide input on the preparation of accessibility plans (Accessibility Multi-Year Plan and Elections Accessibility Plan) for consideration by Council. The accessibility plans will address and include steps that the County has taken and plans to take with respect to the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities as required by legislation;
3. Review in a timely manner, site plans and drawings, as described in Section 41 of the Planning Act;
4. Review access for persons with disabilities to buildings, structures and premises (or parts thereof) that The County purchases, constructs, significantly renovates, leases or funds, as required under the Design of Public Spaces Standard;
5. Promote awareness of accessibility in the County's procurement of goods and services and development of municipally administered, sub-contracted or licensed programs and services;

6. Evaluate existing and proposed policies and by-laws in Prince Edward County and provide advice with the intention of eliminating barriers for individuals with a disability;
7. Identify potential grants and funding that could be available to assist with the removal of barriers for persons with disabilities;
8. Provide advice pertaining to social inclusion, poverty and community wellness; and
9. Liaise with municipal departments, stakeholders, and other organizations on matters related to accessibility, and provide support when necessary.

The Clerk provides meeting and project management support to the Committee, taking a lead in assisting the Committee in fulfilling their mandate by providing direction and project management support on committee activities. While staff and the Committee work closely together, their roles differ.

The Clerk's Office manages the accessibility portfolio, and the Clerk is responsible for building relationships by interacting/engaging with all departments to advocate for the removal of barriers related to accessibility, this includes accessibility policy development such as the multi-year accessibility plan. The role consults and liaise with employees to support and provide expert advice on issues related to accessibility, and access, working with all municipal departments to support their efforts to meet the standards provided in the Act and the action items identified in the Accessibility Plan. research findings on best/new practices and assist with the preparation of reports/ projects and services. The role also reviews legislation, standards and trends in accessibility and determine their applicability to the municipality. Additionally, the Clerk's Office receives inquiries, requests for information and public feedback related to accessibility matters, responding to requests for information and feedback as required.

Highlights of 2024 Accessibility Achievements (Accessibility Advisory Committee):

- Reviewed and commented on 12 site plans and 3 planning files (Official Plan/Zoning By-Law amendment applications)
- The municipality, in partnership with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, has successfully secured funding through the 2023-24 EnAbling Change Program grant. This initiative focuses on creating equitable opportunities in the labor market and supporting awareness and compliance with accessibility regulations. The project, called *Access the County*, is designed to help small businesses in Prince Edward County better understand and comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Access the County is implemented by a task team comprised community members that include members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce, the Picton BIA and municipal staff. [Click here to see the Access the County Terms of Reference.](#)
- Outreach to Business owners wanting to improve accessibility is on-going with the business champions

- Community support work - Support letter for our non-profits needing County support for grants
- [Enhanced Accessibility Feedback Process](#) - The enhanced accessibility feedback process was created to support County staff, Accessibility Advisory Committee, and members of the public. The municipality began collecting feedback and to help identify the potential barriers to accessibility that people with disabilities face.
- Led the National AccessAbility Week 2024 celebrations;
- Continues to advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion - with the plan of receiving training in 2025;
- Provided feedback/advice on multiple parkland dedication projects.

Municipality:

- In collaboration with the committee, created 19 accessible parking spaces throughout Picton, Bloomfield and Wellington;
- Hosted a civic learning session with the Youth In Transition Community Living Prince Edward program;
- Tracking short-term accommodations that provide accessibility features in their rentals.
- Assisted the Wellington Rotary with Implementing mat/accessible water chairs at Wellington Beach - created an internal staff procedure for bookings. In 2024, the chair was rented twice. Hoping to create more awareness by doing a PSA in advance of the summer season.
- Incorporated accessibility pillars from the Multi-Year Plan in the Parks Master Plan and Facilities Condition Assessment, including consultation with the Committee (on-going)
- Incorporated accessibility as a central theme in the 2024 Tourism Management Plan, including ensuring accessible washroom options which resulted in accessible washrooms (porta-potties) at Wilkinson community Park and Macaulay Village Park
- Conducted a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan Survey for Key Staff - results will be utilized to provide feedback to Council on progress regarding accessibility projects, and to address areas for growth, and where training could be beneficial. These results to be incorporated into the next iteration of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.
- Successfully passed an audit by the Ministry of Seniors & Accessibility on specialized transportation services

While there have been achievements, the municipality faces a major financial barrier to be compliant with AODA. To this effect, in January 2024, Prince Edward County approved [Motion 2024-151](#) which advocated for stable and consistent accessibility funds, similar to the gas tax fund concept. This resolution has gained traction across the Province, with over 100 municipalities endorsing this idea. The Honourable Raymond Cho Minister for Seniors and Accessibility responded on April 25, 2024 by highlighting existing funding, such as the Inclusive Community Grants Program and EnAbling

Change Program, noting the government continues to welcome feedback and contributions from stakeholders and disability advocates, and look forward to collaborating with all our partners to continue building an Ontario that enables inclusion, participation and dignity for all Ontarians. In 2025, Council should continue to advocate for this concept to make it a reality.

The Municipality is proud to continue its commitment to accessibility. With the help and guidance of the Accessibility Advisory Community, Council, local businesses, and many community stakeholders, the Municipality has made tangible progress in increasing accessibility.

Budget Considerations

The activities and initiatives undertaken in 2024 were primarily funded through the 2024 operational budget, and grant applications. This multi-source funding approach enabled the successful implementation of various accessibility projects and improvements. The accessibility initiatives planned for 2025 will incur costs for the Municipality, including maintenance and infrastructure upgrades. These expenses have been included in the 2025 operating and capital budgets. Additionally, staff will apply for grants where feasible to supplement these funds.

Risk Implications of Implementing Recommendation(s)

Risk Description	Risk Type	Proposed Mitigation
Disciplinary action and possible fines or penalties from upper levels of government for not meeting AODA requirements	Financial / Legal	Non-compliance/conformity with provincial, AODA or federal legislation that applies to accessibility and statutory requirements will be mitigated by staff conducting due diligence and communicating to applicable government partners that the Plan has been developed and will be implemented. Applicable staff members will undergo training to ensure a clear understanding of accessibility standards, guidelines, and statutory requirements.
Public perception on accessibility barriers	Public / Stakeholder	Staff, in collaboration with organizations and business, will conduct public education on how to remove barriers.

Lack of accessibility focused culture of service delivery	Operational	The Clerk's Office, in a cross-departmental effort will continue to champion accessibility cross departmentally, at senior leadership team meetings, and at other internal meeting opportunities. Applicable staff members will undergo accessibility training, to ensure a clear understanding of accessibility standards, guidelines, statutory requirements and the Plan. An internal working group will be c
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Other Options Considered

None identified, this is an update report.

NEXT STEPS:

The [webpage](#), which hosts the [Multi-Year Accessibility Plan](#), will be updated to include the annual progress report. The Clerk's Office will continue to champion accessibility and make it part of the corporate culture.

The 2024 Action Plan Activities will be communicated to Council via Accessibility Advisory Committee reports and, once ratified and approved by Council, shared with the general public via the Municipality's communication channels.

The County continues to encourage local businesses and organizations to meet accessibility requirements and prevent and remove barriers, however, the County has no official role in enforcing these requirements. Ensuring these requirements are met is the responsibility of the Government of Ontario.

ATTACHMENTS:


1. Accessibility Action Plan 2024

AUTHORIZING SIGNATURES:

Prepared by:

Catalina Blumenberg
Clerk

January 31, 2025



Reviewed by:

Arryn McNichol
Director of Corporate & Legislative Services

February 4, 2025



Approved for submission by:

Marcia Wallace
Chief Administrative Officer

February 4, 2025