



The Corporation of the Village of Merrickville-Wolford

Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

2025-2029

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Executive Summary

The Village of Merrickville-Wolford's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2025-2029 outlines the initiatives and provides a guideline on how the Municipality is committed to accessibility.

In 2005, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) was passed to recognize the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario and provides for the development, implementation, and enforcement of mandatory standards for accessibility in all areas of daily life. It aims to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities, and applies to all levels of government, nonprofits, and private sector businesses in Ontario that have one or more employees.

The AODA is made up of five standards, as well as some general requirements, which covers Customer Service, Information and Communication, Employment, Transportation and the Design of Public Spaces. These AODA standards are part of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR).

One of the requirements of the IASR is to develop, implement, and maintain a multi-year accessibility plan to outline strategies to prevent and remove barriers within the Municipality and meet the requirements of the IASR. The Multi-Year Plan is to be updated at least once every five (5) years and be made publicly available on the website. It also includes a statement of commitment, which is also to be made publicly available.

The Multi-Year Plan sets out strategies to identify and remove barriers to accessibility. The 2025-2029 Plan will continue to build on the previous 2022-2025 Plan, which served as a guideline to remove accessibility barriers within the community. The Village of Merrickville-Wolford will continue to remove barriers, improve access, and ensure that accessibility considerations are made in daily operations and future planning.

Statement of Commitment

The Village of Merrickville-Wolford is committed to complying with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) and all of its standards under it to work towards creating a barrier-free community. The Municipality strives to provide services and facilities that are accessible, and to continuously improve access to facilities and services for people with disabilities.

The Municipality is committed to working towards creating a barrier-free, accessible environment for all who call Merrickville-Wolford home, or for those who come to visit and experience all this community has to offer. This Multi-Year Plan will provide a road map on how the accessibility standards will continue to be monitored and achieved. The Municipality will actively seek out funding opportunities to apply for in order to improve accessibility within the community, as well as allocate funds through annual budgets to work on identified projects as set out within the Plan. Between 2025-2029, the identified projects are all targeted to be completed, with required budgets being considered on an annual basis.

Past Accessibility-Related Accomplishments

In 2022, the Village of Merrickville-Wolford established its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, outlining the achievements of the Municipality and the identified goals and priorities for future accessible planning.

Some of the accomplishments since this time include:

- Implementation of ESCRIBE agenda software for the distribution and publishing of Council agenda packages.
- Design and creation of a new municipal website that meets the online accessibility requirements. This was an identified priority within the 2022-2025 Multi-Year Plan that was achieved.
- Installation of accessible door openers at Eastons Corners Centennial Hall main door and bathroom, Council Chambers at the Municipal Office, Merrickville Community Centre main doors and bathroom, and the Merrickville Rink Building.
- Continuation of accessibility training for onboarding of new employees.
- Continuous search for, and applications of, various grant funding opportunities for accessibility-related projects.

Accessibility Moving Forward

1. Customer Service

The Customer Service Standard mandates that service providers must find ways to break down barriers that prevent customers with disabilities from accessing the services that they need. Barriers may be due to physical obstacles, technology, information and communication, an organization's practices or procedures, or attitudes of staff.

The Municipality:

- Implemented a formal Complaint Policy (2024) to strive towards providing more efficient customer service and response to resident concerns.
- Implemented a concern submission form on the new municipal website.
- Continues to review customer feedback when received.
- Ensures that staff provides accessible customer service however possible.
- The recently approved Personnel Policy and Employee Guide includes the form HR-15D, being the "AODA Best Practice and Procedures" which addresses the procedures to follow and consider when serving residents or customers with disabilities.

Goals for 2025-2029:

- Continue to identify and address potential customer service barriers.
- Consider **Commit to** improving the onboarding and continuous accessibility training for employees to ensure customer service needs are being met **by reviewing the onboarding materials within the 2025-2026 timeframe. If updates are required, staff will work to update the materials and make it available.**
- 2026 Election considerations:
 - Evaluation of all voting locations and methods to ensure that locations and voting methods are accessible to provide barrier-free forms of access to voters.
 - Ensure that election materials satisfy accessibility requirements.

2. Information and Communication

The Information and Communications Standards lists the rules for organizations to create, provide, and receive information and communications that people with disabilities can access. This standard under the IASR requires that the Municipality communicates and provides information in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities.

The Municipality:

- Strives to ensure that the process of receiving and responding to feedback is accessible. Various forms are offered in online submission forms on the website, in fillable PDF format, or in hard copy format available at the Municipal Office.
- Implemented an e-agenda software system, Escribe, which produces fully accessibility-compliant content including agendas and minutes.
- Livestreams all Council meetings to provide individuals with the opportunity to watch meeting proceedings rather than attend in person.
- Conduct Council meetings in a hybrid format to allow for meeting participants to attend virtually as opposed to in person, if required.
- Livestream recordings of all meetings are made available on the Village of Merrickville-Wolford YouTube Channel.
- Designed and created a new municipal website (2024), which satisfies all accessibility standards and requirements. **The website has the Accessibe toolbox implemented on it, which ensures that the site is accessibly compliant. A blue accessibility icon can be found on the left-hand side of the website which can be used to tailor to various features and many of the accessibility features will load automatically under certain circumstances (ie. blind visitor with a screen reader). The accessible plugin constantly monitors the site for accessibility and fixes problems whenever possible. Accessibility audit reports are generated monthly.**

- Increased its use of Facebook as a social media platform and a means to access a broader demographic of residents to provide information.

Goals for 2025-2029:

- Continue to update municipal forms to ensure they are accessible for residents to use. Staff will continuously review and update all forms effective immediately for the remainder of 2025 and into 2026.
- Continue to live stream meetings and use the e-agenda software for Council agenda preparation and distribution.
- Continue using social media as a means of providing municipal information and explore alternative platforms that would be beneficial for residents.
- The Accessibility page, including the Statement of Commitment, is included on the website already, but this will be updated with the new Multi-Year Plan after its final approval. Anytime a public document is posted on the website (ie. Asset Management Plan for the Village, Planning documents, etc.), it can be indicated specifically that if an alternative format is required then a staff contact will be provided to accommodate these requests.
- Staff can undertake a plain language review of the Village website. This will take time to research how this is conducted and to complete the review, so the targeted timeline is for 2026-2027.
- Merrickville-Wolford has a population of less than 10,000 people, so therefore in accordance with Section 29(1) of the AODA, it is not mandatory to have a municipal Accessibility Committee. It is important though to receive feedback and support from those with lived experience and getting assistance in achieving implementable goals, so the Municipality will approach the Merrickville Lions Club Accessibility Committee following the approval of this Plan and inquire about partnering on accessibility initiatives, reviews of accessibility goals, and receiving assistance on implementation (such as installation of actuators on doors and confirming that they are installed correctly, for example).

3. Employment

The Employment Standard sets out accessibility requirements that the Municipality must follow to support the recruitment and accommodation of employees. This Standard requires that employers must make their workplace and employment practices accessible to potential or current employees with disabilities.

The Municipality:

- Informs applicants about the availability of accessibility accommodations in the recruitment process and identifies as an equal opportunity employer.
- Provides onboarding training for new employees.
- Supports employees absent from work because of a short or long-term disability.
- Documents individual accommodation plans.

Goals for 2025-2029:

- Continue to review policies to prevent or remove barriers, ensuring that they are compliant with legislation.
- Improve communication with incoming or potential new employees about the accessibility accommodation practices.
- Ensure that documentation of individual employee accommodation plans are filed.
- Improve communication with employees about the accessibility accommodations that available if they are required.
- Effective immediately, mandate that the HR form 15D is included as part of onboarding for new employees in accordance with the Personnel Policy and Employee Guide.
- Before the end of 2025, staff will reach out to surrounding municipalities to find out what onboarding accessibility training they are currently using for their employees. A review can be conducted to determine what can be further implemented for Merrickville-Wolford based on the responses received.

4. Transportation

The Transportation Standard requires transportation service providers to make the features and equipment on routes and vehicles accessible to passengers with disabilities. Most of the requirements of the Transportation Standard relate to the operation of public transportation service systems. The Municipality does not currently own or operate any transportation system.

Goals for 2025-2029:

- Continued maintenance and improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks.
- Ensure that accessibility requirements are adhered to with any rehabilitation of current infrastructure or installation of new infrastructure.
- Explore partnerships with surrounding municipalities for public transportation options.
- Promote any accessible transportation services that may be available for the public within the Municipality or surrounding municipalities.

5. Design of Public Spaces

The Design of Public Spaces Standard outlines the need for newly constructed or redeveloped public spaces to be accessible for people with disabilities. This Standard describes ways to make communal spaces and buildings more accessible.

The Municipality:

- Installed various accessible power door openers at the municipal facilities.
- Schedules regular maintenance on the lift elevator at the Municipal Office to ensure it is in working order.
- Has applied for accessibility grant funding opportunities to improve access to municipal facilities.

Goals for 2025-2029:

- Install an accessibility ramp at the Municipal Landfill Site.
- ~~Explore~~ **Commit to identifying** options of enhancing the municipal recreation amenities to increase accessibility for more residents. This will include researching amenities that could be implemented in the Municipality. **Staff will seek out recreation funding opportunities on an annual basis to identify opportunities that could be applied for. This will be a good opportunity for the Municipality to also seek and maintain partnerships with local groups and businesses to work in a joint effort to update recreation amenities between 2026 and 2029. A staggered plan on this would be continuous updates to Council for public awareness.**
- Regular and continued maintenance of lift elevator at the Municipal Office.
- Regular maintenance of accessible power doors at municipal facilities.
- **More clearly identifying the accessible parking space and ramp at the Municipal Office can be undertaken by Public Works staff with minimal costs with line painting and symbols.**
- **Dependent upon budget constraints, staff can include a new actuator for the front door of the Municipal Office on the list of outstanding upgrades to be completed, as well as updates to the reception area. This would need to be approved by Council, and specific details for height, interior work, drawings, etc. would assist with the work.**
- **Public Works staff will evaluate the work that is suggested for accessible parking spaces and proper curb access in the downtown core. This will have to be part of a long-term goal with an overall Master Plan on how to undertake the required projects, but staff will ensure this is included within considerations. Short-term solutions for accessible parking spaces may be identified in a review of the Village's Parking By-law within the 2025-2026 timeline.**

- A pedestrian crosswalk with audible indication of status is more of a significant undertaking. This would be possible subject to budget approval, so this could be a project to undertake with local partnerships or through grant funding opportunities prior to the next review of this Plan before 2029.

Contact Information

Municipality:

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Please contact the Clerk to request an alternative format that meets your needs.

Your feedback is welcome. Please let the Municipality know what you think about the 2025-2029 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan by emailing the Clerk.