



# Accessibility Plan

The District Municipality of Muskoka's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

2023-2025

Approved by Accessibility Advisory Committee: October 5, 2022

Ratified by Council: October 17, 2022

Resolution: P121/2022

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Amy Back, District Clerk  
705-645-2100 Ext. 4253  
clerk@muskoka.on.ca

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## **Municipality Participating In This Plan**

### **Municipality**

This plan has been prepared for The District Municipality of Muskoka.

### **Address**

70 Pine St.  
Bracebridge, ON P1L 1N3  
<http://www.muskoka.on.ca>

### **Key Contact**

Amy Back, District Clerk  
(705) 645-2100 Ext. 4239 – Phone  
(705) 645-5319 – Fax  
[clerk@muskoka.on.ca](mailto:clerk@muskoka.on.ca)

### **Population**

66,674 Permanent Residents  
84,400 Seasonal Residents

## **Municipal Highlights – The District Municipality of Muskoka’s History**

The District Municipality of Muskoka (District) was established by Provincial legislation and commenced operations on October 19, 1970. It covers an area of approximately 4,800 square kilometers, containing over 650 lakes. Due to this, Muskoka has been Ontario’s premiere summer vacation destination for many years and is known affectionately as “Cottage Country”. Every summer, Muskoka’s population more than doubles with the influx of cottagers, then recedes again when the seasons begin to change into fall and winter.

Muskoka is governed by a two-tier municipal system. The District forms the upper-tier, working closely with six lower-tier municipalities; Town of Bracebridge, Town of Huntsville, Town of Gravenhurst, Township of Muskoka Lakes, Township of Georgian Bay, and Township of Lake of Bays, who make up the lower-tier. Both levels collaborate and align services to achieve cost efficiencies and best serve residents and visitors to Muskoka.

## Organization of The District Municipality of Muskoka

The District is organized into six main departments, each reporting to the Chief Administrative Officer.

- Administration
- Community and Planning Services
- Engineering and Public Works
- Finance and Corporate Services
- Health Services
- Legislative Services

These departments administer the programs and services assigned by District Council, in accordance with the relevant statutes, regulations and corporate policies.

### **Administration**

The Administration department provides a link between all departments and District Council to support and facilitate the execution of Council decisions - working collaboratively with lower-tier municipalities.

The District's Administration Department reports mainly through the Finance and Corporate Services Committee. This committee sets direction and oversees the functions of the department's corporate responsibilities. The Administration department is organized into service divisions:

- **Chief Administrative Officer:** Provides advice to District Council and leadership to senior staff and Corporate Communications; ensures that policies and direction of Council are implemented efficiently and effectively; Chair of the District Strategic Leadership Team (DSLTT) which includes all department Commissioners, District Solicitor, and Director of Human Resources.
- **Human Resources:** Recruitment; employee and labour relations; health, wellness and safety; talent management and development; compensation and benefits - job evaluations and policy development and implementation.
- **Muskoka Airport:** Operates safe and efficient air transportation facilities that serve the needs of Muskoka residents, businesses and tourists and is governed by an Airport Board that reports to District Council.
- **Communications:** Develops and implements a comprehensive communication strategy in order to provide maximum impact for internal District staff, as well as residents (year-round and seasonal) and visitors to Muskoka.
- **Continuous Improvement Unit (CIU):** Facilitates completion of projects identified from service and operational reviews in order to improve efficiencies and effectiveness of programs and service delivery. The CIU responds to the emerging needs of District Council and provides development opportunities as part of corporate talent management.

## Community and Planning Services

The District's Community and Planning Services department (CAPS) is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all residents in Muskoka by addressing the holistic needs of our communities. The CAPS department works collaboratively with the lower-tier municipalities and community partners on matters related to community growth and development, while working to protect our environment, deliver programs and services to our most vulnerable populations and to promote thriving, caring communities that are based on inclusion, hope and opportunity.

The District's Community and Planning Services sets direction and oversees the functions of the department's corporate responsibilities. The department is organized into service divisions:

- Assistance – Financial and Life Stabilization Support: Addictions and Mental Health Support, Financial Supports (Ontario Works), Life Stabilization (Ontario Works), Community Office locations, Income Tax Clinics, etc.
- Children's Services: Child Care Fee Subsidy, Funding and Other Services for Children and Youth, Licensed Child Care, Muskoka Best Start Network, Muskoka Child Care Advisory Group, Muskoka Home Child Care Agency, Quality Child Care in Muskoka, Wage Enhancement for Early Childhood Educators, EarlyON programming and Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care System.
- Community Programs: Food Security Programs, Pay it Forward and Community Enhancement Grant Program, and the Community Service Recognition Program.
- Community Transportation: Corridor 11 Bus, Rural and Community Connection, and the Specialized Transportation Fund.
- Housing: Social Housing, Affordable Home Ownership Programs, Below Market Rent Units, Rent Assistance Programs, Capital Incentives for Developments and Builders, Funding for Home Repairs, Muskoka Affordable Housing Incentives Program, Muskoka Housing Task Force, Homelessness Prevention Program; Seniors Affordable Housing and Muskoka Homelessness Sharing Table.
- Planning and Service Coordination Tables: The District coordinates and/or participates in a number of regional planning and services coordination tables. The focus area of each table is unique, but all share common objectives to better align human and health services in Muskoka to ensure that we meet the needs of our most vulnerable community members.
- Planning: The District is responsible for a range of planning functions including the drafting of The Muskoka Official Plan, other Policy reviews and special projects, development reviews and approvals, and economic development.
- Environment, Watershed and Geomatics Integrated Watershed Management Initiatives; monitoring recreational water quality and supporting related community stewardship programs; implementing climate actions; providing support to the Muskoka Watershed Council and other community organizations; developing and delivering geographic information systems (GIS) tools to engage the community and support programs.

## **Engineering and Public Works**

The District's Engineering and Public Works Department is responsible for maintenance and oversight of all municipal water and wastewater systems and waste management programs in Muskoka, as well as maintenance of all District roads - working collaboratively with lower-tier municipalities.

The District's Engineering and Public Works Committee sets direction and oversees the functions of the department's corporate responsibilities. The department is organized into service divisions:

- **Engineering:** Provides design support for roads and bridges and water and wastewater capital projects, construction supervision and contract administration; operation and maintenance of Port Carling Locks and James Bartleman Island Park.
- **Roads and Transportation:** Maintenance and construction of District roads, bridges and culverts; load restrictions; road permits; traffic signals and pedestrian crosswalks; active transportation; signage (regulatory, warning and informational); access permitting; line painting; traffic survey; and the winter maintenance program.
- **Solid Waste Management:** Collection, diversion and disposal of solid waste; landfill and transfer stations; and development adjacent to landfill sites.
- **Water and Wastewater:** Treatment and distribution of potable water, ensuring appropriate collection and treatment of wastewater and operation and maintenance of hauled sewage treatment facilities for disposal of septage.

## **Finance and Corporate Services**

The Finance and Corporate Services department advises and supports District Council, Committees and all departments - working collaboratively with lower-tier municipalities.

The District's Finance and Corporate Services Committee sets direction and oversees the functions of the department's corporate responsibilities. The department is organized into service divisions:

- **Financial Services:** Corporate account and financial recording; corporate cash management; and billing and collection systems.
- **Budgets and Financial Planning:** Budget preparation; fiscal policy, business case and impact analysis; long-term fiscal plan monitoring; and procurement initiatives.
- **Fleet Services:** Centralized management of business case analysis, procurement, policy development, and operations and maintenance.
- **Information Technology Services:** Provide modern, stable and secure computing; provide support for business application delivery as well as maintenance and

hardware devices; and a shared services provider to two lower-tier municipalities and the corresponding Public Libraries.

- **Facilities Services:** Service, maintenance, operations and repairs on corporate facilities; capital planning and project management related to facilities; facility technical audits and condition; and energy management.
- **Accessibility:** The continual improvement of access to all municipally owned facilities; premises and services for all those living with disabilities; delivering excellent and accessible customer services and programs to all residents and visitors; providing a supportive working environment for District staff; the participation of persons living with disabilities in the development and review of the annual Accessibility Plan; and providing equal access to all.
- **Police Services:** Police services in Muskoka are provided and fully managed by the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) on a fee-for-service basis. Police services are a financial responsibility of the District, funded through property tax revenue.

## **Health Services**

The Health Services Department is responsible for Long-Term Care Services, Community and Emergency Planning, Paramedic Services, Community Paramedicine, and Health Planning Services.

The District's Health Services Committee sets direction and oversees the functions of the department's corporate responsibilities. The department is organized into service divisions.

- **Long-Term Care Services:** The Pines Long-Term Care Home in Bracebridge and Fairvern in Huntsville.
- **Seniors Programs and Services:** Seniors Healthy Aging Promotions, Links2Wellbeing, Fitness Programs, Happy Day Fairs, Seniors Intergenerational Program, Seniors Services Planning Table, and Seniors Mobile Active Living Centre Programs.
- **Paramedic Services:** Includes emergency response and non-emergency medical transportation services.
- **Community Paramedicine:** Services designed to support residents in their homes and improve quality of life by addressing gaps in resident healthcare needs.
- **Health Planning Services:** To deliver and initiate community-based services that support the health and well-being of residents through Muskoka Health Link, Public Health, Hospital Funding and Long-Term Care Redevelopment. The District is a signing member of the Muskoka and Area Ontario Health team (MAOHT) that seeks to improve the overall health and well-being of the community in the long-term while addressing shorter term issues including coordination of care for priority populations, access to care and transitions between care settings.

## **Legislative Services**

The Legislative Services Department is responsible for the office of the District Clerk, legal services to all departments and the Provincial Offences Office.

The department is organized into service divisions:

- District Clerk: Custodian of all corporate records including minutes, by-laws and reports; provides administrative, procedural and clerical support to District Council, its Standing Committees and various other Ad Hoc Committees; responsible for Freedom of Information requests.
- Legal Services: Legal services to all departments related to general municipal law and by-laws; contracts, leases and agreements; planning and development; aviation matters related to Muskoka Airport; transactional real estate matters; litigation before Courts and Tribunals (Ontario Land Tribunal, Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, etc.); and provincial offences prosecution service.
- Provincial Offences Office: Administration and Court Services for the Ontario Court of Justice within the District pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Province.

## **Services Not Delivered by The District Municipality of Muskoka**

As the District is a two-tiered municipality, there are some services that are delivered jointly by the two tiers and some that are delivered solely by either the upper or lower tier. The lower tiers are solely responsible for:

- Fire Services
- Community Centres and Libraries
- Heritage Arts and Culture
- Recreation Programs and related Facilities

As required under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (the Act), the lower tiers will prepare their own Accessibility Plans addressing their services.

## **The District Municipality of Muskoka's Response to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005**

Per the Act, all municipalities with a population greater than 10,000 must have an Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) to provide advice and consultation on accessibility matters to staff and their respective Councils. In October 2002, Muskoka District Council first adopted by By-law 2002-62 which was repealed and replaced by 2006-97 (a by-law to continue the Accessibility Advisory Committee).

On June 13, 2005, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA 2005) received Royal Assent. The AODA's Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) came into effect in 2013 and sets requirements in

the areas of: Customer Service, Information and Communication, Employment, Transportation and Public Spaces. The IASR requires provincial and municipal governments to work with the community and the private and public sectors to work towards ensuring that Ontario is fully accessible by 2025. The District is committed to accessibility and the tenets of the Act. With the help of the District's Accessibility Advisory Committee, the District is actively working to remove barriers to persons with disabilities.

## **The District Municipality of Muskoka Accessibility Advisory Committee**

### **Accessibility Advisory Committee Mandate**

The goal of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (the Committee) is to champion issues related to the provision of an accessible community on behalf of all of Muskoka's citizens.

### **Message on Behalf of The District Municipality of Muskoka's Accessibility Advisory Committee**

The District Municipality of Muskoka is committed to:

- The continual improvement of access to all municipally owned facilities, premises and services for all those living with disabilities;
- Delivering excellent and accessible customer services and programs to all residents and visitors;
- Providing a supportive working environment for its staff;
- The participation of persons living with disabilities in the development and review of its annual Accessibility Plan;
- Providing equal access to all.

Accessibility planning is intended to identify, remove and prevent many types of barriers by a comprehensive review of by-laws, services, policies, procedures, practices and programs to determine what changes are required to make them accessible to everyone - including staff and members of the public living with disabilities.

The Plan also serves as an educational tool to raise awareness of issues faced by people living with disabilities on a daily basis.

All Accessibility Plans will strive to balance stakeholder priorities and Muskoka's ability to achieve changes over time, by establishing priorities within budget resources. While the Province requires that no new barriers be created, removal of existing barriers will be phased over a period of time as budgets permit.

For a current listing of members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee:

Please contact the District:

- By telephone to: (705) 645-2231, Ext. 4253
- By email to: [clerk@muskoka.on.ca](mailto:clerk@muskoka.on.ca)
- visit the [District of Muskoka's Website](#)

## Terms of Reference

### 1. Reporting Structure

In accordance with The District Municipality of Muskoka's (District) Procedural By-law, the Accessibility Advisory Committee is an ad hoc Committee authorized by Muskoka District Council (Council).

The Committee shall report to Council on or before December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year. The Committee shall advise Council in writing about the preparation, implementation, and effectiveness of the District's Accessibility plan.

Decisions of the Committee are not final until approved by Council unless delegated authority is granted by Council.

### 2. Objectives

The objectives of the Accessibility Advisory Committee are as follows:

- a) Advise Council about the requirements and implementation of accessibility standards and the preparation of accessibility reports.
- b) Research and make recommendations to Council concerning the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with living disabilities within Muskoka.
- c) Educate Council and the general public of the responsibility, benefits and means of having a consumer-friendly community inclusive to age and ability.
- d) Promote the voluntary provision of inclusive access to buildings, services, communications and activities within Muskoka, and recognize those businesses and services that are consumer friendly.

### 3. Composition

The Accessibility Advisory Committee shall be composed of a minimum of three (3) and a maximum of seven (7) members and all Committee members shall be appointed by resolution of Council for such term as may be specified in the appointment resolution.

Three (3) members shall be members of Council that also serve on their Area Municipality's Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Additionally, three (3) citizen representatives will be appointed by Council upon recommendation of the local Area Municipality's Accessible Advisory Committee.

Pursuant to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act a majority of the members of the committee shall include persons living with disabilities.

If a Committee member is unable to complete the term as set out in Section 4 below, a new Committee member will be selected by Council.

#### 4. Term

Members shall be appointed for a term that coincides with the term of Council, expiring on November 15 of the year in which a municipal election is held unless provided by a resolution of Council.

A member may resign from the Committee at any time by advising of this intention in writing to the Chair of the Committee.

#### 5. Frequency of Meetings

Committee meetings shall generally be scheduled at the call of the chair and will include a minimum of two (2) and maximum of four (4) annually.

All meetings shall be open to the public in accordance with the District's Procedural By-law and the Municipal Act, 2001. A meeting of the Committee may only be closed to the public if the subject matter being considered meets the criteria established in Section 239(2) of the Municipal Act, 2001.

#### 6. Roles and Responsibilities of Members

Committee Members shall:

- a) Attend and actively participate in all meetings;
- b) Work with other members to attempt to reach consensus on decisions before the Committee; and
- c) Adhere to these terms of reference, the District's Procedural By-law, the Council/Committee Code of Conduct and any other by-laws, policies or procedures that apply to Committee members.

#### 7. Rules Governing the Proceedings of Committees

The business of advisory committees shall be conducted in accordance with the District's Procedural By-law.

#### 8. Quorum

In accordance with the District's Procedural By-law a quorum shall be a majority of the Committee Members.

As soon after the hour fixed for the holding of a Committee meeting as a quorum is present, the Chair shall take the chair and call the meeting to order.

In the event that a quorum for a Committee meeting cannot be obtained, the following shall apply:

- a) If no quorum is present to enable a meeting to commence thirty (30) minutes after the time appointed for a meeting of the Committee, the Clerk shall, at the request

of a majority of the Members present call the roll and record the names of the Members present and the Members shall stand discharged from waiting further.

If during the course of a Committee meeting a quorum is lost, then the Chair shall:

- a) declare that the meeting stand adjourned, not ended, to reconvene at such time and place as the Chair shall then determine; or
- b) cancel the balance of the meeting, if in his/her opinion, it is not essential to deal with the balance of the agenda before the next ordinary meeting; and

The Clerk shall give such notice of any meeting so adjourned and to be reconvened as is reasonable within the circumstances.

Where the number of Members who, by reason of pecuniary interest, are unable to participate in a meeting, and that the remaining Members are not of sufficient number to constitute a quorum, then, notwithstanding any other general or special Act, the remaining number of Members shall be deemed to constitute a quorum, provided such number is not less than two.

## 9. Voting

In accordance with the District's Procedural By-law, when an issue arises, the Committee will attempt to reach a consensus on how the Committee should resolve the issue.

A question before the Committee will be put to a vote and each Committee Member will be entitled to one vote.

A motion shall be deemed to be carried when a majority of the members present and eligible to vote, vote in favour of the motion. Consequently, on a tie vote, the motion is lost.

## 10. Resources

The staff resource for the Committee is the Staff Accessibility Working Group (SAWG).

SAWG shall provide advisory support to the Committee, including background information, resources and advice to Committee members to assist them in their role.

In addition, SAWG will:

- a) Conduct reviews of facilities, services, policies, procedures, by-laws, practices, and programs to identify accessibility barriers and develop strategies for barrier prevention and removal; and
- b) Develop, review, prepare, implement and evaluate an annual accessibility plan for consideration by the Accessibility Advisory Committee and Council.

## 11. Other

From time to time, members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee may be requested to provide assistance or offer advice regarding District projects. Committee members must keep in mind that while the committee on which they serve has specific goals and objectives, the Committee's function is advisory in nature and the final decision on recommendations made by the Committee rests with Council. Council's responsibility is to the broad public good and, as such, Council may take into account other matters beyond those considered by the Committee when making its final decision on the matter.

### **Staff Accessibility Working Group (SAWG)**

#### **Mandate**

Conduct reviews of facilities, services, policies, procedures, by-laws, practices, and programs to identify accessibility barriers and develop strategies for barrier prevention and removal.

#### **Terms of Reference**

Each division of the District will appoint a representative to the SAWG. If that member is unavailable, an alternate will be provided.

Specific accountabilities for members include but are not limited to:

1. Review AODA legislation and ensure plans are in place to remain compliant.
2. Develop, review, prepare, implement and evaluate a multi-year accessibility plan for consideration by the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and District Council.
3. On an as needed basis but not less than once annually, meet to discuss modifications, changes, or improvements to the multi-year accessibility plan.
4. Consult with and request advice from the AAC.
5. Review initiatives and identify successes in removing and preventing barriers within Muskoka.
6. Identify barriers to people living with disabilities that may be addressed in the coming year and beyond.

## **2020-2022: The District Municipality of Muskoka Accessibility Successes**

The AODA's accessibility standards establish rules and timelines that businesses and organizations in Ontario must follow to effectively identify, remove and prevent barriers for persons living with disabilities.

Extensive work has been carried out to ensure that the District is in compliance with the AODA's General Requirements and each of the five standards outlined in the IASR. The District met all of its accessibility compliance targets from 2013 through 2022, with work occurring steadily to meet subsequent accessibility compliance requirements by or in advance of our compliance deadlines.

### **General Requirement Successes**

- (2021) The Provincial Offences Court has continued to modify court processes to meet accessibility needs as requests are made to the Court.
- (2021) Procurement processes, including Requests for Proposals (RFP) and Requests for Tenders (RFT), have been moved to an email (paperless) process enabling easy and convenient access to information and materials.
- (2022) The Housing and Homelessness Division:
  - Distributed funding provided from the Province to over 2,500 clients to support those who are unable to leave their homes (due to COVID-19, or other circumstances) with food and gas gift cards;
  - Provided a connection to the meals on wheels whereby meals are brought to the home / motel for clients who are unable to prepare food; and
- (2022) Ontario Works provided support to a number of mental health programs throughout Muskoka to help provide access to people who live in rural and remote areas (i.e. Enliven Muskoka, MindAid, etc.).
- (2022) Muskoka Paramedic Services (MPS) Community Paramedicine Program has been working with a local physician to develop a clinic for unattached patients in the Huntsville Community and providing a Wellness Clinic on Watha Mohawk Territory to ensure access to care is extended to vulnerable populations. In addition, they are providing care through the Community Paramedicine program to residents that are on the long-term care waitlist or at risk of being added to the waitlist.

### **Customer Service Standard Successes**

- (2020) 33 key staff members were identified as super users and have been provided training on how to create accessible word and PDF documents. In addition, 11 key staff including the Budgets team have received training to create accessible excel documents.
- (2020) An Accessible Document Creation Training Guideline has been developed to onboard new staff and to provide training to the District Strategic

Leadership team, Directors, Managers and report writers. This training will be ongoing with 16 staff members having received the training to date.

- (2020) Accommodation upgrades have been completed in District Housing, when requested.
- (2020) Public notices are properly formatted as accessible word documents.
- (2020) Accessible templates have been created for Council and Committee Agendas and Reports.
- (2020) Accessible Customer Service training was completed in July and August for municipal employees.
- (2020) Certification training was provided for a member of the Human Resources Division on the Working Mind program that is designed to promote mental health and reduce stigma in the workplace.
- (2020) Muskoka Paramedic Services have purchased and deployed additional stair chairs.
- (2020) Planning, Environment and/or GIS public, stakeholder, pre-consultation, development application or policy related meetings have transitioned to a digital format with video or phone-in options provided.
- (2020) Staff have instituted a policy at transfer stations to allow customers to walk their garbage in, allowing customers that live within walking distance that do not own a vehicle to use the transfer station where they may have encountered difficulties previously.
- (2021) Accessible Customer Service training was completed in early 2021 for Paramedics.
- (2021) Training materials, including a video, and accessible templates have been created and are available for all staff to support the transition to ensuring documents for staff, residents, and other community stakeholders are accessible.
- (2021) All new by-laws are prepared in an accessible format.
- (2021) The 2021 Draft Rate Supported Operating and Capital Budget and Forecast and the 2021 Draft Tax Supported Operating and Capital Budget and Forecast were prepared in accessible formats for the first time. In addition, the public presentations were prepared and delivered in accessible formats. This practice will be continued for all future budget documents and presentations.
- (2021-2022) The District has continued to host statutory public meetings in a virtual format using Zoom Webinar. This platform allows the public to view, listen and / or participate during a Statutory public meeting. These meetings are also webcast and recorded for future viewing. In addition to participating through Zoom, a telephone call-in option is also available.
- (2021) Two new fully accessible units were built as part of a new District affordable housing "Home for Good" building located at 49B Pine Street, Bracebridge.
- (2021) The District engaged KJI Consulting Collective to complete community engagement activities in late 2020 to inform the Muskoka Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-racism (IDEA) Advisory Group on appropriate next steps. The IDEA Advisory Group Committees have been meeting throughout 2021 and developing a Community Action Plan that will be presented to Council for consideration and endorsement.

- (2022) The Provincial Offences Office ensured that virtual court was accessible to court participants. This involved aiding customers through the process and performing test sessions when an accommodation issue was raised.
- (2020) The Muskoka Airport added a “puppy pad” to the secure area for persons with support animals and have been compliant with assisting passengers living with disabilities; including installing accessible check-in counters, international exit and lighting in the hold area, Washington chairs to fit in the aisle of the aircraft, larger accessible parking spaces near check-in, a ramp into the screening area, needle disposal kits in all washrooms, and outdoor public rest areas with pathways.
- (2020 – 2022) All staff at the Muskoka Airport have completed accessibility training and continue to discuss the topic in monthly safety meetings.
- (2019 – 2022) Provided Indigenous Awareness Training to almost 1000 people - staff, councilors, agency partners, board members, volunteers, residents, etc.
- (2022) Piloted Safer Spaces training (2S-LGBTQ+ cultural competency) to 40 District senior leaders and key staff.
- (2019) Established the Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table (MAILT) as a way to strengthen relationships between Muskoka's municipalities and the Indigenous nations with current and historical ties to Muskoka  
[www.engagemuskoka.ca/mailt](http://www.engagemuskoka.ca/mailt).
- (2020) Established the volunteer, community-based IDEA Advisory Group (IAG) to act as an advisory body to District Council and help strive for equity and inclusion, celebrate diversity and combat hate and racism. IDEA = Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism/Anti-Hate. [www.engagemuskoka.ca/idea](http://www.engagemuskoka.ca/idea)
- (2020) Developed a 3-5-year community-based IDEA strategic action plan to promote the IDEA principles throughout Muskoka. IDEA = Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism/Anti-Hate.
- (2021) Established the Staff IDEA Advisory Group (SIAG) to act as an advisory body to the District's senior leadership team and to help create an inclusive workplace culture that is free from discrimination, is actively anti-racist, welcomes and celebrates diversity and strives for equity in all practices, programs and services, both as an employer and service provider.
- (2022) Organized and hosted a one-day Combatting Hate Symposium that created opportunities for community engagement and education and advancement of the IAG goals of ensuring Muskoka is a more inclusive, diverse, equitable and anti-racist community.
- (2022) Developed and signed a Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table (MAILT) Friendship Accord to establish a mutual commitment to the framework, intent and principles of engagement between participating members of the MAILT.
- (2022) The Development Tracking Software (ESRI Cityworks) was launched and has been designed using inclusive design principles and conforms to current software accessibility standards and guidelines. Both the internal facing platform and external public portal are designed to be accessible and will include virtual training opportunities and materials with the goal of being accessible and usable by all people.

- (2022) Signage has been posted at our manned solid waste facilities to ask our staff for assistance, if needed.

### **Information and Communication Standard Successes**

- (2020) Live closed captioning for council chamber meetings/webcasts was piloted in January 2020 with a favourable outcome and has subsequently been implemented for all meetings since February 2020.
- (2020) A formal "Presentation Guidelines" procedure document (which incorporates AODA requirements) has been uploaded to the Staff Information Module and Opportunities Network (SIMON) making it available for reference by all District staff.
- (2020) Ensured department and division staff attend AODA compliance training as made corporately available.
- (2021) Staff have continued webcasting Council and Committee meetings through the District website at the time of the meeting and keep them available for 6 months following the meeting.
- (2021) Creating accessible forms training was provided in April 2021 to 15 staff members.
- (2021) AODA Website compliance was achieved when the new website was launched in the spring of 2021. Communications will continue to monitor the website content to ensure ongoing compliance.
- (2021) A pilot group (Clerk, CAO and IT Departments) successfully migrated to the SharePoint environment; a secure place to store, organize, share, and access information. SharePoint sites include built-in improved accessibility features for staff including friendly keyboard navigation and integration with assistive technologies such as screen readers. The SharePoint sites are built with accessibility in mind including ideal colour contrast selections and the addition of alternative text. Approved document templates are published in a centralized location on SharePoint, ensuring that records created by staff are accessible. The robust search functionality ensures that staff can quickly and easily access required documents and spend less time searching for them.
- (2021) IT Services implemented an accessible default setting standard across all District word documents and emails i.e. font size, spacing, etc.
- (2022) The Provincial Offences Office ensured that virtual court was accessible to court participants. This involved aiding customers through the process and performing test sessions when an accommodation issue was raised.
- (2021-2022) The District has continued to host statutory public meetings in a virtual format conducted using Zoom Webinar. This platform allows the public to view, listen and/or participate during a Statutory public meeting. These meetings are also webcast and recorded for future viewing. In addition to participating through Zoom, a telephone call-in option is also available.
- (2021-2022) All Planning staff have participated in training related to accessible documents and have implemented the corporate requirements for all reports, presentations, and website content. Planning applications have been updated to

an accessible format and are available on the District's website through the Development Tracking Software Public Portal.

- (2022) The Development Tracking Software (ESRI Cityworks) was launched and has been designed using inclusive design principles and conforms to current software accessibility standards and guidelines. Both the internal facing platform and external public portal are designed to be accessible and will include virtual training opportunities and materials with the goal of being accessible and usable by all people.
- (2022) The new Next Generation 9-1-1 System (NG9-1-1) was launched; this System will automatically provide the 9-1-1 operator with the phone number and address or location of the caller even when using a cell phone. NG9-1-1 will also allow 9-1-1 operators to interact with 9-1-1 call centres using new and innovative services such as real time chat, texting to 9-1-1 services, and transmitting photos, videos, and medical records. For residents who have communication disabilities, or who are deaf or hard of hearing, they will be able to text to 9-1-1 call centres using the new NG9-1-1 System.
- (2022) Children's and Seniors Programs have continued to provide:
  - Laptops and internet-enabled tablets to rural seniors;
  - Virtual programming for children in the EarlyON program;
  - Virtual appointments;
  - Translation services for clients where English is not their first language;
  - Virtual professional development sessions for member of the early years and childcare sector; and
  - Virtual supports for the Muskoka Home Child Care Agency and Home Child Care providers.
- (2022) Ontario Works has:
  - Provided refurbished laptops to enable clients to access community supports and services (12 in 2022);
  - Increased the number of clients using direct deposit for payment and the MyBenefit portal (2.5% in 2022) reducing mobility barriers for individuals receiving benefits; and
  - Provided virtual programming, meetings and access to mental health supports.
- (2022) Housing and Homelessness Division has:
  - Adopted the use of eSignatures, where appropriate;
  - Continued to assist clients with the completion of applications and the purchase of equipment i.e. wheelchairs, walkers; and
  - Provided support / funding to multiple agencies and groups (i.e. Muskoka Elder Abuse Prevention, Seniors groups, Seniors clubs, etc.) who have assisted clients with notepad, laptop, and/or cell phone tech in order to stay connected. Many of these agencies also provided training and ongoing learning support to ensure clients/tenants have the ability to stay connected, especially while isolated due to COVID-19, or if their day to day lives prevent them from going out.
- (2022) The Community Paramedicine team hosted a networking meeting with a number of community partners so everyone in attendance could learn about the

diverse services offered in Muskoka and how to access them. Organizations in attendance include Algonquin Family Health Team, Alzheimer's Society of Muskoka, Cottage Country Family Health Team, Canadian Mental Health Association, Gravenhurst Against Poverty, Greenstone, Hospice Muskoka, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, Muskoka and Ontario Health Team, Mind-Aid, Mobile Crisis Response Team, Muskoka Seniors, Muskoka Victim Services, Red Cross, Seniors Assessment and Support Outreach Team, Seamless Care and Optimizing the Patient Experience Team, Specialized Geriatrics Services, The Friends, Wahta Mohawks, Wendat, and the YMCA. A large number of departments from the District were also in attendance including Muskoka Paramedic Services, Children's Program, Seniors Program, Health Link, Homelessness, Housing, Transportation, and Ontario Works.

### **Employment Standard Successes**

- (2020) Provided refresher training for all employees on Accessibility and Human Rights Code. This included identifying updated training resources.
- (2021) The Human Resources department provided three mental health first aid training sessions in 2021; July, September and November.
- (2021) The Human Resources department reviewed and updated individual emergency evacuation plans for employees who may require assistance during an evacuation.
- (2021) In late 2020, staff engagement surveys and meetings were conducted by KJI to inform the District's Staff IDEA Interim Report. Subsequently, a Staff IDEA Advisory Group has been formed and will use the findings of the report to develop a meaningful action plan and next steps to ensure that all staff at the District of Muskoka feel welcome and included.
- (2020-2022) The Information Technology Services (ITS) department completed a number of initiatives:
  - Virtual Desktop (VDI) - moved from a select quantity licencing to organizational level licensing for all to be able to work remotely, including high power processing for Engineering and Geomatics;
  - Microsoft 365 – now available from any internet connection;
  - Outlook 365 – now available from any internet connection;
  - Ability to leverage the Outlook app on a mobile phone; and
  - Provided various peripherals such as webcam, headphones, microphones and ergonomically correct keyboards and mice.
- (2022) ITS enabled the ability to use dictation in Microsoft 365 Word. In addition, staff are now able to automatically transcribe audio meeting files into typed documents.
- (2022) ITS enabled the Windows Accessibility Reading tool that can read web pages, text documents, and other files aloud, as well as speak every action you take in Windows. It is designed for the visually impaired but can be used by anyone.
- (2021) Established the Staff IDEA Advisory Group (SIAG) to act as an advisory body to the District's senior leadership team and to help create an inclusive

workplace culture that is free from discrimination, is actively anti-racist, welcomes and celebrates diversity and strives for equity in all practices, programs and services, both as an employer and service provider.

- (2022) Fleet vehicles have the following items, where applicable:
  - Non-slip running boards;
  - Grab handles;
  - Tilt steering; and
  - Upgraded seats.
- (2022) The Development Tracking Software (ESRI Cityworks) was launched and has been designed using inclusive design principles and conforms to current software accessibility standards and guidelines. Both the internal facing platform and external public portal are designed to be accessible and will include virtual training opportunities and materials with the goal of being accessible and usable by all people.
- (2022) Muskoka Paramedics (MPS) has implemented a “Peer Support Mobile Application” this to provide MPS staff with an easy access portal to receive peer support after a stressful event(s).
- (2022) MPS has installed power lift systems in ambulances which will eliminate most stretcher lifts into/out of ambulances. The system is projected to shed thousands of stretcher lifts from a paramedic’s career.

### **Accessible Transportation Standard Successes**

- (2020) Audible crosswalks have been installed at the following locations:
  - Muskoka Road 18 and James Street
  - Muskoka Road 18 and Church Street
  - Muskoka Road 42 (Taylor Road) and Pine Street
  - Muskoka Road 4 and Meadow Heights
  - Muskoka Road 3 (Main Street) and Muskoka Road 2 (Chaffey Street)
- (2020) Several improvements were made to make transportation more accessible in the District. The contract with the Corridor 11 Bus service operator was renewed and included a requirement for the provision of an accessible vehicle for the service. A media release was provided when the vehicle was ready for service.
- (2020) As part of the Community Transportation Grant, the District was provided with funding to establish a local transportation service to move residents east and west throughout the District, provide individual and accessible transportation solutions, and help create a seamless network that makes it easy for residents to transfer between services.
- (2020) In order to provide another option for those individuals who may lack access to suitable transportation, the Specialized Transportation Fund has also been revamped. This fund already existed within the Community Initiatives Budget and was initially intended to provide access to transportation for residents looking to be involved in some type of community engagement activity. The criteria for access to this funding has been expanded, so that a greater number of residents will now have access to it. In order to qualify, residents must

demonstrate financial need, lack of access to public- or other agency-provided transportation or be unable to use public- or agency-provided transportation that may be available to them.

- (2021) Audible crosswalks have been installed at the following locations:
  - Muskoka Rd. 2 (West Rd.) and Hanes
  - Muskoka Rd. 118 and Muskoka Rd. 7
  - Muskoka Rd. 118 (Wellington St.) Crosswalk (Monk school)
  - Muskoka Rd. 169 (Bethune Dr.) and Veterans Way
  - Muskoka Rd. 18 (Muskoka Rd. S) and Talisman Dr.
  - Muskoka Rd. 169 (Bay St.) and Sarah St.
  - Muskoka Rd. 169 Crosswalk (Boston Pizza)
  - Muskoka Rd. 169 and North Muldrew Lake Rd.
  - New ped crossing on Muskoka Rd. 3 (Main St.)
  - New signalized ped crossing Muskoka Rd. 3 at Yonge St. (Avery beach) -completed by Town of Huntsville in process of being installed currently.
  - New Signalized ped crossing on Muskoka Rd 4 at McCrank Dr.
- (2021) Delivery of a fully accessible vehicle for the Corridor 11 bus route. The Corridor 11 bus has an accessible lift and space for two wheelchairs to travel safely. The District has now been operating the Corridor 11 bus accessibly for a year.
- (2021) In January of 2021, the District launched the Rural and Community Connection bus which provides transit options East-West across the District. This route provides transit accessibility for thousands of residents who historically have not had public transit available to them. An accessible vehicle is available for this route with 24 hour's notice to the operator.
- (2021) In order to provide another option for those individuals who may lack access to suitable transportation, the Specialized Transportation Fund was revamped in November of 2020. This fund has provided individualized transportation to 51 residents so far in 2021. Many residents who have accessed the Specialized Transportation Fund have unique circumstances which require personalized transportation options. This fund allows the District flexibility to support residents who may be unable to use public transit.
- (2022) Accessibility continues to be a priority for transportation programs in the District. Building on our achievements of 2021, we continue to offer wheelchair accessible service on the Corridor 11 bus, and a wheelchair accessible vehicle upon request for the Rural and Community Connection bus. The Rural and Community Connection Service also offers 'flex stops', which allow residents to be picked up at their home rather than having to access a fixed bus stop.
- (2022) The Specialized Transportation Fund, which covers up to \$2,000 per year of transportation costs for eligible individuals, has expanded in 2022 to meet the growing demand. In 2022 so far, the fund has allowed 99 residents to access transportation options to that meet their personal transportation needs. Many residents accessing the Specialized Transportation Fund have accessibility needs that prevent them from using traditional transit options.

- (2022) The Housing and Homelessness Division provided assistance / funding to groups who support clients with transportation for day to day, and urgent needs such as medical, etc. Some agencies that assist with volunteer driver programs include Gravenhurst Against Poverty, Muskoka Seniors, Canada Red Cross, etc.

### **Design of Public Spaces Standard Successes**

- (2020) Modifications to the Barrier Free parking spaces to create larger stalls and wider aisles between the spaces at the main entrance to the Administration Building at 70 Pine St. began in 2019 with the pavement markings and signage being completed this spring.
- (2020) The installation of power operated doors throughout the Administration building at 70 Pine St. was completed earlier this year on interior departmental and washroom doors.
- (2020) Handrails have been added to the ramps on the main floor and basement level areas of the Administration Building at 70 Pine St.
- (2020) A review of recommended accessibility improvements to the washrooms and customer service counters at the Administration Building at 70 Pine St. are beginning this fall with completion anticipated in early 2021.
- (2020) At The Pines Long-Term Care Home, the Muskoka Room Balcony Replacement project was completed. This work ensured the balcony area accessed from the second floor as well as the patio accessed from the main floor is properly sloped to be easily and safely accessed by residents and guests.
- (2020) The redesign of the spa areas within the resident home areas of The Pines as well as a review of the dining room serving areas is underway with expected completion in early 2021.
- (2020) In Housing, staff continue to work with tenants to improve the accessibility of existing apartments by adding bathroom assistive devices such as grab bars in showers or around the toilets and install power operated doors on entry doors where feasible. In addition, two new fully accessible units were built as part of a new District affordable housing building in Bracebridge.
- (2021) At The Pines Long-Term Care Home, a majority of the beds have been replaced with high low beds to better meet the mobility needs and reduce fall risk of the residents. The home has added height adjustable tables in the dining room for improved access to meals for residents. Smart televisions were added to all dining rooms to assist with engaging outside programming to maintain connection for residents to the community. The home is utilizing other technology to connect residents with family members and the leadership team to the family members and caregivers including the Engage Muskoka platform and monthly zoom family meetings.
- (2020) The Muskoka Airport added a “puppy pad” to the secure area for persons with support animals and have been compliant with assisting passengers living with disabilities; including installing accessible check-in counters, international exit and lighting in the hold area, Washington chairs to fit in the aisle of the aircraft, larger accessible parking spaces near check-in, a ramp into the

screening area, needle disposal kits in all washrooms, and outdoor public rest areas with pathways.

- (2022) The Muskoka Airport conducted a live emergency exercise that included accessibility from an emergency preparedness perspective.
- (2022) The Provincial Offences Office ensured that virtual court was accessible to court participants. This involved aiding customers through the process and performing test sessions when an accommodation issue was raised.
- (2022) 175 Lofty Pines – power door operator installed on laundry room.
- (2022) 49B Pine St:
  - Universal washroom and laundry room at grade level;
  - Interior ramp with tactile warning strips to access upper level;
  - Power door operators installed where required;
  - Completion of modified living units;
  - Tactile warning strip installed at transition from walkways to parking lot; and
  - New accessible asphalt ramp to main entry;
- (2022) 100 Oakwood Heights:
  - Completed lighting upgrades to common area and lobby area; and
  - New depressed curb and tactile warning strip has been installed.
- (2022) Contract awarded to renovate the Ante Room at 70 Pine St. to create a universal / accessible washroom.
- (2022) New organics bins have been installed at all 10 solid waste transfer stations in Muskoka with accessibility considerations included such as the height of bins, struts to keep the doors open, lids of manageable weight, etc.
- (2022) Platforms have been installed at all waste compactors to allow for easier access for the public to drop off waste.
- (2022) In the winter season, Operators will ensure the areas around public water taps are salted/sanded daily, including weekends.
- (2022) Engineering and Public Works Department is ensuring that new construction contracts specify AODA compliance where applicable. This includes new sidewalks, ramps, pedestrian crossings, signalized intersections, sign installations, etc.
- (2022) Renovation of the entrance way at The Pines. Replaced aged paving stone walkway at the front entrance with a smooth paved surface improving ease of use of assistive devices.

## **Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all Ontarians. District staff was required to continuously evaluate and realign staff and operations to ensure that we continued to deliver our key services safely and effectively which resulted in a number of innovative measures to continue to make our services accessible.

- Ontario Works provided refurbished laptops to enable clients to access community supports and services. Staff were successful in increasing the number of clients using direct deposit for payments and the MyBenefit Portal. In

addition, virtual programming, meetings and access to mental health supports were implemented. Financial assistance was also provided to assist clients with increased costs associated with COVID-19.

- Staff utilized Facebook and Zoom to connect with families and provide them with activities and supports i.e. Zoom Baby Talks, Zoom Parent Chats, etc. In addition, local services and agencies are now more aware of the portal to community services that EarlyON provides.
- The Seniors Team transitioned to a virtual programming and support model within one week of the Emergency Order being declared providing: Technology Support, Virtual Combined Fitness Classes, etc.
- The Housing and Homelessness Prevention Programs, like Ontario Works and other program areas, have been successful in moving more clients to a direct payment enrolment. Virtual services have been provided where possible, as well as weekly phone calls to support vulnerable tenants and those suffering from isolation during the pandemic. Creative solutions have been implemented to obtain wet signatures, when required. Significant Social Services Relief Funding from the Province enabled us to enhance our collaboration with, and flow additional funds to, many community partners to increase supports related to food security, rent and utility arrears, emergency shelter, etc.
- The District has shifted from in-person Statutory public meetings held under the Planning Act, to a virtual format conducted using Zoom Webinar. This platform allowed the public to view, listen and/or participate during a Statutory public meeting. These meetings are also webcast and recorded for future viewing. In addition to participating through Zoom, a telephone call-in option is also available. All pre-consultation, development application-related, and policy-related stakeholder meetings have also transitioned to a virtual format.
- Muskoka Watershed Council meetings and educational outreach events have been moved to the Zoom platform. In addition, Muskoka Watershed Council has redesigned its website and related communications to be compliant with AODA requirements.
- Transfer stations have all been equipped with new "tap" payment units.
- Bins have been modified or replaced to facilitate less touching. Bins are either open-top or hatches/doors are left open for the public.
- The Finance department moved invoicing and payment processing to digital and direct deposit to reduce the risk of transmission through paper contact and to allow staff to work remotely.
- Administration staff have continued to provide customer service support remotely from home in most cases to ensure continuity in service. Increased contact with customers by phone and email took place to generate work orders and pre-screen residents prior to providing in person service.
- Implemented a common and consistent Virtual Desktop Infrastructure on a Windows 10 platform to enable staff to work from home.
- In-person Indigenous Awareness Training for District staff was interrupted in March when the pandemic was declared. Rescheduled workshops were modified and subsequently delivered by Zoom.

- The Muskoka Economic Recovery Task Force (MERTF) was established, launched and staffed since the pandemic was declared. The MERTF continues to work remotely through various on-line technologies, primarily Zoom. The MERTF's a primary focus on expanding access to adequate broadband internet to all residents in Muskoka has become, demonstrably, more important than ever.
- Staff and community engagement for the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-racism (IDEA) work was be completed remotely using online surveys, Engage Muskoka, and Zoom focus groups and one-on-one conversations.
- All Council and Committee meetings were moved to a Zoom format.
- All interviews and meetings are being managed through Zoom format resulting in a less physically demanding interview process which also allows people to use familiar assistive devices.
- At The Pines Long-Term Care home staff maximized the use of technology for video calls (using tools like Skype, Zoom, Messenger, Google) to bring family and friends to residents. As regular large group activities for residents were not permitted, activation staff adjusted programing to small groups and individual activities. In addition, staff initiated "Community" Zoom calls to allow the Administrator to communicate updates with family and friends.
- Due to the limitations of in-person interaction with Muskoka Health Link clients Care Navigators adapted to deliver services virtually to their clients through on-line programming, telephone calls, texts and emails. For clients with limited technology available, or no internet access, the Care Navigators reached out to other community members to pass along information and share resources currently available in the community for those specific clients' needs.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the District launched an on-demand, accessible transportation program for residents to attend COVID-19 vaccination appointments. This program was part of the larger local campaign to ensure vaccines were accessible. 94 residents utilized this program which concluded in September 2021.

## **Moving Forward: The District Municipality of Muskoka Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2023-2025**

The District is working to create a more inclusive, Age-Friendly and Accessible Community through proactively identifying, preventing and / or removing barriers to accessibility. The community is growing, and the District's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan aims to be responsive to this growth by supporting community development and intensification. The District's diversity will become one of its greatest strengths and the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will help it break down barriers to participation for all community members.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), people living with disabilities experience more significant barriers to participation - barriers that are physical as in the design of public spaces, technological as in absence of assistive devices, and attitudinal in the form of prejudice or negative attitudes towards disability.

Persons living with disabilities frequently encounter barriers including, but not limited to the following:

- **Attitudinal barriers** are the most basic and may contribute to other barriers. Attitudinal barriers are exhibited as personal attitudes, feelings and behaviours and negatively impact how we interact with persons with disabilities.
- **Communication barriers** are experienced by people who have disabilities that impact their hearing, seeing, speaking, reading, writing and understanding. Lack of available communication supports is also considered a barrier.
- **Physical barriers** include the physical design of spaces and places, making it difficult or impossible for persons with disabilities to move or access spaces.
- **Organizational/Systemic barriers** include policies, procedures and programs that may discriminate, exclude or prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating.
- **Social barriers** are related to social determinants of health that can contribute to decreased functioning among older adults and persons with disabilities, including but not limited to; social isolation, unemployment or under-employment, and living in poverty.
- **Technological barriers** include poor technologies or systems that prevent people with disabilities from accessing information.
- **Transportation barriers** are due to a lack of affordable accessible transportation options which interferes with a person's ability to become and remain independent within the community of their choice.

By removing barriers for persons living with disabilities, we are removing barriers for everyone.

## **Priorities to be Addressed: 2023 – 2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan**

### **General Accessibility Standard Goals**

- Review and suggest updates to the Accessibility Policy.
- Review AODA legislation and ensure plans are in place to remain compliant.
- Implementation of the Muskoka Official Plan accessibility policies including:
  - Promotion of improved accessibility for all people, particularly persons living with disabilities and the elderly;
  - Removing or preventing land use barriers that restrict full participation in society for all people, but particularly persons with disabilities and seniors;
  - In reviewing applications under the Planning Act, the District will have regard for accessibility to all facilities, services and matters to which these Acts apply and will identify, prevent, and/or remove land use barriers which may restrict full participation in society for persons living with disabilities and seniors;
  - Work with the Area Municipalities to include accessibility policies in their Official Plans, in accordance with any applicable legislation; and

- Work with the Area Municipalities to consider improved accessibility in the review of development applications.
- The Housing and Homelessness Division will continue to:
  - Provide a connection to the meals on wheels whereby meals are brought to the home / motel for clients who are unable to prepare food; and
  - Provide support to a number of mental health programs throughout Muskoka to help provide access to people who live in rural and remote areas (i.e. Enliven Muskoka, MindAid, etc.).
- Muskoka Paramedic Services (MPS) will continue ongoing efforts to ensure healthcare/primary care services are accessible to vulnerable populations through the Community Paramedicine Program.
- At The Pines and Fairvern Long-Term Care Homes:
  - Continue to replace resident beds with hi-lo beds;
  - Continue to replace dining tables with adjustable models to enhance resident access and dining experience; and
  - Upgrade tub rooms to include the installation of new tubs and ceiling lifts. These measures will improve resident and staff safety and enhance infection prevention and control efforts.

### **Customer Service Standard Goals**

- The Provincial Offence Court will continue to review new legislative requirements to ensure inclusivity for persons living with a disability and continue be available, as indicated on our website, to anyone seeking accommodation to directly discuss options.
- Continue to provide training to staff on creating accessible documents.
- Continue to review buildings and properties to identify and improve on accessibility.
- Continue to complete accommodation upgrades in housing to improve accessibility such as adding grab bars and powered doors to units.
- At the Muskoka Airport, convert the customer service entrance to an automatic opening and closing door.
- Develop a Diversity Calendar to establish a suite of days of recognition to be adopted by the District and promoted to partner agencies and communities in Muskoka.
- Launch an IDEA Community Grants Program to help fund and encourage partner agencies and community groups to undertake IDEA initiatives that promote IDEA principles and positively impact residents of Muskoka. IDEA = Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism/Anti-Hate.
- Roll-out Safer Spaces training (2S-LGBTQ+ cultural competency) to all District Staff and Councillors.
- Provide Indigenous Awareness Training to all incoming District Councillors.
- Consider implementation of preferred personal pronouns in email signature lines and on nametags.
- Develop a 5-year curriculum plan of IDEA related training topics to be rolled out to all District staff and Councillors.

- Develop a 3-5-year strategic action plan to ensure the District is continually striving toward an inclusive workplace culture that is free from discrimination, is actively anti-racist, welcomes and celebrates diversity and strives for equity in all practices, programs and services, both as an employer and service provider.
- Develop and launch an Inclusive Language Guide for District staff and Councillors.
- Complete a Road and Place Name Audit for all of Muskoka to better understand what roads, places and public assets should be renamed in line with the IDEA principles and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.
- Rename Muskoka Road 38, in partnership with Wahta Mohawks First Nation and the Township of Muskoka Lakes, to better reflect its Indigenous history, as well as the Indigenous culture of the Wahta Mohawk community through which it passes.
- Hire a social worker to assist with resident and staff needs at The Pines Long-Term Care Home.
- Implement a family portal to improve communication at the Fairvern Nursing Home.
- Enhance the celebration and recognition of Accessibility Week in collaboration with Accessibility working groups.

### **Information and Communication Standard Goals**

- Continue to ensure all public-facing documents are accessible.
- Continue to train staff on creating accessible documents regarding publications, forms, templates, reports, presentations, brochures, notices, etc.
- Continue webcasting Council and Committee meetings with closed captioning through the District website at the time of the meeting and keep available for 6 months following the meeting.
- Create a standardized message to be included for all survey and engagement pieces and projects to encompass alternate formats available to meet accessibility.
- Add accessibility as a monthly topic on the Area Municipalities Communications Group agenda and seek best practices on effective communication tools that meet and exceed accessibility standards.
- Initiate monthly audits from departments/teams to update the Communications department on marketing materials being used and alternative formats that are available for our community.
- Continue training opportunities to ensure social media and public-facing platforms remain accessible. Take advantage of current trends and work with Area Municipalities on a coordinating approach for consistency in messaging.
- Children's and Seniors Services will continue to provide:
  - Laptops and internet-enabled tablets to rural seniors;
  - Virtual programming for seniors and children in the EarlyON program;
  - Virtual appointments;
  - Translation services for clients where English is not their first language;

- Virtual professional development sessions for member of the early years and childcare sector; and
- Virtual and hybrid supports for the Muskoka Home Child Care Agency and Home Child Care providers.
- Ontario Works will continue to:
  - Provide refurbished laptops to enable clients to access community supports and services; and
  - Provide virtual programming, meetings and access to mental health supports.
- Housing and Homelessness Division will continue to:
  - Work towards electronic communication, filing, and e-signatures, where possible;
  - Assist clients with the completion of applications and the purchase of equipment i.e. wheelchairs, walkers; and
  - Provide support / funding to multiple agencies and groups (i.e. Muskoka Elder Abuse Prevention, Seniors groups, Seniors clubs, etc.) who have assisted clients with notepad, laptop, and/or cell phone tech in order to stay connected. Many of these agencies also provided training and ongoing learning support to ensure clients/tenants have the ability to stay connected, especially while isolated due to COVID-19, or if their day to day lives prevent them from going out.

### **Employment Standard Goals**

- Launch and train staff to use a voice to text feature on the internal phone system.
- Activate a software feature; speech recognition commands, as required.
- Provide awareness, education and training of Microsoft 365 Accessibility features.
- Roll-out Safer Spaces training (2S-LGBTQ+ cultural competency) to all District Staff and Councillors.
- Consider optional implementation of preferred personal pronouns in email signature lines and on nametags.
- Develop a 5-year curriculum plan of IDEA related training topics to be rolled out to all District staff and Councillors.
- Develop a 3-5-year strategic action plan to ensure the District is continually striving toward an inclusive workplace culture that is free from discrimination, is actively anti-racist, welcomes and celebrates diversity and strives for equity in all practices, programs and services, both as an employer and service provider.
- Develop and launch an Inclusive Language Guide for District staff and Councillors.
- Continue to assess available accessibility features when purchasing fleet vehicles.
- Add accessibility to weekly/monthly team meetings as a discussion item.

- At The Pines Long-Term Care Home:
  - Upgrade tub rooms to include the installation of new tubs and ceiling lifts. These measures will improve resident and staff safety and enhance infection prevention and control efforts; and
  - Hire a social worker to assist with resident and staff needs.
- Implement a staff portal to improve communication at The Pines Long-Term Care Home and the Fairvern Nursing Home.
- Redevelop internal District employee intranet and consider accessibility enhancements and leverage this internal platform to ensure employees are engaged and informed about District accessibility goals, policies and achievements.

### **Accessible Transportation Standard Goals**

- As implementation of the District's '5-Year Transportation Needs Assessment and Growth and Sustainability Plan' continues through 2025, the District is committed to continual improvement of the accessibility of transportation programs. Staff are working to implement the following solutions to remove barriers for people living with disabilities.
  - **Virtual Transportation Hub:** The Transportation Hub, or Brokerage, was first proposed in the 2020 '5-Year Transportation Needs Assessment and Growth and Sustainability Plan'. It is the concept of a "one stop shop" for transportation information in Muskoka. A Hub would improve the accessibility of transportation information and support residents in navigating their options. Currently, residents who access the Specialized Transportation Fund can access the District's Transportation Network Coordinator for this service. The goal is to expand the service District wide.
  - **Strengthen Transit Connections:** One of the current barriers to transit is difficult connections with other services. Some of this barrier can be removed by improving the timing, fare compatibility, and bus stops. Staff continue to work on bus schedules and collaboration with connecting services to streamline residents' experience on transit.
  - **Signage and Communication:** Much of the District's transit information is currently only available online, which could be difficult for some residents to navigate. Staff are working on the possibility of adding physical signage and schedule information at each bus stop. Staff are also working to integrate transit information into systems users may already be using, such as google maps. Finally, work is ongoing to publicize current onboard bus policies, which would include policies on services animals and support persons.
- The Housing and Homelessness Division will continue to provide assistance to clients and tenants with needed transportation for medical, mental health appointments, etc.
- Complete the installation of the remaining audible crosswalks throughout Muskoka.

## Design of Public Spaces Standard Goals

- Continue efforts to review buildings and properties to identify and improve on accessibility.
- At the Muskoka Airport, convert the customer service entrance to an automatic opening and closing door.
- Fire alarm system audibility upgrades to 100 and 200 Oakwood Heights.
- Ongoing review and upgrading related to accessibility in all District buildings and facilities, i.e., door and bathroom hardware, lighting, power door operators.
- Ongoing major capital projects consideration of accessibility requirements, i.e. Fairvern Nursing Home, Port Carling Paramedic Station, 49A and 49B Pine St.
- Consideration of power door operators on any new construction modified units.
- The Solid Waste Division will procure a consultant to assess accessibility at waste facilities.
- At The Pines Long-Term Care Home:
  - Improve conditions in the home's parking lots to reduce trip hazards (i.e. removal of interlocking brick); and
  - Upgrade the gazebo to improve access to outdoor space.
- At the Fairvern Nursing Home:
  - Purchase outdoor furniture for use by residents and families to ensure outdoor areas are user friendly.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The 2023-2025 District's Multi-Year Accessibility Plan provides an update on activities that were undertaken between 2020 - 2022; in addition to planning for Muskoka's accessible future. The Staff Accessibility Working Group and Accessibility Advisory Committee jointly guided the development of this Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and created a firm vision moving forward to improve the accessibility of all our programs, policies, services and facilities. The District has strengthened its commitment to increased accessibility and will continue to improve and make strides to achieve its accessibility goals.

### Get Involved

The next three years will be an exciting time for improvements to the accessibility of the District, where more improvements will be introduced and barriers to accessibility removed.

As improvements are made, solutions will be sought for problems that persons with disabilities living in or visiting Muskoka continue to face and the District wants your help.

Staff have already received some great feedback from the community which has helped develop this document. If you have any experiences or ideas for how we can further enhance the accessibility of the District's programs, services and facilities, please contact us.

### For more information please contact:

- By mail or in person: 70 Pine Street, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1N3
- By telephone to: (705) 645-2231, Ext. 4253
- By email to: [clerk@muskoka.on.ca](mailto:clerk@muskoka.on.ca)
- visit the [District of Muskoka's Website](#)