Policy Name: Accessibility Standards **Policy Number**: AD-006-2025

Administrative Approval Date: May 21, 2025

Most Recent Amendment Date: May 21, 2025 **Effective Date:** June 16, 2025

Supersedes: AD-006-2022

1. Policy

The District Municipality of Muskoka (District) is committed to providing equal treatment to people living with disabilities with respect to the use of District services, programs, and facilities in a manner that respects their dignity and independence, and that is equitable in relation to the broader public. This commitment extends to residents, visitors, employees, vendors, contractors, consultants and third parties living with visible or non-visible disabilities.

2. Purpose

This policy is intended to provide an overarching framework to guide the review and development of other District policies, standards, procedures, by-laws and guidelines to comply with the standards developed under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, S.O. 2005, c. 11 (AODA) https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/070429 and the *Integrated Accessibility Standards*, O. Reg. 191/11 (IAS).

3. Application and Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all persons who deal with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of the District, whether the person does so as an employee, member of Council, agent, volunteer, student on placement, or otherwise and all persons who participate in developing the District's policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods and services to members of the public or other third parties.

3.2 The District will develop policies, procedures and practices which address dignity, independence, integration and equality of opportunity. These policies, procedures and practices will comply with the legislative requirements prescribed under the AODA in conjunction with Ministry of Attorney General requirements and promote accessibility.

4. Definitions

4.1 Accessible Formats – may include, but are not limited to, large print, recorded audio, visual and electronic formats, braille and other formats usable by persons living with disabilities.

4.2 Communication Supports – may include, but are not limited to, captioning, alternative and augmentative communication supports, plain language, sign language and other supports that facilitate effective communications.

4.3 Disability – is defined, per Part 1 (2) of the AODA as follows:

4.3.1 Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,

4.3.2 A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,

4.3.3 A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,

4.3.4 A mental disorder, or

4.3.5 An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

4.4 Service Animal – includes a “guide dog” as defined in the *Blind Persons’ Rights Act* and refers to an animal in service for a person living with a disability:

4.4.1 If it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability; or

4.4.2 If the person provides a letter from a physician, nurse practitioner or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability.

4.5 Support Person – means, in relation to a person living with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

4.6 District – means The District Municipality of Muskoka.

5. General Principles:

5.1 Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)

The District has established an Accessibility Advisory Committee. Pursuant to the Mandate and Terms of Reference, the goal of the committee is to champion issues related to the provision of an accessible community on behalf of all of Muskoka's citizens.

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 living with 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; and
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.

5.2 Establishment of Accessibility Plans and Policies

The District shall produce a multi-year accessibility plan that establishes, implements, maintains and documents the phased-in strategy to prevent and remove barriers as well as addressing current and future requirements of the AODA. The plan will be reviewed by the AAC and approved by Council at least once every five years. In addition, the plan will be posted on the District's website and shall be made available in an accessible format and with communication supports, upon request.

5.3 Procurement of Goods, Services, Facilities and Kiosks

When procuring or acquiring goods, services, facilities or self-serve kiosks, the District shall incorporate accessibility design, criteria and features, unless it is not feasible or practicable. If not practicable, the District shall provide an explanation, upon request.

5.4 Training

All District employees, volunteers, agents, and others who deal with the public or other third parties, and those involved in developing customer service policies, practices and procedures, shall receive training on the requirements of the AODA and the IAS and on the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as it pertains to persons living with disabilities. The training shall be appropriate to the duties of the employee, volunteer or third party. Training shall take place as soon as is practicable and upon completion, the District shall keep a record of the training provided including the dates on which the training took place. Training shall take place on hire and on an on-going basis in connection with changes to the policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to persons living with disabilities.

6. Customer Service Standards:

6.1 The Provision of Goods and Services to Persons Living with Disabilities

The District will use reasonable efforts to ensure that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following principles:

- The District's goods and services are provided in a manner that represents the dignity and independence of persons living with disabilities.
- Persons living with disabilities are given an opportunity equal to that of persons without disabilities to obtain, use or benefit from the District's goods and services.

6.2 Assistive Devices and other Measures that Assist with Accessibility

A person living with a disability may provide his/her own assistive device for the purpose of obtaining, using and benefiting from the District's goods and services. Exceptions may occur where the District has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of a person living with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the person living with a disability to ensure that their assistive device is operated in a safe and controlled manner at all times.

6.3 Service Animals

If a person living with a disability is accompanied by a guide dog or other service animal, the District will permit the person to enter the premises

with the animal and keep it with them, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises. If a service animal is excluded by law, the District will look to what alternate means are available to enable the person living with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the District's goods and services.

It is the responsibility of the person living with a disability to ensure that their service animal is kept in control at all times.

6.4 Support Persons

A person living with a disability may enter premises owned and/or operated by the District with a support person and have access to the support person while on the premises.

The District may require a person living with a disability to be accompanied by a support person while on its premises, but only if a support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of the person living with a disability or the health of safety of others on the premises.

When a support person is accompanying a person living with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the District's goods and services, the support person will be permitted to attend at no charge where an admission fee is applicable.

Where fees for goods and services are advertised or promoted by the District, it will provide advance notice of the amount payable, if any, with respect to the support person.

6.5 Disruption of Services

The District is aware the operation of its services and facilities is important to the public. However, temporary disruptions, in whole or in part, in services and facilities may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within the District's control or knowledge. The District will provide notice of the service or facility disruption to the public.

The District department responsible for posting such notices include facility and service managers or their designates. Notice of the service or facility disruption will include:

a) information about the reason for the disruption; and
b) its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that are available.

The District will give notice of the disruption to the public by posting the information in a conspicuous place on the premises of the relevant facility,

and, whenever possible, on the District's website (www.muskoka.on.ca) and in the media as appropriate.

If the disruption is anticipated, the District will provide a reasonable amount of advanced notice of the disruption. If the disruption is unexpected, notice will be provided as soon as possible.

7. Information and Communication

7.1 Feedback

The public can provide feedback on the accessibility of the provision of goods and services by the District through the Accessibility Advisory Committee:

a) By mail or in person: 70 Pine Street, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1N3
b) By telephone to: (705) 645-2231, Ext. 4253
c) By email to: info@muskoka.on.ca

7.2 Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

Except as otherwise provided by the AODA, the District shall, upon request, and in consultation with the person making the request, provide or make arrangements to provide accessible formats and communication supports for persons living with disabilities. Accessible formats and communication supports shall be provided in a timely manner, taking into account the person's accessibility needs and at a cost that is no more than the regular cost charged to other persons.

This does not apply to products and product labels, unconvertible information or communications and information that the District does not control directly or indirectly through a contractual relationship. If it is determined that information or communications are unconvertible, the department shall provide the person requesting the information or communication with:

a) An explanation as to why the information or communications are unconvertible; and
b) A summary of the unconvertible information or communications.

The public can make a request by contacting:

The Clerk's Department:

a) By mail or in person: 70 Pine Street, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1N3
b) By telephone to: (705) 645-2231, Ext. 4253
c) By email to: clerk@muskoka.on.ca

The Municipal Provincial Offences Court:

a) By mail or in person: 76 Pine Street, Bracebridge, ON P1L OC4
b) By telephone to: (705) 645-1231
c) By email to: poa@muskoka.on.ca

7.3 Emergency Procedures, plans or public safety information

The District will provide all existing public emergency procedures, plans and public safety information, upon request, in an accessible format or with appropriate communication supports in a timely manner.

7.4 Accessible websites and web content

Internet websites and web content controlled directly by the District or through a contractual relationship that allows for modification of the product shall be made accessible in accordance with the requirements of the AODA IAS.

8. Employment Standards

8.1 Recruitment

The District will post information about the availability of accommodations for applicants living with disabilities in its recruitment process. Job applicants who are individually selected for an interview and/or testing shall be notified that accommodations for material to be used in the process are available, upon request. The District will consult with any applicant who requests an accommodation in a manner that takes into account the applicant's disability.

Successful applicants shall be notified about the District's policies for accommodating employees living with disabilities as part of their offer of employment.

8.2 Employee supports

The District will inform employees of the policies used to support employees living with disabilities, including policies on the provision of job accommodations that take into account an employee's accessibility needs due to disability. The District will provide this information to new employees as soon as practicable after they begin their employment and provide updated information to all employees whenever there is a change to existing policies on the provision of job accommodations that take into account an employee's accessibility needs due to disability.

8.3 Accessible formats and communication supports for employees

Upon an employee's request, the District will consult with the employee to provide or arrange for the provision of accessible formats and communication supports for:

a) Information that is needed to perform the employee's job; and
b) Information that is generally available to employees in the workplace.

The District will consult with the employee making the request in determining the suitability of an accessible format or communication support. See section 7.2 Accessible Formats and Communications Supports.

8.4 Workplace Emergency Response Information

If an employee's disability is such that workplace emergency response information is necessary and the District is aware of the need for accommodation, this information will be provided to employees. In addition, this information shall be provided, with the employee's consent, to the person designated to provide assistance. The information will undergo review when the employee moves to a different location, when the employee's overall accommodation needs or plans are reviewed and when the District reviews its general emergency response plan.

8.5 Documented Individual Accommodation Plans

A written process for the development and maintenance of documented individual accommodation plans shall be developed for employees living with disabilities. If requested, these plans shall include information regarding accessible formats and communications supports. If requested, the plans shall include individualized workplace emergency response information.

8.6 Return to Work Process

The District maintains a policy that outlines the process for employees returning to work following an injury or illness who require disability-related accommodations (Disability Accommodation HR-014).

8.7 Performance Management, Career Development and Redeployment

The District will take into account the accessibility needs of its employees living with disabilities as well as any individual accommodation plans when providing performance management and career development and when considering redeployment.

9. Built Environment Standards

The District shall comply with the AODA Design of Public Spaces Standards (Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment) when undertaking new construction and/or redevelopment of public spaces.

10. **Community Transit**

In addition to adhering to the policies within this Policy, the District will develop and maintain policies and procedures unique to its service, and that are required in the regulations under the AODA.

Related Policies/Procedures:

FI-013-2018 Tax Assistance to Low-income Seniors or Low-income Persons with Disabilities
HSW-008- Early Safe Return to Work Program for Occupational Injury or Illness
HR-082 Sick Days and Short Term Disability Benefits
HR-014 Disability Accommodation
PP:00 Code of Ethics and Conduct
SH-908 Request for Accessibility Accommodation
SH-201 Mobility Scooters
SH-202 Pets and Service Animals

Reference:

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, S.O. 2005, c. 11 (AODA) *Ministry of the Attorney General – Accessibility for People with Disabilities*
Integrated Accessibility Standards, O.Reg. 191/11 (IAS)
Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997
Blind Persons' Rights Act
Ontario Human Rights Code