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Report 2026-054

Report Title: 2025 Accessibility Annual Status Report

Committee Name: Corporate Support

Committee Meeting Date: March 31, 2026

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Council Meeting Date: April 15, 2026

Strategic Plan Priorities: ☐ Innovate for Service Excellence
☐ Ignite Economic Opportunity
☒ Foster a Thriving Community
☐ Propel Sustainable Growth
☐ Champion a Vibrant Future

Recommendation

“That the Corporate Support Committee, having considered Report 2026-054 ‘2025 Accessibility Annual Status Report’, recommend that County Council approve the ‘2025 Accessibility Annual Status Report and updated 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.”

Purpose

This report is the County of Northumberland’s annual update on the measures taken during 2025 to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and to report on the progress made to meet the requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

Background

The County is committed to accessibility and meeting or exceeding the legislated requirements.

Statement of Commitment to Accessibility

The County of Northumberland is committed to ensuring that people of all ages and abilities enjoy the same opportunities as they live, work, visit and invest in our community. The County is guided by the four core principles of dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity, and supports the full inclusion of persons as set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Accessibility Legislation in Ontario

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 sets out a road map for creating an accessible Ontario. The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) under the AODA provides the standards that businesses and organizations in Ontario must follow to identify, remove and prevent barriers. In addition to the General Requirements, which include the development of accessibility policies and plans, procuring goods, services and facilities and requirements for training, the IASR contains mandatory and enforceable standards in five key areas:

- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces
- Customer Service

The Design of Public Spaces Standard focuses on removing barriers in areas not covered by the Ontario Building Code such as exterior paths of travel, on and off-street parking, recreational trails, pedestrian crossings and service counters. It applies to new construction or redevelopment of existing spaces. It does not require organizations to retrofit to be compliant.

The Ontario Building Code (OBC) regulates the minimum building standards for the construction of all new buildings and buildings that undergo significant renovation. The OBC includes requirements for minimum accessibility within buildings. In 2025, the OBC was amended and most new construction and extensive renovations are subject to these amendments; existing buildings where no work is planned are not affected by the amendments.

Consultations

The 2025 accomplishments outlined in this annual status report were determined by the County's Accessibility Coordinator in collaboration and consultation with the County departments.

The Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee (NAAC) has reviewed and provided input on this Accessibility Annual Status Report and will continue to provide input on the County's accessibility plans on an on-going basis to ensure the County is meeting the needs of people with disabilities. At its February 12, 2026, meeting, the NAAC endorsed the 2025 Accessibility Annual Status Update and the updated 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and recommended that Council accept and approve the 2025 Accessibility Annual Status Update and the updated 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

Legislative Authority / Risk Considerations

To meet the legislative requirements of the AODA, the County must comply with the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR). Therefore, the County must establish, implement, maintain, and document a multi-year accessibility plan which outlines the County's strategy to prevent and remove barriers and meet its obligation under the IASR. In addition, the County is also required to prepare an annual status report on the progress of measures taken to implement the multi-year accessibility plan. (O. Reg. 191/11: Integrated Accessibility Standards, Section 4.)

Discussion / Options

This Accessibility Annual Status update outlines the County's accessibility achievements for 2025, including the accomplishment of goals set out in the County's 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. Some of the 2025 goals have been adjusted to continue in 2026.

Northumberland's Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Northumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee (NAAC) is a citizen-based committee that provides advice, recommendations and support to County Council and all County departments regarding the development, implementation, and maintenance of the County's Accessibility Plan in accordance with the AODA. The NAAC advises on the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers to people with disabilities when accessing County goods, services, and facilities.

Each member of the NAAC is a volunteer, except for 1 member from County Council. The majority of NAAC membership is held by people with disabilities. The NAAC members bring a wide range of personal and professional experiences and perspectives related to the challenges faced by people with disabilities. They provide invaluable advice and support as we continue to work toward a barrier-free community.

The NAAC is supported by the Accessibility Coordinator and the Corporate Services Department.

Under the AODA, the NAAC reviews site plans and drawings described in section 41 of the Planning Act, and the County consults with the NAAC on other projects related to the design of public spaces. The NAAC members continued to provide input and feedback to County staff and Council based on their knowledge, expertise and lived experience.

In 2025, the NAAC also:

- Endorsed the 2024 Accessibility Annual Status Report.
- Awarded Helping Hands certificates to County employees who championed accessibility.
 - Karrie Martin (Corporate Services)
 - Giselle Lech and support dog Ivy (Northumberland Paramedics)
 - Keagan Phillion (Communications)
- Supported and contributed to the awareness activities for National AccessAbility Week (May 25-31, 2025) and International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3, 2025).
- Provided pre-project recommendation for a possible future housing project
- Endorsed the County's 2025 Enhancing Access to Spaces for Everyone (EASE) grant application to install assistive listening technology in Council Chambers and Provincial Offences Administration courtroom.

- Participated as mock evacuees in a mock emergency exercise and provided feedback on the accessibility of the emergency shelter experience (October 22, 2025)

Accessibility Governance/Compliance

The Accessibility Coordinator acts as a resource for all County service areas and facilitates compliance with the AODA. To ensure that the County continues to meet or exceed the requirements of the AODA, the Coordinator continued to stay informed about legislation and participated in accessibility networks such as the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals (ONAP).

The Accessibility Coordinator facilitates the inter-municipal accessibility advisory committee meetings 3 times a year, bringing the County and member municipalities together to support AODA compliance by sharing information, discussing issues, problem solving and collaborating.

In 2025, the Accessibility Coordinator supported County departments by consulting and educating staff in a variety of areas including: assistive listening technology, braille, best practice for signage (including font size, style, colour contrast, use of dual languages and use of braille), wheelchair charging stations, best practice for customer service desk design, and accessible emergency shelters.

In addition, the Accessibility Coordinator:

- Participated in a Public Health Agency of Canada research focus group examining the role of local governments in creating dementia-inclusive communities, alongside local government officials involved in the built environment.
- Acted as the liaison with the funder for the Employment and Social Development Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund 2022 grant award for the County headquarters accessible emergency exits project, to ensure that all elements in the funding agreement were met; Submitted project final report in December 2025.
- Coordinated awareness activities for National AccessAbility Week and International Day of Persons with Disabilities in consultation with NAAC and Communications.
- Monitored the 2025 goals within the 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, liaising with County departments.
- Participated as a mock evacuee and provided feedback and recommendations on the accessibility of the emergency shelter experience.
- Responded to residents and staff inquiries related to accessibility.
- Provided accessibility grant information to local business/organizations.
- Participated in the provincial 2025 Enabling Access to Space for Everyone (EASE) grant application process.
- Supported member municipalities regarding accessibility (including Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility AODA desk audit)

Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation

General requirements

The County has an overarching accessibility policy in place along with several operational policies related to accessibility.

The County's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2026 outlines how the County will continue to meet its legislated obligations under the AODA and address the accessibility needs of our community. The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan is posted on the County's website.

The County continues to include accessible design, features and criteria when purchasing goods, services, or facilities. If the County is not able to purchase accessible goods, services or facilities, the County provides an explanation as to why, upon request.

We continue to ensure that training is provided on the requirements of the accessibility standards and the Human Rights Code as it pertains to persons with disabilities to all employees, volunteers, persons who participate in developing policies and persons who provide goods, services, or facilities on behalf of the County. Training is appropriate to the duties of the employees, volunteers, and other persons.

In 2025, the County:

- Continued to monitor the status of and work towards the goals within the County's 2022-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.
- Conducted an annual review of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and updated the Plan for 2022-2026 (ongoing).

Information and Communications

Northumberland County's main website and microsites have been developed to ensure Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA compliance. The County regularly monitors websites and web content to identify and remediate any areas of non-compliance.

The Web Content Accessibility Working Group members continue to support web compliance within their business units. To support ongoing document accessibility, all employees responsible for creating documents have received accessible documents training and new employees are assigned accessible documents training appropriate for their roles. The staff are supported by the Communications and Digital Accessibility Coordinator.

All videos posted to the County's social media and corporate YouTube channels include captions, where possible within platform limitations.

In some situations, the County may not be able to post web content due to the format. When information is not accessible to a person, County employees work with the person to find a suitable accessible format. We encourage individuals who find a document inaccessible to contact us to request it in an alternative format.

In 2025, the County:

- Redeveloped the County website and 4 microsites in compliance with WCAG 2.0AA
- Continued accessible documents training for all new employees, as appropriate.
 - Held 8 Accessible Word and PowerPoint Documents training sessions
 - 42 employees trained.
- Facilitated 4 Equidox training sessions (document remediation software).
 - 6 employees trained.
- Hosted 1 Plain Language Workshop.

- 15 employees were trained to use clear straightforward expression to allow the reader to understand the message easily.
- Continued monthly audits on select webpages and documents posted on the County's website(s) to ensure WCAG 2.0 AA compliance.
 - Completed audits of over 150 webpages across the County's corporate website and 4 microsites to support accessible and complaint website redevelopment
 - 13 documents audited.
- Drafted organizational Writing Guide to support greater consistency, readability and accessibility across organizational materials (to be finalized and distributed/rolled out to staff in 2026).

Employment

The County of Northumberland remains committed to accessible and equitable hiring practices and continued to meet the Employment Standard requirements under the AODA. All job postings include a statement about the availability of accommodations for applicants with disabilities throughout the recruitment process.

Offers of employment notify successful candidates that job accommodations are available for people with disabilities. All employees are informed of policies regarding job accommodations. The County continues to provide workplace and emergency response information in accessible formats to employees who require it. The County provides accessible formats and communication supports in consultation with the employee, upon request.

The County continues to share job postings directly with local agencies and other organizations that assist people with disabilities in their job search.

In 2025, the County:

- Reviewed and updated the general orientation handout package to improve accessibility and enhance employee experience.

Transportation

The County of Northumberland does not provide or operate conventional or specialized transportation services, school transportation or ferries, nor does the County license taxicabs; therefore, the transportation standards do not apply to the County.

Design of Public Spaces

The County continues to ensure that all new and redeveloped public spaces meet or exceed the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard. The County continues to meet the consultation requirements when carrying out the construction or redevelopment of public spaces, such as when new recreational trails are developed. Although the County is not required to retrofit public spaces under the AODA, we continue to make accessibility improvements.

In 2025, the County:

- Oversaw the design and installation of a new accessible entrance/exit/emergency exit on the upper level of 555 Courthouse Road and relocated a Type B accessible parking space adding the access aisle on a clear path of travel to the entrance/exit. (Cobourg)

- Oversaw the design and installation of a new accessible emergency exit outside a lower-level committee room at 555 Courthouse Road including a powered door operator and ramp to safety (Cobourg)

The County worked with the Northumberland County Housing Corporation (NCHC) to make accessibility-related improvements including the following:

- Added pull-down shelving to 3 units at 299 Elgin Street East (Cobourg)
- Added an additional power door operator to 2 units at 299 Elgin Street East (Cobourg)
- Converted 3 tenant washrooms from bathtubs to walk-in showers (2 at 6 Percy in Colborne and 1 at 330 King Street in Cobourg).

Customer Service

The County of Northumberland continues to comply with the Customer Service Standard. When accessing County goods, service and facilities, individuals may use their assistive devices. Service animals are welcomed in all areas that are open to the public unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. People with disabilities can access their support person when accessing County goods, services, and facilities.

We continue to train all new employees and volunteers on Accessible Customer Service, including how to communicate with people with disabilities in a manner that takes into account their abilities. We work with the person with a disability to determine which methods of communication work best for them.

We continue to offer a variety of ways for customers to provide feedback on the accessibility of our facilities, programs and services.

In 2025, the Accessibility Coordinator received, tracked and ensured responses to customer feedback, including:

- 1 concern regarding the waste calendar missing information on accessible formats. When designing the 2026 calendar, information on how to access accessible formats was included.
- 1 concern related Accessible Recycling Program customer bags not being picked up. The County advised the customer how to place the tags correctly.
- 1 concern regarding the web application for Accessible Recycling Program requiring an email address to submit. The County mailed a paper form to the customer.
- 1 concern regarding red-green lock and occupancy lights on accessible washrooms not distinguishable for person with colour-deficiency. The County will explore alternative options.
- 1 concern regarding ineligibility for tax-rebate after the home was reassessed by Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). The County provided the resident with contact information for MPAC for Request for Reconsideration and local municipality Finance team for follow-up.

The following accomplishments improved customer service in 2025:

- Hosted a staff Lunch and Learn with Unstoppable Tracy “The Power of Determination” to challenge assumptions and reduce stigma related to disabilities.

- Accommodated 147 households through the Accessible Recycling Collection Program (decrease of 13%).
- Accommodated 200 households through the existing Medical Waste Subsidy program (increase of 15%).

Other initiatives

The County continued to participate in the following initiatives in 2025:

- Recognized National AccessAbility Week (May 25 – 31, 2025).
- Awarded Helping Hands certificates to County employees who championed accessibility.
- Recognized International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3, 2025).

Financial Impact

There is no provincial funding to support the implementation of the regulations under the AODA. Ongoing costs to administer and manage the implementation of the AODA requirements and accessibility improvements are integrated as a part of general operations.

There is a financial risk for O. Reg. 191/11: Integrated Accessibility Standards non-compliance. The County may incur administrative penalties of \$500.00 up to \$100,000.00 per day, based on the impact of any contravention of the IASR.

Legal risks may occur if the County does not afford reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities, under AODA, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Member Municipality Impacts

The County continues to collaborate with all member municipalities through the Inter-Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Conclusion / Outcomes

It is the recommendation of staff that the Council of the County of Northumberland receives and approves this 2025 Accessibility Annual Status Report.

Attachments

1. Report 2026-054 ATTACH 1 '2022-2026 MYAP - 2026 Update'