Municipality of Southwest Middlesex

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2016 - 2021

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

Introduction

In June 2015 the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005* (AODA) was enacted into law. The AODA is more comprehensive and prescriptive than the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* from 2001 and applies to the public sector as well as private and non-profit organizations. The AODA requires the development of accessibility standards, compliance deadlines and administrative penalties for non-compliance.

The fundamental purpose of the AODA is to ensure that Ontario is accessible by 2025. Ontario is the first and only Canadian jurisdiction to regulate accessibility standards. Standards Development Committees were established in the following areas:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Built Environment

Each standard has established implementation targets and compliance requirements for obligated organizations.

The AODA requires accessibility of goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment as well as information and communications.

Implementation Strategy

Southwest Middlesex supports the spirit and goals of the AODA to make the Province of Ontario accessible by 2025. The Municipality is striving to become more accessible and inclusive to people with disabilities by ensuring that accessibility is a reality throughout all facilities and business operations. The Municipality is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the *Act*.

Participating Municipalities

This multi-year accessibility plan is prepared jointly with participating municipalities within the County of Middlesex. The participating municipalities include:

- County of Middlesex
- Township of Adelaide Metcalfe

- Township of Lucan Biddulph
- Municipality of Middlesex Centre
- Municipality of North Middlesex
- Municipality of Southwest Middlesex
- Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc
- Municipality of Thames Centre
- Village of Newbury

Statement of Commitment

Southwest Middlesex is committed to eliminating barriers and improving accessibility for people with disabilities in a manner that respects dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

Southwest Middlesex recognizes the diverse needs of all our residents and customers and will respond by striving to provide services and facilities that are accessible to all.   The Municipality is committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner, and will do so by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility and meeting accessibility requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).*

Middlesex Accessibility Advisory Committee

The AODA requires municipalities to establish an Accessibility Advisory Committee, where the population exceeds 10,000.

The Middlesex Accessibility Advisory Committee is a public committee that is comprised of people with disabilities and staff members from the community. The purpose of the committee is to provide advice to Councils of all participating municipalities on the removal and prevention of barriers.

Monitor and Review

This Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years. An annual status report will be completed to document the progress and measures taken to meet the requirements under the Integrated Accessibility Regulation.

Plan coordination

The County's Accessibility Coordinator is responsible for the development of this plan, in consultation with the participating municipalities and the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Municipal Contact Information (2016)

Municipality	Contact
County of Middlesex 399 Ridout Street North London ON N6A 2P1	Jennifer Cowan, Accessibility Coordinator Kathy Bunting, County Clerk
Township of Adelaide Metcalfe 2340 Egremont Drive, R.R.#5 Strathroy, ON N7G 3H6	Cathy Case, Acting Administrator-Clerk
Township of Lucan Biddulph 33351 Richmond St., P.O. Box 190 Lucan, ON N0M 2J0	Ron Reymer, CAO Lisa deBoer, Clerk
Municipality of Middlesex Centre 10227 Ilderton Road, R.R. #2 Ilderton, ON N0M 2A0	Michelle Smibert, CAO Stephanie Troyer-Boyd, Clerk
Municipality of North Middlesex 229 Main Street, P.O. Box 9 Parkhill ON N0M 2K0	Marsha Paley, CAO Jackie Tiedeman, Clerk
Municipality of Southwest Middlesex 153 McKellar Street Glencoe, ON N0L 1M0	Janneke Newitt, Administrator/Clerk
Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc 52 Frank Street Strathroy, ON N7G 2R4	Ralph Coe, CAO Angela Toth, Director of Corporate Services/Clerk
Municipality of Thames Centre 4305 Hamilton Road, Dorchester ON N0L 1G3	Steward Findlater, CAO Margaret Lewis, Clerk
Village of Newbury 22910 Hagerty Road, Newbury, ON N0L 1Z0	Betty Gordon, Clerk-Treasurer

Timelines and Deliverables

Outcomes
- People with disabilities will have access to accessible services
- People with disabilities will have access to alternate formats and communication supports for any information that the Municipality produces
- A barrier-free recruitment process
- Greater accessibility in municipally-owned facilities
- Municipal staff able to identify barriers to accessibility and actively seek solutions to prevent and remove barriers

Approach
- Develop policies and procedures
- Incorporate accessibility into planning processes
- Train staff
- Engage the public in feedback
- Work to remove barriers to employment
- Continue to make facilities accessible
- Ensure there is access to information and communications

Timelines
2012- 2013
- The development of policies and commitment statement
- Developing a multi-year accessibility plan
- Purchasing and kiosk requirements
- Emergency information (public and workplace)

2014-2015
- Employment (recruitment, assessment, selection, return to work, accommodation plans, performance management, etc.)
- Training
- Feedback process
- Accessible formats and communication supports
- Accessible websites and web content

2016-2021
- Continue to improve accessibility in all aspects listed above
- On-going municipal sidewalk replacement program, accounting for accessibility needs
- Reporting to Accessibility Directorate of Ontario as required (2017, 2019, 2021)
- Accessible Customer Service policy & procedures update
- Implementation of requirements under Design of Public Spaces Regulation

Southwest Middlesex Accessibility Achievements

Training

- Trained staff on accessibility regulations in 2013. This training is provided on an on-going basis when new employees are hired. The training includes:
  - A review of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and its regulations (including the Accessible Customer Service Standard and the Integrated Accessibility Standard) - Power Point presentation.
  - An overview of the Ontario Human Rights Code

- Developed training document for volunteers. This training is provided on an on-going basis when new volunteers are recruited.
- On-going training of staff on creating accessible documents.
- Trained Council on AODA requirements in February 2013, hosted by Middlesex County.

Accessible Website and Web Content

- New website launched in 2014. Web designer advises that it has been made accessible in accordance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.
- In 2015 revised templates for council reports, minutes and by-laws to ensure accessibility when posted to the web site.

Policies

- Accessible Customer Service policy developed in 2009.
- Accessibility policy developed in 2013 which includes requirements under the Accessible Customer Service Standard and the Integrated Accessibility Standard.
- Accommodations in the Workplace policy developed in 2013 which outlines the process that staff must follow when requesting an accommodation and the process for accommodations during the recruitment process.

Purchasing

- Passed a new Purchasing Policy in 2013, amended in 2014, that addresses accessibility.

Feedback Process

- Created a new feedback form that is available from the municipal website, the municipal office and other various municipal facilities. When feedback is received, the Administrator/Clerk will notify the appropriate department to make arrangements for the feedback to be followed up with in a timely manner.

Communication Supports and Accessible Formats

- Through training, the Municipality attempts to ensure that documents found on the Municipality's website are accessible per the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. This is an on-going process and documents are updated as staff time permits. Members of the public can request documents in accessible formats or communication supports needed to attend meetings. Members of the public should contact the Clerk to determine the appropriate format.

- 2014 Municipal Election. The Municipality used an alternative voting method (telephone/internet). See the attached report on how accessibility requirements were met - Schedule "A".

Employment Requirements

- The Accommodations in the Workplace policy (adopted in 2013) outlines the process for accommodations being provided during the recruitment process.

Southwest Middlesex Accessibility Goals

Training

- Provide Department heads with information on how to remove barriers to accessibility through the recruitment process.
- Develop procedures to ensure that accommodation requests are documented.
- Develop comprehensive purchasing training and deliver to staff responsible for making purchases.
- Provide (through Middlesex County) on-going training to help staff create accessible documents.

Website and Web Content

- Continue to monitor website and consult with web designer to ensure WCAG compliance.
- Develop strategy to ensure web documents are compliant.

Policies

- Continue to review policies to ensure they are consistent with the four principles of accessibility.
- Reformat Emergency Response Plan (currently posted on the website) to a more accessible format

Design of Public Spaces Regulation

- The Municipality will ensure compliance with the Design of Public Spaces regulation as it applies to municipally owned public spaces. Municipal staff will advise developers of these regulations during consultation meetings.

Accessible Customer Service Standard update

- Review the updated Accessible Customer Service Standard in 2016 and implement as required.

Accessible Maintenance Procedures

Maintenance of Accessibility Elements, Design of Public Spaces Standard

Purpose:

To meet the requirements under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O.Reg 191/11), Design of Public Spaces Standard (Section 80.44) Maintenance of Accessible Elements

Practices:

To ensure that any newly constructed or redeveloped elements provided for under the Design of Public Spaces will have procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of the accessible elements in public spaces.

Scope:

Organizations shall ensure that their multi-year accessibility plan includes procedures for preventative and emergency maintenance of the accessible elements in public spaces as required under this Part and procedures dealing with temporary disruptions when accessible elements required under this Part are not in working order.

The Design of Public Spaces Standard applies to public spaces that are newly constructed or redeveloped, that include:

- Recreational Trails and Beach Access Routes
- Outdoor Public Use Eating Areas
- Outdoor Play Spaces
- Exterior Paths of Travel
- Accessible Parking

Application:

Departments that maintain elements listed under Scope:

- Shall apply best practices in the preventative maintenance of accessible elements with periodic checks such as;
  - o Annual inspections, or more frequently as per the Minimum Maintenance Standards.
  - o After storms or events that might affect accessible elements
  - o As part of any reports of vandalism or complaints
- Shall apply best practices in the emergency maintenance of accessible elements with active response once notified.
- Shall apply best practices in the emergency maintenance of accessible elements with active response once notified.
- Shall continue to provide public notification of temporary disruptions in keeping with compliance requirements under the Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulation (O. Reg 191/11) and the Municipality's corresponding policy:
  - o Notice of the disruption will include: the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any that are available.
  - o Notice will be given by posting the information in a conspicuous place as well as by posting the information on the Municipal website.
- Notify the Road Supervisor for the affected Municipality (where applicable)
- Repair as soon as practicable

Accessibility of eVoting Services

The use of technology has provided people the advantage of accessing information on demand and performing activities in a convenient and effective method. Everyday technologies including computers, telephones, smartphones, touchscreens, and other tools present opportunities for persons with disabilities to accomplish more while being consistent with standard principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity. Intelivote's eVoting technology strives to provide universal accessibility while promoting independence and empowerment in election participation.

Internet Voting:

Persons with disabilities access Intelivote's eVoting services over the Internet.

The Intelivote system has been created ensuring it meets the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) requirements guaranteeing that persons with disabilities and older people with changing abilities due to aging can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web. Web Accessibility encompasses all disabilities that affect access to the Web to allow individuals to more actively participate in society – including the ability to vote independently in elections. The standards set in the WAI respect visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, and neurological disabilities, with the goal of providing equal access and equal opportunity. Web Accessibility also addresses 'temporary disabilities' that people may experience due to an illness or health circumstance.

Intelivote has taken measures and has been proactive in accommodating persons with disabilities facilitating their comfort with the availability of eVoting services. Intelivote's online solution is compliant with the guidelines as listed by the W3C technologies website principles which include organization, functionality and readability of information provided, as well as alternative ways of representing information (audio). Additionally, the Intelivote system has full compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

In performing regular internal auditing against WCAG-2 and Section 508 standards Intelivote ensures the application is addressing the needs of disabled participants at all times. The Voter Module is coded with XHTML transitional document type and conforms to all W3C web standards. The Module also supports and is compatible with other accessible technologies such as screen reader software.

Online voting has afforded flexibility to many disabled persons across Canada in hundreds of elections conducted by Intelivote systems.

Telephone Voting:

Persons with disabilities may access the eVoting services over the telephone.

Communication barriers can make it difficult for persons with disabilities to receive or convey information. Telephone barriers may come in the form of low volume, the use of language that is not clear or plain, and confusing or unorganized menus and menu options.

Intelivote Systems Inc has created the telephone voting service taking the following into consideration:

- The telephone eVoting service is offered on all types of touch tone phones and wireless devices including cell phones and smartphones.
- Clear natural language is used and is also offered in English or French.
- Menu options are clear and easy to follow, advising when to select options and providing confirmations of selections made.
- Standard volume is used to allow for adjustments dependent on the telephone or device.
- Users are given a generous amount of time to complete ballot activity and prompts are repeated when no action is detected.

Persons who suffer from a vision loss or vision disability including total blindness and legal blindness have the ability to use the Intelivote telephone eVoting service to cast a ballot in an election. Telephone voting has allowed many individuals the opportunity to cast a ballot remotely with little to no assistance required. The application is also capable to integrate with TTY (Teletypewriter) service for users who are deaf, Deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, or who are deafblind and do not have access to a computer.

Advantages:

Election officials who are responsible for conducting an election must have regard for the needs of electors and candidates with disabilities. Municipal and school board elections must provide the public with equal access and equal opportunity in casting a ballot. By offering electors the choice of voting electronically through the Intelivote system, election officials are providing accessibility to the disabled persons in their community.

The Intelivote system is comprised of Internet and Telephone voting capabilities. Using the Intelivote system, disabled persons are given the capability to vote from the comfort of their own home. Voting from home facilitates the voting process for disabled persons who have mobility restrictions and/or have a difficult time with transportation due to physical disabilities, whereas these barriers would otherwise be difficult or cumbersome in traditional elections.

Remote voting from any location and from more than one eVoting channel benefits disabled persons in a multitude of ways. It gives disabled persons the same independence and privacy in participating in an election as other voters; where they can vote without any assistance. If assistance is still required, most municipal offices host a local Voter Help Centre or voting assistance locations where election staff may assist in the voting process.

The Intelivote system is also intended to accommodate the older population in the community. It is recommended election staff travel to senior citizen homes to assist in the voting process to maintain the high participation rates found in the 65 years+ age range. Voter Instruction Letters belonging to electors residing in senior homes or other such facilities are arranged to be mailed directly to the election officials for handling. Seniors may choose the telephone to complete their voting, or election staff may visit the facility with kiosk wireless Internet-enabled devices as a voting choice to cast their ballot. Devices may include laptops and tablets and can include touch-screen mechanisms to assist with coordination in voting.

The Intelivote application significantly improves the accessibility of elections without adding additional costs, simultaneously positively impacting election participation.