



The Corporation of the Town of Thessalon Accessible Customer Service Policy

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA 2005)

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**The Corporation of the
Town of Thessalon**

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Purpose

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 is Provincial legislation that sets out Standards of compliance to ensure that services provided to Ontarians with disabilities is accessible and provided in a manner that uses reasonable efforts consistent with the core principles of:

Dignity – services are provided in a respectful manner consistent with the needs of the individual.

Independence – services for persons with disabilities shall support their independence while respecting their right to safety and personal privacy.

Integration – allow people with disabilities to fully benefit from the same service, in the same place and in a similar way.

Equality of Opportunity – persons with disabilities are given the same opportunity to benefit from the services provided as other clients.

Scope

Accessible Customer Service will be provided by all employees who communicate with the public, all management and program staff who develop our policies and procedures, all volunteers and any third parties we may contract with.

Our intent is to ensure all persons with disabilities receive customer service in a manner that takes into consideration their disability and offers excellence in customer service.

Commitment

The Town of Thessalon is committed to providing accessible municipal facilities, services, programs and documents to its residents and visitors. The Town of Thessalon strives to prevent and remove barriers to ensure to create a welcoming environment for all ages and abilities. As the Town of Thessalon continues to develop and grow; a sense of inclusion and belonging is at the forefront. Accessibility policies, training, procedures and practices are continually reviewed to ensure equal opportunities for all.

The Town of Thessalon is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for people with disabilities. We are committed to treating people with disabilities in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence.

We believe in integration, and we are committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner. We will do so by removing and preventing barriers to

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accessibility and by meeting our accessibility requirements under Ontario's accessibility laws.

The Town of Thessalon continues to develop and enhance the community to become inclusive for all and in doing so will consult with the public and persons with disabilities, when required, as per the AODA.

Definitions and Accompanying Policy

Person with a Disability:

The definition of disability under the AODA is the same as the definition of disability in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Section 2 states that "Disability" means;

- a) 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 on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
- b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
- d) a mental disorder; or
- e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

Communication is a process of providing, sending, receiving and understanding information. This section of the regulation is a specific requirement to communicate with an individual with a disability in a way that takes the person's disability into account. This means that you must consider how the disability affects the way that the person expresses, receives or processes communications. The goal is to communicate in an effective way.

Policy

When communicating with a person with a disability, The Corporation of the Town of Thessalon (hereinafter referred to as the "Municipality") will do so in a manner that takes into account the person's disability.

The Municipality is committed to providing fully accessible telephone service to our customers. Staff will be trained to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language, to speak clearly and slowly and to tailor their responses as much as possible in support of the individual.

Access for persons who are deaf is available by Bell Relay Service (1- 800-268-9243). All staff will be trained on how to use a Bell Relay Service and proper etiquette when using Bell Relay Service telephone.

The Municipality will offer to communicate with customers by other means, such as e-mail, if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.

Support Person

A support person is a person who accompanies a person with a disability to assist him or her. A support person can be a professional, a family member, a friend, or other person who assists a person with a disability with communication, mobility, personal care, or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

Policy

A support person is a trusted individual chosen by a person with a disability who assists with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods, services, or facilities. The Municipality is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person.

Please contact the event organizer for further details if there are any applicable fees for the support person.

The Municipality may require a person with a disability to be accompanied by a support person when on the premises, but only if, after consulting with the person with a disability and considering the available evidence, the employee determines that,

- a) a support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability or the health or safety of others on the premises; and
- b) there is no other reasonable way to protect the health or safety of the person with a disability and the health or safety of others on the premises.

If a support person is required due to the above circumstances, the Municipality shall waive payment of the amount, if any, payable in respect of the support person's

admission to the premises or in connection with the support person's presence on the premises.

Service Animal

Service animals are used by people with many different kinds of disabilities. Examples of service animals include dogs used by people who are blind; hearing alert animals for people who are Deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing; and animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure and lead them to safety.

A service animal is defined in the Act as:

"Any animal where it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability and if the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse or other government issued certification confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability."

Policy

Persons with a disability, accompanied by a service animal are welcome at The Municipality.

If in an unusual circumstance at an event outside of The Municipality's business office, a service animal is excluded by law, The Municipality will ensure that alternate means are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use, or benefit from the services of The Municipality.

If it is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, i.e. a guide dog with visible harness, The Municipality will use extreme discretion in asking the person with a disability to confirm the animal is a service animal by:

- Asking if the animal is a service animal.
- If concern over inappropriate animal behaviour ask the person to provide documentation from one of the following regulated health professionals confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability:

A member of the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario.

A member of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario.

A member of the College of Nurses of Ontario.

A member of the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario.

A member of the College of Optometrists of Ontario.

A member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

A member of the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario.

A member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario.

A member of the College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists of Ontario.

Staff will offer the location of fresh water for the service animal and where service animals may be walked to relieve themselves.

Assistive Devices

Personal assistive devices are usually devices that people bring with them, such as, walkers, personal oxygen tanks, magnification devices, wheelchairs, canes, or other mobility devices that assist the person with daily living.

Policy

Persons with disabilities shall be permitted to obtain, use, or benefit from goods or services through the use of their own assistive devices.

Staff will be trained and become familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by customers with disabilities while accessing our services.

The Municipality will also ensure that staff knows how to use the assistive devices which are available on our premises, including electronic door openers.

Exceptions may occur in situations where The Municipality has determined that the assistive device may pose a risk to the health and safety of a person with a disability or the health and safety of others on the premises.

In these situations and others The Municipality may offer a person with a disability other reasonable measures to assist them in obtaining, using, and benefiting from the services of The Municipality where other measures are available.

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

Notice of Service Disruption¹

The Standard requires that notice to the public be provided when there is a temporary disruption (planned or unexpected) of facilities or services that are usually used by people with disabilities to access goods or services. This notice must include the reason for the disruption, its duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available and posted in an obvious place.

Policy

The Municipality is aware that the operation of its services and facilities is important to the public. However, temporary disruptions in our services and facilities may occur due to reasons that may or may not be within The Municipality's control or knowledge. Examples of this could be "snow days", disruptions in power/heat beyond our control.

The Municipality will make reasonable efforts to provide notice of the disruption to the public, including:

- The name of the event/service
- The normal service location being impacted
- Alternate service locations or service methods
- Hours of service availability
- Contact information
- Any other information deemed appropriate to deliver our service.

The Municipality will make reasonable efforts to provide prior notice of planned disruption if possible, recognizing that in some circumstances, such as in the situation of unplanned temporary disruption (snow storms), advance notice will not be possible. In such cases, The Municipality will provide notice as soon as possible.

In the event of a temporary service disruption that would limit a person with a disability from gaining access to our office, goods, or service, The Municipality will post a notice or otherwise make the disruption known to customers in the following methods and places:

- Website home page (www.thessalon.ca)
- Notice on entrance doors

¹ For examples, see Appendix A and Appendix B.

Feedback²

The customer service standard requires that a process be in place for receiving and responding to feedback about how you provide goods or services to people with disabilities.

Policy

The Municipality is committed to providing high quality services to all members of the public it serves. At The Municipality we value feedback as it helps us to identify areas that require change and encourage continuous service improvements. Feedback from a member of the public about the delivery of services to persons with disabilities may be given by telephone, in person, in writing, in electronic format or through other methods.

Information about the feedback process is readily available to the public and notice of the process will be posted on The Municipality's website (www.thessalon.ca) and/or in other appropriate locations.

All feedback will be kept in strict confidence and used to improve customer service. In addition, the author of the feedback will be provided a response as promptly as possible, in the format in which the feedback was received outlining actions deemed appropriate, if any.

Feedback will be reviewed at each staff management meeting to review and monitor our progress. Should feedback include individual staff members, management will meet with staff member to discuss/remedy.

Feedback mechanisms:

- Print format Accessible Customer Service Questionnaire available at the front counter in large print. (14 and 18 font, verdana)
- www.thessalon.ca link on The Municipality website.

Training

The Accessible Customer Service Standards requires providers to train all staff, including volunteers on how to provide customer service to people with disabilities. Training should help to dispel myths, misconceptions, stereotypes and fears about people with disabilities.

² For an example, see Appendix C.

Training must include:

- A review of the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard.
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disability.
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device, service animal or a support person.
- How to use the equipment or assistive devices available on your premises or that you otherwise provide that may help with the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing your goods or services.

Under the Act training must be provided:

- To every person who deals with the public or other third parties on your behalf, whether the person is an employee, agent, volunteer or otherwise.
- To every person who participates in developing your policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to members of the public or other third parties.
- To new staff who deal with members of the public or other third parties or who participate in developing your policies, practices and procedures on the provision of goods or services to the public or other third parties in accordance with the training requirements set out in the standard. Training will be provided as soon as is practicable after they are assigned applicable duties.
- In connection with any changes to your policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.

Policy

The Municipality will ensure that all staff and volunteers who interact with our customers or create policy/procedures are trained as required by the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service. Ongoing training to ensure excellence in the way we serve our customers with disabilities will be conducted with “mini” training and awareness as part of our annual accessibility policy reviews. The content of the training will include:

- Overall review to ensure and build on awareness of the purposes of the AODA.
- The specific requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07), now part of the Integrated Standards Regulation.
- Instruction on The Municipality’s Accessible Customer Service policies, procedures and practices pertaining to the provision of goods and services to

persons with disabilities; and how to interact and communicate with persons with disabilities.

- What to do if a person with a particular type of disability is having difficulty accessing our services.
- How to interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices or who require the assistance of a support person or service animal.
- Information about the equipment or devices available on the premises of The Municipality that may help with the provision of services to persons with disabilities.
- Ongoing awareness sessions with other disability service providers to gain additional awareness and insight.

Timeline for Training

Training will be provided as a priority for new hires and included in new employee orientation package. New employees and volunteers will be required to complete the Accessible Customer Service online training module at www.accessforward.ca as part of new employee or volunteer orientation.

Ongoing training will be provided to all staff and volunteers to ensure ongoing learning, development and employee engagement in providing exception service to our ratepayers.

Training will also be provided with any change to The Municipality's policies, procedures and practices governing the provision of services to persons with disabilities.

Training Records

The Municipality will keep records of all Accessible Customer Service training, to include dates and content of training provided to each employee and volunteer.

Provision of Accessible Customer Service to persons with disabilities will be reviewed with each staff member at all performance evaluations.

Notice of the Availability of Documents and Format of Documents

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service requires all public organizations ensure customers are notified that the documents required under the Standard are “available upon request by posting the notice at a conspicuous place on the premises you own or operate, by posting it on your website or by another method that is reasonable in the circumstances”.

The Standard also requires a copy be made available to anyone who asks in a format that considers their disability.

Policy

The Municipality will notify customers by posting notice of availability of documents in conspicuous place on our premises.

Our policy and procedures in providing documentation are:

- When providing a document to a person with a disability The Municipality will provide the document, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes the person’s disability into account. Staff is instructed to ask our customer if they require information/documentation in an alternative format.
- All forms, documents, and materials will include “Alternative formats available upon request”.
- **As a work in progress**, all existing forms and documents will be made accessible in the following formats:
 - Large print
 - Web accessibility
 - All existing in-house forms that would be normally available for the public will be reviewed for “plain language” content and revised where necessary
 - Any future in-house forms that would normally be available for the public will be created with plain language

The Municipality uses many governmental documents and requests alternative formats of all documents when ordering materials from a Provincial or Federal program.

A copy of any of our documents is available to anyone who asks for them. Print copies are available at the set fee.

Accessibility Disclaimer

The Town of Thessalon is committed to responding to the accessibility needs of the community. This commitment extends to our website. The Municipality's website has been designed to be meet the Province of Ontario's Accessible Information and Communications Standard (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005).

Whenever possible, documents (PDF, Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint) are posted to the website as accessible documents. An ongoing effort is being made to make historical documents available and compliant with the standard, although at this time there are some limits in our ability to do so.

The Municipality recognizes situations where it is not practicable or possible to present content in an accessible format. In these cases, best efforts are used to provide citizens an accessible alternative or assistance in acquiring the information they need. Should you need assistance in obtaining an accessible alternative for non-accessible content, contact the Municipality by dialing 705-842-2217 or townofthess@thessalon.ca.

Modifications to this and future policies

The Municipality is committed to developing customer service policies that respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

Therefore, any changes made to this policy will consider the needs of people with disabilities.

Any policy of The Municipality that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or removed.

Appendix A: Sample Document

Notice of Planned Service Disruption

There will be a scheduled service disruption at *(address)* (*indicate reason, e.g. electrical work is being carried out and our power will be turned off*) impacting the delivery of goods and services for customers **on (date)**.

The goods and services unavailable during this service disruption are:

1. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Floor)*
2. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Floor)*
3. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Floor)*
4. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Floor)*
5. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Floor)*

The services listed above can be accessed at the following time, date, location, or method:

1. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Location, Date, Time)*
2. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Location, Date, Time)*
3. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Location, Date, Time)*
4. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Location, Date, Time)*
5. *(Service/Event Name)* *(Location, Date, Time)*

We apologize for any inconvenience this disruption has caused.

Should you require additional information on the delivery of this service, please call our office at *(contact number)*.

Appendix B: Sample Document

Notice of Unplanned Service Disruption ~ The Municipality

Due to unforeseen circumstances, (*indicate reason where appropriate, e.g. weather conditions*) there is a service disruption at (*address*) impacting the delivery of goods and services for customers from (*time*).

The goods and services unavailable during this service disruption are:

1. (*Service*)
2. (*Service*)
3. (*Service*)
4. (*Service*)
5. (*Service*)

The services listed above can be accessed at the following time, date, location, or method:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. (<i>Service/Event Name</i>) | (<i>Location, Date, Time</i>) |
| 2. (<i>Service/Event Name</i>) | (<i>Location, Date, Time</i>) |
| 3. (<i>Service/Event Name</i>) | (<i>Location, Date, Time</i>) |
| 4. (<i>Service/Event Name</i>) | (<i>Location, Date, Time</i>) |
| 5. (<i>Service/Event Name</i>) | (<i>Location, Date, Time</i>) |

We apologize for any inconvenience this disruption has caused.

Should you require additional information on the delivery of this service, please call our office at (*contact number*).

Appendix C: Providing Goods and Services to People with Disabilities Feedback Form

Accessible Customer Service Feedback Form

Thank you for visiting *The Municipality*. We value all of our customers and strive to meet everyone's needs. Your feedback is important to us.

To help us better serve you by providing fully Accessible Customer Service, please complete our feedback form using this form or asking us for the form in alternative formats.

Did we respond to your customer service needs today? YES NO

Was our customer service provided to you in an accessible manner?

YES SOMEWHAT NO (please explain below)

Did you have any problems accessing our goods and services?

YES (please explain below) SOMEWHAT (please explain below) NO

Please add any other comments you may have:

Contact information (optional):

Thank you.

Organization contact information.