

Executive Summary

The Municipality of Mississippi Mills Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020-2025 outlines the initiatives the Municipality has taken and plans to take to ensure compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*. The Plan also identifies steps taken to address the growing needs of our community.

The Municipality of Mississippi Mills is committed to ensure that persons with disabilities share the same rights, freedoms and obligations so that they may live as independently as possible and able to participate in all that the Municipality of Mississippi Mills has to offer. The annual accessibility plan represents and plays an important role in recognizing the needs of persons with disabilities that reside in Mississippi Mills.

The multi-year plan sets out strategies to identify and remove barriers to accessibility. It also positions the Municipality as a leader in accessibility matters in the community.

About Mississippi Mills

On January 1, 1998, the Corporation of the Municipality of Mississippi Mills was created by an amalgamation of the former Town of Almonte, the Township of Ramsay and the Township of Pakenham. The Municipality is a diverse community of rural and rural with a population of 13,163 covering over 500 square kilometres of land within Lanark County just west of the City of Ottawa.

Statistics Canada information indicates that 22% of Canadians aged over 15 years have one or more disabilities and the prevalence of disability increased with age, from 13% for those aged 15 to 24 years to 47% for those aged 75 years and over. Based on Mississippi Mills population and Canada's average number of individuals with an identified disability, there would be just under 3,000 residents living with a disability.

Legislation

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)

In 2005, the Ontario Government passed the AODA to benefit all Ontarians by developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards. The AODA sets out the road map for an accessible Ontario by 2025 with mandatory and enforceable standards in five key areas:

1. Customer Service
2. Information and Communications
3. Employment
4. Transportation
5. Public Spaces

The AODA also requires that municipalities prepare annual status reports on progress of measures taken to implement your accessibility plan. In addition, municipalities must also file an online report every two years that identify how the municipality is complying with AODA standards.

Ontario Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)

The ODA was established to improve the opportunities for people with disabilities. Certain sections of the ODA were rescinded in 2015 that applied to municipalities. This was done to streamline accessibility requirements across different accessibility laws and remove duplicated requirements.

Ontario Regulation 191/11 – Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)

The IASR was enacted in July 2011 and establishes accessibility standards for information and communications, employment, transportation, the design of public spaces and customer service. The requirements apply to the public, private and not for profit sectors and have compliance dates ranging from 2011 to 2021.

Mississippi Mills Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Mississippi Mills Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) advises and assists Council and staff in promoting and facilitating accessible services and facilities. This is achieved through the review of municipal policies, programs and services and the identification, removal and prevention of barriers faced by people with disabilities.

The AAC is made up of between 5 to 7 members of the public, 1 to 2 members of Council, and the Mayor is an ex-officio member.

Mississippi Mills' Plan

1. Customer Service

The Municipality of Mississippi Mills developed an Accessible Customer Service Policy in January 2010. Accessible customer service means giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access the municipality's goods and services and allow them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other people.

The Municipality of Mississippi Mills continues to:

- Provide accessible training to staff (training completion certificates are saved with the employee's personnel file)
- Ensures that anyone who provides service on behalf of the municipality has been trained on providing accessible customer service

2020-2025 Customer Service Goals

- Explore the opportunity to utilize technologies to support accessible customer service. Such as acquiring a tablet to facilitate communication for deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing visitors and non-English speaking visitors. The tablet may also be able to magnify information for people with low-vision and may be capable of accessing an on-demand sign language interpreter.
- Review the Accessible Customer Service Policy and Procedure and identify opportunities to reinforce and promote requirements that enhance accessible customer service
- Continue to identify and address potential barriers at public spaces
- Identify additional employee training in a variety of formats which may include: in-class, events, and e-learning on IARS requirements
- Accessible 2022 Election
 - Evaluation of all voting locations and methods to ensure that locations are fully accessible and provides barrier free access to voters, candidates and employees
 - Ensure that all election materials are made available in a number of accessible formats

2. Information and Communication

The Information and Communications Standard under the IASR requires that the Municipality communicates and provides information in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities.

The municipality continues to:

- Maintain accessible website and web content where possible
- Municipal staff strive to communicate in accessible formats

2020-2025 Information and Communication Goals

- Develop and/or update standards and guides for municipal employees for accessible digital, marketing and media content
- Revised municipal website to meet or exceed WCAG 2.0 Level AA
- Explore the use of accessibility tools to test the municipality's website for accessibility standards
- Provide video recording of Council and Committee of the Whole meetings
- Ensure that all print documents are accessible

3. Employment

The employment standard under the IASR sets out accessibility requirements that the municipality must follow to support the recruitment and accommodation of employees. This includes preparing individualized emergency response information for persons with disabilities and making employment practices and workplaces more accessible for new and existing employees with disabilities.

The municipality continues to:

- Notify applicants about the availability of accessibility accommodations in the recruitment process
- Advise successful candidates about the availability of accommodations for employees with disabilities

2020-2025 Employment Goals

- Continue to review human resource policies to prevent or remove barriers, ensure they are compliant with legislation and reflect best practices

4. Transportation

Most of the requirements of the Transportation Standard relate to the operation of public transportation systems. The Municipality of Mississippi Mills does licence taxis within the municipality but does not own or operate any transportation system.

2020-2025 Transportation Goals

- Explore partnerships with local organizations that are able to provide accessible transportation.
- Promote any accessible transportation services available in the Municipality

5. Public Spaces

The Design of Public Spaces Standard under the IASR requires that the Municipality to ensure that newly-constructed or significantly renovated public spaces are accessible.

The municipality also complies with the Ontario Building Code's requirements for accessibility in the built environment.

The municipality continues to:

- Conduct annual identification of barriers at all municipally-owned facilities
- Consultation with the AAC on all new designs for public spaces

2020-2025 public space goals:

- Continue to prioritize accessibility in newly designed and significantly renovated public spaces
- Explore community engagement opportunities during the project design phase
- Enhance pedestrian safety
- Incorporate accessible features with the Almonte Downtown Revitalization project

Accessibility Moving Forward

The Municipality must comply with the statutory requirements identified in the AODA; however, the municipality is committed to identifying and enacting on barrier-reducing initiatives to approve accessibility in the municipality.

Barrier reducing initiatives endorsed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee include:

- Conducting an accessibility survey to garner feedback from the community to identify barrier reducing opportunities
- Work with community partners in the community and county to promote accessibility opportunities
- Annual accessibility recognition or Celebrating Accessibility Awards
- Create an annual accessibility fund that would identify barrier-reducing improvements to municipal assets such as buildings, recreation facilities or outdoor spaces.