# Joint Annual Accessibility Status Report 2023/2024

A summary of Elgin County and its Local Municipal Partners accomplishments towards inclusion and accessibility in 2023 and 2024

**Elgin County and Local Municipal Partners**
**Joint Annual Accessibility Status Report  2023 and 2024**

## Objectives and Purpose

This is the County of Elgin and its Local Municipal Partners (LMPs) Annual Accessibility Status Report update.  In 2015, Elgin County released its second Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (Ontario Regulation 191/11). The plan outlined the County's strategy to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility, which includes how to meet requirements under the AODA.

In 2021, the County released its first Joint Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (MYAP), which includes the County of Elgin and its seven Local Municipal Partners' accessibility progress, goals and timelines for the next five years. As a result of the MYAP becoming a joint effort, it allowed the Annual Accessibility Status Reports to become streamlined and collaborative rather than requiring each LMP to create their own.

This Status Report includes the accessibility initiatives that were completed in 2023 and 2024 to implement the strategy outlined in the Joint Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

The purpose of this Status Report is to make the public aware of Elgin County and its LMPs' progress with accessibility implementation and to prevent and remove barriers and meet requirements under the AODA and IASR.

## Compliance Reporting

For the 2023 report, Elgin County was able to claim compliance and continues to work on maintaining web compliance and document accessibility. Any LMPs who claimed non-compliance are working with the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility to ensure compliance is achieved.

## Commitment Statement

The County of Elgin and its LMP's statement of commitment establishes the vision and goals for the Municipalities to meet the legislated accessibility requirements. The statement of commitment is publicly available on the County website, accessibility policy and Joint MYAP.

The County of Elgin and its LMPs are committed to identifying, eliminating and preventing barriers and improving accessibility for people with disabilities in a manner that respects dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity.

The County of Elgin and its LMPs recognize the diverse needs of all of our residents and customers and will respond by striving to provide goods, services and facilities that are accessible to all.

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The County of Elgin and its LMPs are committed to being responsive to the needs of all of our residents and employees. In order to meet the needs of people with disabilities the Municipalities will:

- Ensure policies address dignity, independence, integration and provide for equal opportunity for people with disabilities
- Allow people with disabilities to use their own personal devices to obtain, use or benefit from the services offered by the County and LMPs
- Accommodate the accessibility needs of people with disabilities to ensure they can obtain, use, or benefit from the County and LMPs goods, services, programs and facilities
- Communicate with people with disabilities in a manner that is considerate of the person's disability

The County of Elgin and its LMPs will promote accessibility by ensuring that compliance is met for all regulations made under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. In order to ensure that timelines are met, The County and its LMPs will establish, implement and maintain a Joint Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. The plan will outline the County and its LMPs strategy to prevent and remove barriers to people with disabilities. The plan will be updated on an ongoing basis, as needed, to ensure it remains current and aligns with the IASR.

**Continuous Achievements in Accessibility**
- The County of Elgin and its LMPs focus on removing barriers which may exist in our buildings and facilities, while ensuring that new buildings, leases, and renovations do not create any new barriers
- Elgin County/Central Elgin Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee continues to meet and review accessibility initiatives
- The County of Elgin and its LMPs continue to comply with the requirements of the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* including continuing to train staff, volunteers and third parties who interact on behalf of the Municipalities on an ongoing basis
- All library branches continue to provide accessible materials and communication supports upon request. In addition, the libraries have several accessible materials and resources available including but not limited to: large print books, audio books, CELA Library loan access, electronic materials with zoom features, hand-held magnifiers as well as ZoomText with large print keyboards
- Continue to review customer feedback and take appropriate action
- The County of Elgin and its LMPs are continuously looking into new accommodation options for people with disabilities
- Use of technology such as eScribe to ensure that Council agendas and minutes are completely accessible as well as maintaining website compliance achieved
- Continue to explore and monitor potential funding opportunities for the built environment relating to accessibility under the Enabling Accessibility

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Fund, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Canadian Tire Jumpstart and Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program.

**Highlights of 2023 and 2024**

**The County of Elgin accomplished the following in 2023/2024:**

- o Completed the County Administration Building elevator update that includes 2 new elevators compliant with all AODA requirements that provide access to all floor levels for staff, tenants and the public
- o Completed the Terrace Lodge Redevelopment project that included designs to support accessibility requirements and likely exceeding those requirements
- o Reviewed and provided recommendations for the accessible off-street parking in the back and front parking lots at the County Administration Building to ensure it is compliant with the IASR requirements for accessible parking spaces
- o Obtained approval from Council for the Joint Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan 2024-2026
- o Redeveloped the Elgin County website (including for Library, Tourism, Economic Development, and Homes) to ensure full compliance with the WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements
- o Updated the Accessibility Policy, Emergency Response Policy, and Accommodations Policy to meet best practices
- o Plan for adoption of more accessible Library front-end catalogue software, with implementation in 2025.
- o Received approval for projects under provincial Inclusive Community Grants Program to support the creation of accessible, age-friendly outdoor leisure and reading spaces at Straffordville Library, West Lorne Library, Elgin County Heritage Centre and Terrace Lodge, as well as accessible exterior book drops at Straffordville and Dutton Libraries.
- o Launch of the library mobile service to long-term care residents and staff in Terrace Lodge and Elgin Manor.
- o Hosted a Fireside Chat with London Deputy Mayor Shawn Lewis, London's first openly gay member of city council at the Belmont Library
- o Libraries participate in the Indigenous Reads program annually and Dutton library staff led a reading in Dutton on September 30th as part of National Truth and Reconciliation Day.
- o Participation in MI Understanding and MI Friends children's mental health support programs.
- o Monthly visits and partnership with Oneida Friendship Resource Centre.
- o Preparation of booklists, collection support resources and promotional materials for inclusive activities and events such as Black History month, International Women's Day, Alzheimer Awareness month,

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National Seniors' month, Movember for Men's Health, and Pride months.

- o Chair yoga at Springfield and Belmont libraries
- o Dementia Friendly training through Alzheimer Society Southwest Partners – To all staff as part of staff development day and further training / public awareness sessions unfolding within each library branch
- o Libraries hired a student to undertake an IDEA audit of the Library's physical collection through Young Canada Works. Project entails an audit of approximately a thousand published items to determine on-going suitability for the collection. Assessment criteria includes identification of the main character(s), author, and content, as well as the use of appropriate subject headings and as reviewed against several diversity measures.
- o Development of "Healthy Brain Kits" collection to support all levels of brain health and in partnership with the Alzheimer Society Southwest Partners.
- o Refresh and repackaging of the Library's Literacy collection. The Adult collection is complete, and the Juvenile collection is expected to be completed in early 2025.
- o Continued ordering and purchasing of "Wonderbooks", Yoto Cards and Yoto Bundles, and decodable books to support children's learning to read and the joy of reading with these pedagogies.
- o Launch of mural "Oneida Settlement Journey, 1840" at Elgin County Heritage Centre, June.
- o County Council adoption of comprehensive revisions to the Museum's Collections Management Policy which formally affirms the Museum's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and Indigenous rights.
- o St George Street – enhanced 3 crosswalks to confirm to AODA incl. tactile warning plates and line painting, separated existing sidewalk from roadway with 1.5m landscape boulevard to increase public safety perception and steel beam guiderail due to public concerns regarding safety
- o East Road PXO – Awarded contract for the design and construction of a Level 2 – Type 'B' accessible crosswalk and new sidewalk to link NE Port Stanley with Downtown amenities to remove the need for a vehicle and promote active transportation

**Elgin County / Central Elgin Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (JAAC) reviewed and provided consultation on:**

- o The updates made to the Accessibility Policy, Emergency Response Policy, and Accommodations Policy

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- o The updates to the Accessibility Content Style and Design Guide and Creating Accessible Documents Guide
- o The updates made to the Town of Aylmer's Willow Run recreational trail, the Township of Malahide's reconstruction of the accessible ramp and additional parking spaces at the Municipal Building, and the Municipality of West Elgin's addition of on-street accessible parking spaces in Rodney
- o The concern regarding snow removal in parking lots
- o Recommendation made to ensure snow removed is not placed in accessible parking spaces and instead put in a non-accessible space or off-site
- o The construction project for the East Road Multi-Use Pathway in Port Stanley
- o The JAAC planned and co-hosted the AccessAbility Open House with the City of St. Thomas on September 28, 2023 at the Memorial Arena and again on June 1, 2024 at the Joe Thornton Community Centre.


**The Municipality of Bayham accomplished the following in 2023/2024:**

- o Continued making changes to the municipal website to ensure compliance with the WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements
- o Tendering and start of construction on Marine Museum accessibility upgrades
- o Design and permitting for accessible canoe/kayak launch


**The Municipality of Central Elgin accomplished the following in 2023/2024:**

- o Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (JAAC) reviewed the updated terms of reference in 2024
- o Website provides accessibility function and has an accessibility feedback form
- o Continue to promote e-transfer payment options for residence
- o Provide accommodations on job postings, providing alternative meeting spaces to accommodate candidates and alternative work arrangement to accommodate employees
- o Continue to maintain programs already established in External Pathways Recreational Trails, Play Spaces, Off-Street Parking and Rest Rooms
- o Continue to look for and advance upon funding opportunities, re-applied to the Green Infratructure Community Building Grant (GICB)
- o Conducted building conditions assessment on Municipal owed building which included an accessibility component
- o Continue to service residents and provide accommodations when requested

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- Ensures that all Council materials receive an accessibility review via Adobe Pro before publishing Agendas.
- Continues to ensure closed captioning for all live-streamed meetings.
- Provides opportunities for community members to be heard and participate in decision-making processes, such as JAAC.
- Offer car-side Commissioner of Oaths for individuals who aren't able to easily access the municipal office.
- Recognize Truth and Reconciliation Day and encourage staff to participate in educational opportunities.

**The Municipality of Dutton Dunwich accomplished the following in 2024:**

- Accessible ramp and railing and new accessible entrance doors at town hall was completed in the spring.
- Completion of a new website with a citizen portal for residents to complete municipal business 24/7.
- Reapplied to the 2023-2024 Enabling Change Program Grant (small projects component) to fund an accessible service counter.
- Implemented a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy with education for all employees.
- Working with the County to create an additional accessible parking spot at the main accessible entrance on Currie Road (County owned road).
- Accessible counters, sinks, and faucets installed in the public washroom at the Municipal Office.
- Fully accessible Service Ontario service counter completed.
- Accessible staff lunchroom and kitchen completed.
- Successfully continue to digitize our TOMRMS filing system so employees can access any files should they need to work from home if an accommodation is required.
- Accessible sidewalks/tactile plates installed on:Mary Street from McIntyre Street to Nancy Street. Partial sidewalk replacement on Leitch Street at the intersection of Mary Street.
- Partial sidewalk replacement on Marsh Line. There are no tactile plates as no intersection is involved
- 2 Baseball Diamonds have accessible benches and access to fields, including on field that had accessible bleachers

**The Town of Aylmer accomplished the following in 2023/2024:**

- Reviewed recruitment/ candidate pool generation existing and best practices to increase diversity of job applicants and new staff hired.

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- o Provided opportunities for community members to be heard and participate in decision-making processes through public engagement aimed at engaging a diverse community. The goal to improve collaboration with diverse community members and organizations in Aylmer.
- o Held Community Round Table on Old Town Hall, and 2025 Budget Process
- o Established Old Town Hall Advisory Committee to leverage stakeholder insights on increasing the facilities usage.
- o Establishment of a corporate communication policy (2021) to implement best practices, with the goal of engaging a diverse community.
- o Continued growth of the Town's social media pages, including the addition of a community event calendar to the Town's website, and an associated this weekend in Aylmer events post.
- o Encouraged opportunities for cross-training and job shadowing across the organization.
- o Continued work with community organizational stakeholders to ensure that diverse populations are able to effectively and efficiently engage with Town programs and services. Part of this includes engaging diverse communities in a meaningful way.
- o Town adopted Elgin County and the Local Municipal Partners DEI Plan, and utilized it in the process of considering applicants for the Police Services Board
- o Monitored services to ensure they are accessible, inclusive and equitably provided
- o Upgraded front service desk with tray for customers to complete paperwork, and set personal items
- o Created more opportunities to engage youth and seniors.
- o Provided opportunities to welcome newcomers to the municipality.
- o Staff now delivering all new property owners an information package on Town services
- o Staff have additionally prepared and now distribute a new business package, with a list of local supports.

**The Township of Malahide accomplished the following in 2023/2024:**

- o Reviewing and updating the Corporate Procurement Policy to include a barrier-free purchasing perspective.
- o Updated accessibility training modules onto an all-encompassing, online training platform with updated modules and accurate, automated record tracking
- o Accessible format alternatives to documents upon request

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- Staff training on creating accessible documents
- Continual review of website and social media platforms to ensure accessibility compliance.
- Update HR Policy B-4.3 Accommodating Special Needs to reflect industry best practices and IASR requirements
- Created Return to Work Process and Return to Work Plan for employees
- New engineered wood fibre placed at 4 playgrounds in the Township.
- Malahide Community Place, South Dorchester Hall, and Wonnacott Park have had materials added to enhance the existing surfaces, resulting in significant upgrades
- Removed the gravel surface at Mill Street Park and replaced it with engineered wood fibre.
- Created a Customer Service Connect, Supports & Engage portal to with fillable forms for multiple departments that customers may need assistance with.
- Continue to work with the County Accessibility monitoring potential funding opportunities for the built environment relating to accessibility under the Enabling Accessibility Fund, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Canadian Tire Jumpstart, Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program
- Accessibility AODA Online Training Module and Human Rights 101 Third Edition - all new employees and current employee complete online training.
- Customer Feedback Form - a mechanism for customers to file concerns regarding accessibility.
- Customer Service Policies - various accessible formats and supports - QR codes, website, print option, in person, by phone
- Recruitment - notice on each posting to include accessible options and accommodations.

**The Township of Southwold has accomplished the following in 2023/2024:**

- Reviewed and updated Accessibility Policy
- Implemented a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy
- Continue to digitize our TOMROMs filing system so employees can access files should they need to work from home as an accommodation due to any issues.
- Continued training on accessibility to staff to ensure compliance(ongoing)
- Continued staff training regarding WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliance
- Continue to make changes to the Township website to ensure compliance with WCAG 2.0 Level AA requirements
- Continue to make changes to Township Facebook page to ensure compliance with the WCAG2.0 Level AA requirements
- Repainted and realigned accessibility parking spaces at Township facilities, including the municipal office and Southwold Keystone Complex and Library

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- o Added extra mulch to Township playgrounds to ensure firm playing surface.
- o Purchased a new sidewalk plow to improve sidewalk and accessible walkway maintenance.
- o Applied for Trillium Capital Grant funding for accessible trail in Fingal
- o Applied for funding under the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Grant for recreational trails between the Southwold Keystone Complex and Corsley Park.
- o Installed new municipal gateway signage and village signs with reflectivity for easier wayfinding.
- o Initiated construction on a New Fire Hall which includes accessible access points and washrooms
- o Updated and adopted the Individual Accommodation policy in the Township's Personnel Policy Manual
- o Updated and adopted the Loss of License policy in the Township's Personnel Policy Manual (includes job protection & requirement for accommodation for medically related license loss)

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**Availability of the Plan and Status Report**

The Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and Annual Accessibility Status Reports can be accessed through Elgin County's website on the Accessibility Page:

https://www.elgincounty.ca/accessibility/

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**Accessible formats and/or communication support(s) are available upon request.**