



*Hastings Highlands*

*Beautiful By Nature*



# 2024 Annual Accessibility Report

## Introduction

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands is committed to creating inclusive programs and services, served by a diverse workforce, that meet the needs of our growing and changing community. By removing barriers to services and programs and in the workforce, we recognize the strength that comes with difference, embracing new ideas and perspectives. This commitment to diversity and inclusion will be realized through processes that engage and support employees and create enhanced customer experiences for the community we serve.

In 2018 Council approved the Municipality of Hastings Highlands Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2018-2022) to identify, prevent, and remove barriers in Municipal programs and services for people with disabilities. In 2023 Council approved the new Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (2023-2027) which builds on the success of the previous plan, outlining new and continued initiatives to meet and exceed its legislated obligations to identify, prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities.

You will find updates on the actions taken in 2024 to meet the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* and in support of our 2023-2027 Multi- Year Accessibility Plan.



## **Accessibility Highlights in 2024**

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The Municipality of Hastings Highlands is committed to meeting the five standards set out by AODA regulations to give people with disabilities inclusive access to our community and all the services available. The five standards include:

1. Customer Service Standard
2. Information and Communication Standard
3. Employment Standard
4. Transportation Standard
5. Design of Public Spaces Standard

Outlined below are the 'Accessibility Highlights in 2024' for each of the above five standards.

### **General Accessibility**

In 2024, the Municipality initiated preliminary discussions with Hastings County to explore opportunities for participation on their Accessibility Advisory Committee. This collaboration aims to enhance the exchange of information, resources, and supports, and to strengthen efforts to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities within the community.

### **Customer Service Standard**

Hastings Highlands Accessible Customer Service Policy (Bylaw 2018-084) outlines how the Municipality will comply with the Customer Service regulations under AODA by addressing the following:

- The provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities
- The use of assistive devices by persons with disabilities
- The use of service animals by persons with disabilities
- The use of support people by persons with disabilities
- Training
- Customer feedback regarding the provision of goods and services to persons with disabilities; and
- Notice of availability and format of documents

### **Highlights for 2024 – Accessible Customer Service**

- Hastings Highlands continues to provide customers with a number of options to connect with staff or attend appointments either by phone, web conference, email or in person – to ensure that each member of the public, regardless of abilities has access to the services of the Municipality
- Members of the public are encouraged to contact the Municipality to request information or support in an alternate format
- Council, Staff and Volunteers continue complete regular scheduled training on the

*Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* which includes information on how to interact and support customers with disabilities

- Hastings Highlands continues to solicit feedback from the public on how accessibility can be improved throughout the Municipality

## Information and Communication Standard

### Highlights for 2024 – Information and Communication

- A new website provider was procured in 2023 to ensure that the Municipality's website continues to meet or exceed accessibility compliance requirements by providing the Municipality with the appropriate framework, tools, guidelines and ongoing training. In the interim, Hastings Highlands current website ([www.hastingshighlands.ca](http://www.hastingshighlands.ca)) continues to be maintained in accordance with WCAG 2.1 Level AA guidelines. (Not including a select few inaccessible documents required by statute to be posted)
- The Municipality continues to produce resources for the public in both print and electronic formats to ensure that information is available to the community, regardless of ability
- Those who require information published by the Municipality in an alternate format are continuously encouraged to contact the Municipality, so that we can work to provide them with the information they need in a format that's accessible to them
- A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Municipal website and social media to support consistency and accessibility by creating a **clear, consistent, and enforceable framework** that ensures digital content is inclusive and compliant with accessibility standards
- The Municipality began the procurement process for **Ontario511** to enhance accessibility in the following areas:
  - **Ontario 511** is designed to meet the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requirements by providing accessible travel information through multiple platforms. Here's how it aligns with AODA standards:
    - **Accessible Website and App:** Ontario 511 offers visual aids and text versions that meet accessibility standards. Regular testing and assessments are conducted using approved tools and technology to ensure continual compliance with Ontario accessibility standards.
    - **Multiple Access Channels:** Information is available via the website, mobile app, and telephone service, ensuring that users can choose the platform that best suits their needs.

### Council/Committee Meetings

Hastings Highlands recognizes the importance of ensuring that Council/Committee Meetings are 'open' to the public regardless of a person's ability.

Meetings continue to be live-streamed and recorded in the Municipality's Council Chambers to YouTube – an online viewing platform. Through the Hastings Highlands YouTube channel, viewers have the ability to view meetings with closed captions as well as *pause*, *slow down* or *speed up* the meeting recording.

- Web-based meetings allow greater participation - regardless of ability
- Telephone (call-in) option is available for meeting participants in addition to accepting written correspondence
- Return of in-person public viewing of Council/Committee Meeting began in early 2023

## **Employment Standard**

The Municipality strives to address accommodation at every stage of the recruitment and selection process. The availability of accommodation is advertised on all job postings and volunteer advertisements. This includes advertisements and postings for all Committees of Council including the Library Board.

Staff and Volunteers are trained to provide accessible customer service and have a variety of skills/resources to meet the various accommodation requests of candidates.

### **Highlights for 2024 – Employment**

- Hastings Highlands continues to work to standardize their Job Advertisements and Job Descriptions throughout the various departments of the Municipality to ensure consistent language related to the Municipality's commitment to providing a 'barrier-free' accessible recruitment and selection process
- Hastings Highlands' Selection Team has continued to use 'web-based' meeting platforms (i.e., Zoom and Microsoft Teams) to allow for greater flexibility and accommodation amongst applicants/candidates
- New Staff and Volunteers are trained on accessibility and customer service as soon as possible after hiring, to ensure that even their earliest interactions are grounded in providing accessible, respectful customer service to individuals with varying abilities

## **Transportation Standard**

### **Highlights for 2024 – Transportation Standard**

- Accessible transportation in Hastings Highlands is available through community service organizations in the area such as Bancroft Community Transit and Care North Hastings
- The 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan was updated in 2023 to include an initiative that prioritizes the strengthening of relationships with these organizations and agencies
- Renewed parking lot lines at the Municipal Building/Library which includes the accessible parking spaces located at the front of the building

## Design of Public Spaces Standard

### Highlights for 2024 – Design of Public Spaces Standard

- The 2023-2027 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan was updated in 2023 to include several initiatives to help achieve a higher level of accessibility in public spaces as well as Municipal workspaces. The Municipality continues to work towards these initiatives which include as follows:
  - Establish a process for consultation with the public and persons with disabilities when constructing new or redeveloping existing recreational trails, outdoor play spaces, exterior paths of travel (rest areas) and on-street parking, as required under the IASR
  - Review accessibility legislation and this Plan when creating new public spaces, making renovations to Municipal property and when designing and building new infrastructure and seek opportunities to enhance accessibility and remove barriers
- Municipal staff continue to regularly inspect and monitor the accessible elements within public spaces to ensure they remain in good working order and remain aware of their responsibility to report the matter promptly to the Operations Manager or designated facility manager should an issue be identified.

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Your Feedback is Important to Us!

To request a copy of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan or Status Report in another format, please contact us:

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# Hastings Highlands

*Beautiful By Nature*

## OUR VISION

*“An enviable community, with a progressive vision and financial stability, prepared for the future.”*

## OUR MISSION

*“To provide a community that is Beautiful by Nature for all residents and visitors to thrive, prosper and enjoy life.”*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- *We Care*
- *We're All in This Together*
- *Welcome Home*



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