



**Executive Summary
Accessibility Audit Project of
City of Welland Facilities**

March 19, 2024

Executive Summary

To further its commitment to citizens and staff with disabilities and to ensure compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005, the City of Welland has initiated the Facility Accessibility Audit Project. Upon completion, this project will allow city staff to systematically plan for the elimination of physical and architectural barriers for those with disabilities, and to design new buildings and facilities that will meet the needs of all members of its community.

The project involved auditing 25 facilities and spaces to identify where barriers may exist in the built environment. The accessibility section of the Ontario Building Code (OBC Section 3.8) and the AODA's Design of Public Spaces Standard was used as the basis of the audit tool. The audit also referenced the Town of Oakville's Universal Design Standard (OUDS).

The project was awarded to The Herrington Group Ltd. Since 2003, The Herrington Group (THG) has conducted accessibility audits of over 1,200 buildings province-wide assessing over 50 million square feet of facility space. THG worked with A.W. Hooker and Associates. A.W. Hooker Associates Ltd. served as the project cost consultant.

1. The Audit – Project Context

1.1 The Impact of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The AODA creates and enforces standards of accessibility and addresses barriers relating to all types of disability. This project was informed by the Design of Public Spaces Standard, GAATES Illustrated Technical Guide, (DOPSS), the Town of Oakville Universal Design Standards, as well as newly updated sections of the Ontario Building Code, Section 3.8.

This audit affords a “snapshot” of accessibility in relation to these standards. It indicates the level of non-compliance, priority of concerns and associated cost of bringing its facilities up to current codes and standards as of 2024, should the City choose to initiate these changes.

It provides the City with a quantifiable baseline and a measurable understanding as to the extent of the accessibility currently available within its facilities and venues and provides recommendations to improve accessibility in the future.

1.2 Audit Methodology and Scope

This report includes 25 facilities identified by City of Welland staff. Each facility was assessed for use according to a customized assessment tool created by the consultant. Audits provide a detailed “tour” of each facility, reflecting all external and internal elements, as well as on-site services and amenities. Audit staff begin at the parking and move to the building or public space entry and walk throughout the facility/space (e.g. entrance, access and circulation, meeting rooms, washrooms, stairwells, elevators etc.). The audit team takes specific measurements of facility areas, and elements. A “cross-disability” focus is used, ensuring facilities are assessed for barriers experienced by individuals with mobility, sensory and cognitive disabilities.

1.3 Audit Limitations and Context

The audit report provides reasonable, achievable recommendations over time. For example, in many facilities, doorways ranged from 800 mm – 860 mm wide. Although the Ontario Building Code requires doors in a public path to be a minimum 860 mm wide, the consultant made no recommendation. It is not feasible to widen every doorway within existing structures. Changes to ensure compliance with Standards should be made when there is a change in the facility use or when there is a direct need.

1.4 Report Format and Priority Rankings

This report will act as a tool that will enable the City to prioritize and plan “access improving” initiatives. The audit results are presented in a dataset form to facilitate easy review as well as providing all necessary information, in a succinct format, relating to why the barrier exists and how it can be removed. Recommendations are ranked according to priority levels.

Priority 1

High priority recommendations relate to AODA compliance, specifically compliance with the Design of Public Spaces Standard as required by 2025. Priorities in this category include parking, entrances, and service counters.

Also addressed here are issues that pose an immediate risk of creating or maintaining hazards to life or public safety. High priority items found include access to defibrillators, fire pulls, emergency call buttons in washrooms and visual fire alarms.

Priority 2

Medium priority recommendations relate to items that, when completed, will increase

accessibility of the facility, and will ensure Ontario Building Code and DOPSS Regulations compliance. Priorities in this category include automatic doors, improving colour contrast, washroom improvements and ramps.

Priority 3

Low priority items are those which would increase accessibility when needed to accommodate staff or citizens with a disability. Items in this category would ensure compliance with the Town of Oakville OUDS. For example, priorities in this category include the installation of voice announcement panels in existing elevators.

2. Audit Result Observed

Audit results vary across facilities and are largely impacted by the facility's age and the design standards that were in place at the time of construction. Older facilities have more issues than newer ones. Overall, the efforts of the City to increase accessibility, in a cross-disability way, is obvious to the auditing team. Wheelchair accessibility has been well addressed.

In terms of accessibility barriers recurring trends and themes are as follows:

Service Counters

Departmental offices and areas directly serving staff and members of the public are lacking accessible service counters. A requirement of the Design of Public Spaces Standards, the installation of accessible service counters was recommended repeatedly by the consultant.

Washroom Accessibility

Most universal gender-free washrooms do not have wall mounted, fold-down grab bars on the transfer side of the toilet. This is a new requirement of the Ontario Building Code.

Almost all washrooms have sensory deficits, specifically, a lack of visual alarms. The presence of visual alarms was the exception and not the rule for both washrooms with stalls and universal, gender-free washrooms. The availability of visual alarms in these areas is essential as users may become isolated in the event of an emergency.

While washrooms in general address wheelchair accessibility, washroom urinals are not equipped to address the needs of wheelchair users. The audit team rarely found lowered urinals, and none had grab bars installed. Urinal grab bars allow for safe and efficient usage of the fixture.

Sensory Accessibility in Path of Travel

Elevators are equipped with tactile and braille signage, but voice announcement is absent in most elevators. This is particularly important to persons with visual disabilities to be able to operate the elevator independently.

The Design of Public Spaces Standard (DOPSS) provides a prescriptive approach to the use of tactile warning surfaces. The Code clarifies what constitutes a detectable warning surface and where it is required. It assists in ensuring that accessible design goes beyond wheelchair accessibility and addresses items such as the use of guidance patterns, pedestrian crossing patterns and the installation of warning surfaces in a barrier-free path of travel. The audit presents several opportunities to address this need. For example, tactile warning plates are needed in almost all stairwells.

Exterior Access

Accessible parking is available at various lots. The Design of Public Spaces Standard (DOPSS) requires the installation of both car and van accessible parking spaces. All parking spaces meet the needs of both cars and vans but are not labelled as such which is a requirement of the Standard. Additionally, the Standard requires the installation of access aisles in all parking spaces to ensure adequate space is maintained for vehicles with ramps. Although parking spaces are wide enough, many did not have the painted required access aisle.

2.1 Understanding Cost Estimates

Final cost estimates for both campuses total \$3,493,045. Cost estimates are determined using the Elemental Format, which is the national format produced by the Canadian Institute of Quantity Surveyors. Costing is based on retrofitting as opposed to creating “new builds”. Also, all recommendations, however minor were assigned an associated cost, including maintenance related items. Items that were classified as currently “technically infeasible” were also cost.

Costs according to priority levels are as follows:

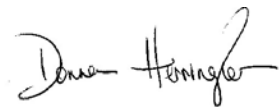
Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Total
\$575,750	\$1,738,545	\$1,178,750	\$3,493,045

The costing report does not consider discounts due to volume purchasing. If the City chooses to make updates based on a specific design element (e.g. door openers, grab bars), supplier discounts may be secured. Also, the costing report does not distinguish between work that is completed internally by city staff and that done by outside contractors. Internal work such as simple, maintenance-related projects (relocation of washroom fixtures, soap dispensers etc.) may be done at a lower price by using internal resources.

3. Conclusion

The success of this project would not have been possible without the assistance and support of city staff. We appreciate all efforts to expedite our work and the ongoing support we received in accomplishing the project deliverables. We sincerely hope that this project will assist the City in its future endeavours to create a universally accessible community.

Respectfully submitted by:



Donna L. Herrington
The Herrington Group Ltd

Additional Resources and Materials Referenced

AODA - Design of Public Spaces Standard

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-make-public-spaces-accessible>

Design of Public Spaces Standard - GAATES Illustrated Technical Guide

<https://gaates.org/resources/>

Oakville Universal Design Standard

Ontario Building Code

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/r13368>