



The Regional Municipality of Durham 2020 Accessibility Report



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Message from the Regional Chair and CAO



Dear Friends,

2020 was unlike any year most of us have experienced. Our patterns of learning, working, and socializing shifted dramatically to digital connections in a matter of weeks, or even days.

Durham's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) meetings were held virtually, taking the needs of all members into account. While we worked to find ways to ensure all could participate, there were challenges with internet connections, and access to computers and devices that caused significant barriers to digital participation. The pandemic has highlighted inequalities in access to the technology required to participate in the virtual world.

In March, Roberta Atkinson who had been with the AAC since its inception, resigned due to health reasons. We sincerely thank Roberta for her passion and pragmatic advice. She was recognized for her long service with an Accessibility Award in 2020.

In past years, our Accessibility Awards presentation was part of our Annual Joint AAC Forum. In 2020, we knew our annual gathering of AAC members from around the region to learn, network and celebrate accessibility would not be possible due to the pandemic. Instead, we launched an awards road show featuring a video to highlight accessibility achievements in different parts of the Region. It was wonderful to see the difference these champions had made in the community and celebrate them from a safe social distance.



The pandemic has taught us many lessons, including the need for better access to information, programs, and services. We must continue to ask people how they want to receive information and then make it accessible in many ways, through multiple channels. This is at the heart of our myDurham 311 customer-centric innovation. Through the past year, many departments have stepped up to provide timely, detailed, and trustworthy information and supports to the public and our business community.

The Region has continued to make accessibility improvements at its facilities in anticipation of re-opening to the public. For example, touchless door openers were installed at Regional Headquarters to replace the classic push button openers. COVID-19 required us to change the way we deliver services far more rapidly than we ever thought possible, from online appointments and virtual court appearances, to acceptance of electronic documents and payments. Many of these changes to remote service improve accessibility for people with disabilities. It shows that accessibility is achievable when we make it a priority, and that everyone benefits.

The pandemic also highlighted systemic biases in our economic and social systems. People with disabilities know from lived experience that discriminatory attitudes and barriers embedded in our society and economy are the most difficult to change and require the most attention. We have recently created a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion office. This office will work in partnership with the community and those members who are living with disabilities to examine Regional strategies, programs, and approaches to check for bias, discrimination, and disparities in access. While we recognize progress achieved to improve accessibility over the past year in these extraordinary times, the work is far from complete. Please join us in the ongoing journey toward accessibility and inclusion for all.

John Henry

Regional Chair and Chief Executive Officer

Elaine Baxter-Trahair

Chief Administrative Officer



Message from the Chair, Durham Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)



2020 has been an unprecedented year, and the effects of COVID-19 have had a significant impact on our lives, our communities, organizations, and workplaces.

We've all had to adapt and find new ways of working, learning, connecting, and supporting one another, all while balancing public health protocols. We've all had to be flexible.

Flexibility and adaptability are also foundational principles critical to accessibility and accommodating the diverse needs of people with disabilities. There are many examples within our community of adapting services to better support our citizens with disabilities during this pandemic, from accessible face masks, priority entrance and hours at stores, to improving websites to make them more accessible.

We are committed to continuing to make accessibility a priority within Durham Region and build a safe, inclusive, and barrier-free community where everyone can thrive.

Carla Boose

Chair, Durham Accessibility Advisory Committee

Durham Region 2020 Accessibility Report

Durham Region believes in building communities where every person can fully participate.

The Regional Municipality of Durham 2020 Accessibility Report is our annual update on the implementation of standards and timelines outlined in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) and the 2016-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

Creating welcoming and inclusive communities where every person who lives, works, and plays, can fully participate makes good sense for all of us. This philosophy is supported in our 2020-2024

Strategic Plan aligning with Goal 2: Community Vitality – Build a healthy, inclusive, age-friendly community where everyone feels a sense of belonging. The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and our Age-Friendly Durham Strategy and Action Plan speak to the needs of our community and how we can achieve that.

To review the Regional Municipality of Durham 2016-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and previous Accessibility Reports, please visit durham.ca/accessibilityreports.

Statement of organizational commitment

The Region of Durham is committed to ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities throughout its goods, services, employment, and facilities, as outlined in the Accessibility Policy.

Accessibility shall be addressed in a manner that:

- Upholds the principles of dignity and independence
- Strives to provide integrated services
- Provides equal opportunity.



The Regional Municipality of Durham
2016-2021 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan



Accessibility Awards

The Region of Durham's Accessibility Awards allow the organization to celebrate the importance of accessibility. They honour community leadership in breaking down barriers by acknowledging individuals, services and/or businesses that have demonstrated a commitment to accessibility.

Nominations for these awards are made by the Accessibility Advisory Committees of municipalities within Durham Region. Thanks to these committees and the various community partners who recommend and support the nominations.



2020 Award Recipients



Town of Ajax
Abiraa Karalasingam



City of Oshawa
Linda Tamburro
(posthumously)



Township of Brock
Fisher's Your
Independent Grocer



City of Pickering
Don Terry



Municipality of Clarington
Foodland Newcastle



Township of Uxbridge
Brandon Bird



Region of Durham
Roberta Atkinson



Town of Whitby
Sheridan Nurseries

Region of Durham 2020 Highlights

Health and Wellness

Health and Wellness staff in the Corporate Services department continued to support Regional employees through wellness initiatives.

This includes sessions on COVID-19 concerns and coping skills, which were facilitated by Family Services staff; Bell Let's Talk speakers, who raised awareness about mental health to help break the stigma; and sessions on work/life balance, working from home, and more. These sessions aligned with the demands of 2020 and were offered to help support staff during this challenging year.

One session was facilitated by Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe, a multi-award-winning psychology and education instructor who specializes in resiliency, navigating stress and change, leadership, and personal wellness in the workplace. Her keynotes provide practical strategies grounded in global research and case studies that help foster resiliency within others and ourselves.

In the session to staff, Dr. Hanley-Dafoe explored the world of emotions and how they relate to our behaviour, mood, and perspective, along with discussing the research-informed practices of mindfulness and self-regulation.



Long-Term Care

2020 was the year of virtual connection at Regional long-term care homes.

Long-term care staff quickly recognized how important it was for residents to have access to family, friends, and volunteers when physical visits were not possible. Eight online accounts were purchased to offer unlimited times for visits and events. Recreation staff and Resident Care Aides created schedules for families to connect weekly, bi-weekly and, in some cases, daily with residents. These virtual visits have been a key support to resident well-being and family peace of mind during a very distressing time.



“

“I enjoy seeing my children on Facetime—they live far away and that’s the only way I get to see them. The staff are doing their job connecting me to family.”



“I think the Zoom calls are going well; otherwise, I wouldn’t get to see my grandchildren, children, and their spouses. My nephew and his wife are always there, and the family have fun and are happy together. I am really happy with the calls.”

”

Feedback from residents and families

Residents have told us that they appreciate the virtual calls and feel reassured when they see their family members: “I get to see my family is healthy.”

Family members have commented that:

“Our Zoom calls with our mother/grandma have helped to provide support and reassure us that she is doing okay in spite of this pandemic. Our experience with Hillsdale has been nothing but positive, the genuine care and empathy from the team has been amazing.”

“Through the dedication and caring of the staff at Hillsdale, I have been afforded the opportunity to be virtually connected and present with my mother. Although conversations with my mother are impossible, I can bring her joy and express my feelings through song three times a week. My greatest satisfaction comes from knowing that she is present and connected to me during these sessions. Love can be expressed through this wonderful technology.”

“My brother and I would like to thank you and express how much it meant to us to be able to have Zoom time with our mom during this past year. Our Mom has dementia, but we still enjoy sharing time with her and speaking to her about the important people and events in her life so far.”

“The Zoom time is still helping us through these challenging times when we miss our loved ones. To be able to tell her ‘we love you’ and ‘we miss you’ means the world to us. With our humble appreciation and much thanks to those who set up this whole system of communication for us, we say thank you from our heart.”

“The staff and Zoom calls have been amazing, caring, and a great avenue in making a difference for family.”

New e-commerce payment option for garbage bag tags

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Region is modernizing how services are delivered to residents during this unprecedented time. This includes a new e-commerce payment option for garbage bag tags.

This is the Region's first e-commerce payment option, which means payment can be completed directly through durham.ca with a credit card or credit-enabled debit card — without the need to add the Region as a payee with an affiliated bank.

Residents can fill out an online order form, make a credit card or debit payment and submit their order. The Region will then mail the garbage tags to their home.

This new online transaction is a contactless way for residents to purchase garbage bag tags, which helps prevent the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring physical distancing and avoiding cash handling.



Primary Care Outreach Program

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Primary Care Outreach Program (PCOP) has continued to support clients who are experiencing homelessness or are at-risk of being unsheltered. We continue to meet clients where they are (i.e., tents, street locations, and the Durham Region Isolation and Recovery Program) to provide engagement, mental health, substance misuse and medical assessment, and service navigation. Through the Oshawa inner-city Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic, we are providing virtual connection via cell phone or email link to physicians, a nurse practitioner, and nursing and withdrawal management. This team brings the medical professionals virtually to the clients. Additionally, they support clients connecting to Ontario Works/ Ontario Disability Support Program and housing supports, as needed.



Police Services

Reporting and services continued during the pandemic, as requests for police record checks, freedom of information access, and incident and accident reports were made available online.



Planning and Economic Development department

The Durham Adaptive Sport Collective was formed as a legacy of hosting the Durham Region 2019 Ontario Parasport Games. The objective is to grow adaptive sport opportunities and participation in Durham Region.

For 18 years, the Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee (DAAC) hosted an annual farm tour to demonstrate the importance of the agricultural sector in Durham Region. Since the tour could not take place in-person this year, due to the pandemic, the committee organized a virtual tour and doubled the average participation rate, which allowed people of all abilities to participate.



Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 Compliance Timelines

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, organizations must meet requirements in: information and communications, employment, transportation, design of public spaces and customer service.

2010-2017 Requirements Completed

- Provide accessible customer service
- Provide accessible transportation services
- Provide emergency and public safety information in accessible formats
- Provide employees with accessible and customized emergency information
- Create accessibility policies and a multi-year plan
- Buy accessible goods, services or facilities
- Make new websites accessible
- Train employees on Ontario's accessibility laws
- Make it easy to provide feedback, when asked
- Make employment practices accessible
- Make public information accessible, when asked
- Make new or redeveloped public spaces accessible

2018-2020

No new requirements

Future Requirements 2021

Websites must conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Level 2.0 AA

WCAG - an international standard for making websites and web content accessible to a broader range of users with disabilities.

Continuous improvements throughout the organization

Internal

- New e-Forms have replaced the legacy portable document format (pdf) on durham.ca, which has improved accessibility for the public.
- A third-party accessibility consultant completed an accessibility audit on all corporate websites. From the findings, staff are working towards making improvements.
- Staff received tools and equipment to telework in order to provide services to the public.
- Accessibility was incorporated into online processes for Health Services to ensure the public could easily access the information they needed during the pandemic.
- Endorsement by Regional Council to implement the myDurham 311 project throughout 2020 to 2023. This project will modernize the way in which the Region engages with clients, combining public-facing services and customer service strategy into one enterprise program, and incorporating accessibility along the way.
- Accessible templates continue to be created based on department/division needs.
- Training sessions are held virtually for staff who are responsible for posting information on durham.ca.
- Corporate Communications staff worked with Information Technology and the Accessibility team to improve the readability and navigation of content on durham.ca and the internal website.
- Accessibility awareness training sessions are planned throughout the organization and are now held virtually.

External

- Critical content, that incorporated accessibility, was posted on the Region's Health department pages on durham.ca to communicate current COVID-19 information.
- Durham Region Transit Specialized Services has adopted an enhanced personal protective equipment (PPE) protocol, which consists of always wearing medical grade gloves and masks, and – during the loading process – Operators are required to wear a face shield.
- Vehicle capacity in Specialized Services vehicles has been reduced to a maximum of four customers per trip until further notice.
- Live streaming of additional Regional Committees and Board meetings gave the public the opportunity to view meetings.
- Family Services had a seamless transition to virtual counselling services.
- Classic “push” button door openers were replaced with touchless openers in high public access areas at Regional Headquarters.
- Significant modifications were made to the south entrance accessible parking area at Regional Headquarters. This included leveling and reconfiguring this area, and adding another parking space.





Contact Information

We welcome your feedback. Please let us know what you think about the Regional Municipality of Durham 2020 Accessibility Report.

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