

Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee Terms of Reference - DRAFT

1. **POLICY PURPOSE:**

This policy outlines the terms of reference for a joint accessibility advisory committee for member municipalities in Waterloo Region. The Committee will be known as the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee or “GRAAC”.

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) municipalities with more than 10,000 residents must have an accessibility advisory committee.

The AODA is legislation to improve opportunities for people with disabilities. Lived experience and knowledge of disability are important in identifying, preventing, and removing barriers to accessibility. The GRAAC allows people with disabilities and people with knowledge of disability to give input on accessibility and municipal work.

These terms of reference were developed under the guidance of the AODA as outlined in section 29 of the Act.

2. **DEFINITIONS:**

“Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)” is Ontario legislation. It provides a framework for creating a barrier-free province for people with disabilities. The AODA’s goal is to improve accessibility across various sectors, including municipalities. The overall goal is to create better access, opportunities, and inclusion for people with disabilities in Ontario.

“Accommodations” are supports that allow equal access and participation.

“Ad hoc” means creating something that is not originally planned, but that becomes necessary.

“Advisory Committee” is a group appointed by Council(s) to give advice to Council(s) and municipal staff on the work they do, the spaces they create and maintain, and the services they provide.

“Agency” is a business or community organization with a focus to serve and/or support people with disabilities in Waterloo region.

"Barrier" is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in society. Barriers can be:

- Physical
- Architectural
- Information or communications
- Attitudinal barrier
- Technological barrier
- Systemic barrier
- A policy or practice.

"Co-Chair" means one of the leaders for committee meetings. Two co-chairs are elected annually in December by GRAAC. Together they provide leadership to move through the meeting agenda, ensure decorum is kept at meetings, and that the rules of procedure and conduct are followed.

"Committee Administrator" is a staff member from the Coordinating Municipality who provides administrative support to the Committee to complete tasks including but not limited to the agenda, minutes, and accommodations.

"Committee Members" have experience and knowledge of disability, have lived disability experience or are representatives from agencies serving people with disabilities.

"Coordinating Municipality" is the municipality that is identified by the staff coordination group as the lead in the coordination of the committee. This is reviewed every 2 years.

"Councils" are the elected councils of the member municipalities.

"Disability" means a physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual or mental condition that impacts a person's life, and potentially their ability to have full access and inclusion when barriers are present that do not accommodate that condition. Disability can occur at any point in a person's life. Some people are born with a disability. Some develop a disability later in life. Disability can be permanent, temporary, or episodic.

"Diversity" is the presence of different characteristics that contribute to a person's identity. The more different characteristics/identities present among people in a group, the more diverse the group is. These characteristics include but are not limited to: race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, socioeconomic status, language, and physical ability.

“Equity” is an approach that would provide fair and equal access and opportunity for everyone. Equity addresses discrimination, exclusion and barriers experienced by distinct groups.

“Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)” is a regulation under the AODA. It sets out accessibility requirements that organizations must follow to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

The IASR provides a framework for creating more accessible communities, workplaces, services, and public spaces through standards in five key areas:

- Information and Communications – Ensures information, websites, and communication methods are accessible and available in formats that meet diverse needs.
- Employment – Requires accessible practices throughout the employment lifecycle, including recruitment, hiring, accommodation, return-to-work processes, and career development.
- Transportation – Establishes accessibility requirements for public transit and other transportation services to improve access and independence.
- Design of Public Spaces – Sets accessibility requirements for newly constructed or redeveloped public spaces, such as sidewalks, trails, parking areas, service counters, and recreational facilities.
- Customer Service – Requires organizations to provide goods, services, and facilities in ways that respect the dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity of people with disabilities.

Together, these standards support Ontario’s goal of creating a more accessible and inclusive province.

“Inclusion” Ensuring all people are welcomed, valued, and involved in ways that are accessible, fair, and respectful.

"Legislation" refers to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, as amended, or its associated Regulations, as applicable.

“Municipal Staff Representatives” means a staff member from a member municipality who attends meetings to receive advice and support the Committee in reaching decisions. Each of the member municipalities, where possible, will



have a staff person in attendance at each Committee meeting and at coordination meetings.

“Non-Voting Member” is a person who is formally part of a committee, and can actively take part in discussions, offer insights, and contribute expertise, but does not have voting rights.

“Ontario Building Code” is a set of regulations developed by the Government of Ontario that governs the construction, renovation, and alteration of buildings in the province.

“Member municipalities” are the municipalities listed in Schedule ‘A’ of the document.

“Pecuniary Interest” refers to a financial stake or involvement someone has in a particular matter. This means the person has potential to gain or lose money or have their financial position directly affected by the outcome of a decision or transaction.

“Quorum” is the minimum number of members in attendance at a meeting to advance the business of the Committee.

“Ratification” refers to the action of signing or giving formal consent to a treaty, contract, or agreement, making it officially valid.

“Staff Coordination Group” is the group of staff that is consulted to support the overall coordination of the committee.

“Sub-Committee” is a smaller committee which includes some members of the larger committee. The subcommittee is assigned to focus on a particular task within the committee's jurisdiction. The subcommittee has a responsibility of reporting to the larger committee.

“Waterloo Region” is the geographic area which encompasses all the member municipalities as outlined in Schedule ‘A’ of the Terms of Reference.

“Voting Member” is a person who has the formal right to vote on matters presented for decisions.

3. **POLICY CONTENT:**

3.1 **Purpose of the Committee**

The GRAAC will provide advice to Councils and staff on accessibility matters in Section 29 of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

3.2 Governance

The GRAAC is governed by procedures detailed in the Municipal Act, the AODA, 2005, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, the coordinating municipality's Code of Conduct, and any other relevant legislation.

The Committee will rely on the Procedural By-law of the Coordinating municipality as the default for procedural guidance.

3.3 Mission

The GRAAC assists the member municipalities to fulfill the requirement for a municipal accessibility advisory committee under the AODA by providing advice to identify, prevent and remove barriers to participation.

3.4 Mandate

The GRAAC will provide advice and recommendations to Councils and staff from the member municipalities about facilities, public spaces, infrastructure, programs, services, activities and policies to improve inclusiveness and accessibility for people with disabilities in areas outlined in the AODA.

3.5 Legislated Responsibilities

- a. Advise Council and staff of the member municipalities about municipal accessibility plans. This includes developing the plans and implementing them.
- b. Inform Council and staff of the member municipalities on the accessibility of buildings, structures or premises that the municipalities maintain, lease, purchase, construct or significantly renovate.
- c. Review and advise on the accessibility of site plans and drawings as described in Section 41 of the Planning Act, as selected and discussed at GRAAC meetings or sub-committee meetings. This includes all municipal building projects for member municipalities.
- d. Perform any other relevant work as specified in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) (O. Reg. 191/11).

3.6 Other Duties / Responsibilities



- a. Consult with people with disabilities, community groups, and organizations representing persons with disabilities to better understand their needs, priorities, and goals. Share these learnings with the Committee.
- b. Provide advice to staff and Councils of the member municipalities on ways to better include and serve people with disabilities in municipal services.
- c. Participate in consultation opportunities as they relate to the review of relevant legislation, regulations, and standards (such as AODA, Ontario Building Code, IASR).
- d. Advise about accessibility of existing and proposed procurement processes.
- e. Suggest relevant agenda items to be added to a future agenda.

In between Committee meetings, members can request to add agenda items by notifying a Co-Chair or Staff Liaison. Agenda item requests are not guaranteed to be added to a future agenda. They will be considered by the Staff Coordination Group on a case-by-case basis. If an agenda item cannot be added, the reason will be provided in writing.

3.7 Committee Composition

Voting Members

GRAAC will have a minimum of 12 members and a maximum of 14 members appointed to be on the committee. These members will have full voting privileges. The majority of Committee members must be people with disabilities, as per Section 29 (3) of the AODA. Membership may be made up of the following:

- Up to 4 representatives who live within Waterloo Region townships
- Up to 8 representatives who live within the municipalities of Waterloo Region with at least 4 from the City of Waterloo
- Up to 2 representatives from organizations/agencies representing the interests of people with disabilities.

The overall goal is to have representatives on the Committee from each municipality, as well as people with diverse identities and experiences.

A full list of appointed members will be shared with the clerks of member municipalities. The clerks will share that information with their Councils as an email information item.

Non-Voting Members

Each of the member municipalities will appoint at least one and up to two staff representatives to the Committee. They may not vote.

Each of the member municipalities can also appoint a member of Council as a representative on the Committee. They may:

- Attend all meetings
- Share and discuss relevant issues relating to their municipality
- Communicate their municipality's perspective

They may not vote.

3.8 Quorum

Quorum is when most of the voting members of the Committee are present at a committee meeting. Quorum is needed to move forward the formal business of the meeting. With a membership of 12, 7 is the minimum number of members that must be present to achieve quorum. With a membership of 14, 8 is the minimum number.

Quorum is reduced if a member(s) resigns from the committee, or if fewer than the target number of members are appointed to the committee.

If quorum is not achieved at a meeting, the meeting may continue but no decisions may be made, and no resolutions may be passed. Any items on the Agenda requiring a decision or resolution of the Committee will be referred to the next scheduled meeting. For any member taking part virtually, where possible cameras are encouraged to be on, to ensure quorum is kept.

3.9 Voting

Every member of the committee must vote, including the Co-chairs. Those members who are present at a Committee meeting when a decision is made shall vote, except if they are disqualified from voting because of a pecuniary interest or are absent from the meeting during the vote. Any member who declines to vote will be recorded as voting in the negative (opposed). If the vote is tied, the motion being voted on is considered lost.

3.10 Committee Member Attendance and Expectations

Any member of the Committee who does not attend three regular meetings in a row may be removed from the Committee. Members are encouraged to let the Committee Administrator or Municipal Staff Representatives know if they can't attend a meeting. Committee member attendance may be taken into consideration when considering members for reappointment.

3.11 Committee Term

Committee members will serve for a two-year term. They will remain members of the Committee until new members are appointed. If a Committee member can no longer be a member before the end of their term, the Coordinating Municipality will recruit a replacement member for the rest of that term.

The Coordinating Municipality may review previously received applications for membership to the committee to see if there is a candidate that serves the committee's overall membership goals (e.g. municipal representation, or perspective/lived experience the committee would benefit from) and recommend to Councils their appointment. Otherwise, the Coordinating Municipality will issue a call for recruitment to fill that vacancy and term. Pending municipal review and advisement to Councils, Councils will appoint another person for the unexpired term.

There will be no limit to the number of consecutive terms that a member can serve. However, reappointment is not guaranteed. Appointments will depend on:

- Who has applied
- Priorities of the committee and the member municipalities it serves,
- Nominating committee's review of applications
- Councils' confirmation of appointments.

3.12 Committee Recruitment and Appointment Process

Applications for the Committee will be received by the Coordinating Municipality. All member municipalities are encouraged to advertise the recruitment process. Community organizations serving the interests of people with disabilities should be involved in advertising recruitment.

Recruitment communications must be inclusive and accessible.

The timeline for recruitment is:

- Recruitment will begin three months before the start of the new committee term.
- It will close after one month.
- The application review period will be one month long. It will begin after recruitment has closed.
- Applicants will be notified of their application status one month before the beginning of the new term.
- Successful applicants who are new to the committee will receive mandatory orientation.

Applications will be reviewed and vetted through a Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee will include relevant staff representatives from member

municipalities as well as Council representatives from member municipalities who sit on GRAAC.

The overall goal of the nomination process is that successful applicants represent the 7 municipalities of Waterloo Region, as well as reflect a broad spectrum of disability and the diversity of our community. Community organizations applying for membership must represent and serve the interests of people with disabilities in the community. And they must maintain positive and productive relationships with local disability communities.

Once the Nominating Committee completes its review, they will send their recommendations for members to the participating Municipal Clerks offices of the member municipalities. They will send recommended member applications along with the unselected applications. The Municipal Clerks will share the Nominating Committee's recommendations with their Councils. The Councils will then consider the Nominating Committee recommendations in closed meetings of Council and confirm the member appointments.

Once confirmed, the municipal clerks for member municipalities will be provided with the full list of approved membership, which they will email to the respective councils as an information item, along with a copy of the appointment bylaw.

3.13 Meeting Schedule and Location

GRAAC will generally meet monthly ten (10) times per year, in the afternoon on the third Thursday of the month. There are no meetings in July nor August.

The Coordinating Municipality will prepare an annual schedule that will be added to all member municipalities' websites. The goal is for dates and meeting locations to be consistent. This will make it easier for members to plan and prepare for meetings. However, the date and location of the meeting can be changed by the Coordinating Municipality in consultation with the Staff Coordination group if needed. Notice of changes will be provided at least two weeks in advance of the meeting date to ensure that appropriate accommodations (e.g. transportation, childcare, ASL interpreters) can be made to support member attendance. Notice of any modified meeting dates and/or locations will be updated on all member municipalities websites.

Staff will aim for all meetings to be in a hybrid meeting format, with an in-person and virtual/telephone option. When hybrid is not possible, the default will be virtual. Notice of the meeting format will be shared on the meeting agenda. If inclement weather occurs, the meeting will be virtual/telephone.

3.14 Open Meetings

All meetings are open to the public except for reasons outlined under Section 239 of the Municipal Act, as amended. No person will be excluded from meetings except for improper conduct, as defined by the Coordinating Municipality's Procedural By-law. If there is a matter under consideration that justifies a closed meeting under the coordinating municipality's procedural by-law, the coordinating municipality will work with their clerks to confirm a closed meeting is necessary. If necessary, a special closed session of the committee will be called. When a matter is considered in a closed meeting, members are expected to maintain confidentiality about the meeting.

3.15 Coordinating Municipality

The Coordinating Municipality will be the lead in administering and coordinating the Committee. The Coordinating Municipality will be responsible for matters including but not limited to:

- Preparing the annual committee calendar
- Preparing the agenda and any necessary agenda setting meetings
- Meeting minutes
- Attendance management
- Coordinating recruitment
- Coordinating committee orientation
- Coordinating accommodations
- Coordinating the committee budget with input from the coordination group
- Payment of committee meeting expenses/reimbursements, including honoraria.

3.16 Staff Coordination Group

All member municipalities will have a staff member assigned as a primary staff representative. They will support the coordination of the committee as part of a staff coordination group. The staff coordination group will be consulted on process and procedures related to committee operations, including committee orientation. The assigned staff representative will be the primary contact for the Coordinating municipality for matters related to the respective member municipality.

3.17 Staff Representatives - Roles and Responsibilities

Each of the member municipalities should have a staff representative attend meetings to receive committee advice and help the Committee in reaching decisions. The staff representative can be a member of the staff coordination group or a designate.

Staff representatives will also work with the Coordinating Municipality to bring forward agenda items. These items may be from committee members, or from member municipal staff wanting to share information or get feedback from the Committee.



Staff representatives will report back to their Councils on any matters that may require ratification.

Staff representatives will collaborate on matters that involve or impact multiple member municipalities to ensure the necessary processes and approvals are followed. Staff representatives will refer items pertaining to non-member municipalities to the relevant municipality's accessibility advisory committee.

3.18 Co-Chairs

Co-Chairs will be selected annually by the Committee through a vote at the December meeting. The Co-Chairs will lead meetings and act as a liaison between the Committee and staff if members want to bring forward items for consideration on a future agenda. The Co-Chairs will notify the staff of the Coordination Group of any agenda items requested by the members between Committee meetings.

Members who are appointed as a Co-Chair would not be permitted to also chair a sub-committee.

Co-chairs will be oriented to their role and provided with a guide to help them perform their duties.

3.19 Sub-Committees

The GRAAC may identify an area (e.g. transportation) where additional time, consideration, and/or lived experience are needed beyond a regular committee meeting. The Committee, in consultation with Staff Liaisons and Co-chairs, can decide to form a subcommittee to meet those needs. The subcommittee may be ad hoc. It needs to have a specific and clearly explained mandate. It must be reviewed annually by Staff liaisons and Co-chairs to decide whether the subcommittee needs to continue.

Regular GRAAC members may volunteer to serve on the subcommittee. Membership on sub-committees may be expanded, if required, to include people or organizations with a particular area of expertise who are not regular Committee members.

Where a sub-committee is needed, the membership on the sub-committee will be one less than the overall committee's quorum.

Staff representatives and Council representatives shall not be voting members of sub-committees. Their role is to provide input on matters related to their respective municipalities.

The Coordinating Municipality will work with subcommittee members, Staff representatives, and co-chairs to determine an appropriate schedule of meetings for subcommittee work. The Coordinating Municipality's same responsibilities apply to subcommittee meetings as regular Committee meetings. A chair for the subcommittee will be decided through a vote, which will take place when a subcommittee is formed, and once annually as long as the subcommittee continues to exist. The chair the subcommittee will report back to the Regular committee on the business of the subcommittee. One Staff Liaison from each member municipality shall be present at subcommittee meetings. It may be the regular Staff liaison or a member of staff who works in the subject area the subcommittee speaks to.

3.20 Built Environment - Advisory Work

The Committee is required by legislation to review and advise on the accessibility of site plans and drawings as described in Section 41 of the Planning Act, as selected and discussed at GRAAC meetings or sub-committee meetings, including all municipal projects for the member municipalities. Where possible the Committee will appoint a member to lead and organize the advisory work related to the built environment. The appointed member, if absent from a meeting, can appoint a designate. If the Committee cannot appoint a lead, the member municipalities may request assistance from the entire committee to support the built environment advisory work. A routine item will be included on the monthly agenda to ensure any built environment work completed throughout the month is reported back to the Committee, and a tracking sheet summarizing the work completed will be included in the agenda for reference.

3.21 Committee Honorarium and Reimbursement

All member municipalities are committed to addressing any communication, technology, transportation and caregiver (e.g. childcare) and care needs (e.g. attendant care) barriers that would prohibit a person's interest in taking part in the Committee. The goal is to continue developing and fostering a community where equity, inclusion, and anti-racism are core principals of policies, programs and procedures.

The Coordinating Municipality will offer and explain the process for reimbursements. The Coordinating Municipality will initiate honorarium and compensation process payments each quarter. Eligible expenses include:

- Transportation to and from committee meetings
- Caregiving expenses for the duration of committee meetings, plus thirty minutes before and after committee meetings to account for travel time.
- Attendant services



1. Honorarium:

Members will receive a \$150 honorarium for regular monthly meetings.

Collaborative work requested by municipalities outside of committee meetings will be compensated for at \$50/hour.

The honorarium process for disbursement will be based on the Coordinating Municipality's honorarium policy. If the Coordinating Municipality does not have a policy, direction from the policy/policies of member municipalities will be applied.

Where an organization or agency is appointed to the committee, individual honoraria will generally not be provided to the representative. Recognizing that participation can create costs for smaller community and grassroots organizations, the coordinating municipality may provide an equivalent organizational contribution or donation, subject to applicable policies and available funding.

2. Travel Costs:

- **Public transit pass:**

Where possible, Committee members will be encouraged to travel by public transit. Bus, MobilityPLUS or light rail transit expenses will be covered for travel to and from the Committee meeting and subcommittee business on the date of the meeting, through the form of complimentary passes provided by the Coordinating Municipality.

- **Parking:**

Committee members traveling by personal-use-vehicle will be eligible to park at the facility where the Committee meeting or subcommittee business is held, on the day and time of the meeting, at no cost through the form of complimentary parking passes. Committee members needing a parking pass need to tell the Committee Administrator of this need and they will be provided with the parking pass at the meeting.

- **Alternative Transportation Arrangements**

Where public transit or personal-use-vehicles are not possible or practical, Committee members who need an alternate form of transportation can reach out to the Committee Administrator who can assist with supporting transit needs to attend committee meeting(s).

- **Mileage**

Committee members will be eligible for mileage for all Committee meeting and sub-committee related work at the mileage rate determined by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) effective January 1st of each year. Mileage will be reimbursed from the site of departure direct to the arrival site, including the direct return trip.

3. Caregiving

The costs of caregiving that committee members incur will be reimbursed on an as-needed basis. The maximum payable amount is the current Living Wage per hour plus 30 minutes before and after for travel time. Additional information will be communicated to Committee members.

4. Technology

The Committee Administrator will support reasonable technology requests made by Committee members to help remove barriers for participation (such as the loan of a laptop or tablet).

The member municipalities are committed to accommodating the needs of committee members under the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

All reimbursement requests should be arranged directly with the Coordinating Municipality.

3.22 Conflict of Interest

The Municipal Conflict of Interest Act outlines a set of ethical rules for Council, Committee and local board members. These rules apply if members have a pecuniary (financial) interest in a matter that is before them at a meeting. The legislation requires a member with a pecuniary interest to:

- Disclose the interest and its general nature before the matter is considered at the meeting;
- Complete any required form(s) that are necessary by the municipal conflict of interest act;
- Not take part in the discussion or voting on any question in respect of the matter;
- Not try to influence the voting, during or after the meeting; and
- Immediately leave the meeting if the meeting is closed to the public.

3.23 Code of Conduct

Members are expected to follow the Code of Conduct for the Coordinating Municipality. Persons in violation of the Code of Conduct may be referred to their



member municipality staff representative to consider whether the member will be permitted to keep their appointment on the Committee.

Each member will receive a copy of the Coordinating Municipalities Code of Conduct as part of their Committee Orientation at the start of each term.

3.24 Dissolution of the Committee

Dissolution of the Committee requires a resolution from each Council. Dissolution of the committee may be triggered by one of the following:

- Expiration of term
- Completion of task or mandate
- Resolution of issues
- Legislative requirement no longer exists or new direction on the requirement is issued by the Province
- Merger with another committee
- Recommendation by the GRAAC, staff or Council

4. HISTORY of POLICY CHANGES

The Terms of Reference was previously approved in 2016 when the Committee was governed and administrated by the City of Kitchener. An extensive rewrite of the Terms of Reference was completed in 2026 to align with governance administration being reassigned to Region of Waterloo and City of Waterloo.

The member municipalities will review the Terms of Reference every second term.

Terms of Reference Adoption Dates

- Region of Waterloo, Fall 2026
- City of Waterloo, Fall 2026



Schedule 'A'
Member municipalities

1. Region of Waterloo
2. City of Waterloo