



ESSEX REGION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

1.0 BACKGROUND

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) was passed by the Ontario legislature with the goal of creating standards to improve accessibility across the province. The AODA allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility designed to make Ontario more accessible.

Conservation Authorities across Ontario must comply with this legislation by January 1, 2012.

2.0 PURPOSE

- 2.1 The **Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) Accessible Customer Service Policy** was developed in response to the first specific standard of the AODA, which is to provide for service delivery in a way that preserves the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.

3.0 PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Goods and services should be provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- 3.2 Goods and services to persons with disabilities will be integrated unless an alternate measure is necessary, whether temporarily or permanently, to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the goods and services.
- 3.3 Persons with disabilities will be given an equal opportunity to obtain, use and benefit from the goods and services.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 Except where otherwise stated in this policy:

“Person with Disabilities” means, according to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*:

- 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, 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 developmental disability,

- c) 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.

“Service Animals” means:

- a) A “guide dog,” as defined in Section 1 of the Blind Persons Rights’ Act; or
- b) A “service animal” for a person with a disability, if:
 - i) it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for the reasons relating to his or her disability; or
 - ii) the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability
- c) A customer with a disability who is accompanied by a service animal must maintain care and control of the animal at all times.

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

5.0 SCOPE

- 5.1 The ERCA is committed to being responsive to the needs of all residents, customers and visitors to Essex Region.
- 5.2 This policy applies to:
 - a) all departments within the ERCA.
 - b) all employees, unionized, non-unionized and Contract staff.
 - c) All members of ERCA’s Board of Directors.
 - d) all volunteers who interact with the public on behalf of the ERCA.

6.0 PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

- 6.1 The ERCA will make reasonable efforts to ensure its policies, procedures and practices consider people with disabilities; and ensuring its services are provided in an accessible manner.

Communications

- 6.2 Communications will be considered in a manner that considers a person’s ability.
- 6.3 Upon request, the ERCA shall give the person the document, or the information contained in the document, in a format that takes into account the person’s disability.

- 6.4 Material printed in-house and publications produced on behalf of the ERCA should contain a note indicating “alternate formats are available upon request” and include relevant contact information.
- 6.5 In-house printing, where possible, should adhere to the CNIB’s Clear Print Standards or any subsequent accessible information and communication policies.
- 6.6 The ERCA will consult the person requesting the document to determine an appropriate accessible format of the document or information requested in accordance with the provisions of this policy.
- 6.7 Materials that are unavailable in an appropriate format will be converted and made available in a reasonable time frame, and at the expense of the responsible department.
- 6.8 A reasonable time frame will depend on the media chosen, the size, complexity, quality of source documents, availability of translation equipment, and number of documents to be converted.

Guide Dogs or Service Animals

- 6.9 Persons with disabilities accompanied by a guide dog or service animal will be permitted in those areas of the premises owned or operated by the ERCA that are typically open to the public unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law.
- 6.10 Persons with disabilities accompanied by a support person will be permitted to be accompanied by that support person in premises normally open to the public.
- 6.11 If an amount is payable by a person for admission to the premises or in connection with a person’s presence at the premises, the Authority will ensure that notice is given in advance about the amount, if any, payable in respect to the support person.

Training

- 6.12 Staff and volunteers who interact with the public or who are involved in the development of policies, practices and procedures regarding the provision of goods or services for the ERCA will receive appropriate training.
- 6.13 The ERCA shall ensure that the following persons are trained on the policies, practices and procedures establishing the accessible provision of its goods and services to persons with disabilities:
 - a) Every person who deals with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of the ERCA, whether the person does so as an employee, agent, volunteer or otherwise.
 - b) Every person who participates in developing the ERCA’s policies, practices and procedures governing the provision of goods or services to members of the public or other third parties.
- 6.14 This training will include a review of the purposes of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the requirements of this policy, including, but not limited to the following matters:
 - a) Interacting and communicating with persons with various types of disabilities.

- b) Interacting with persons with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal or the assistance of a support person.
- c) Use of equipment or devices available on premises owned or leased or otherwise provided by the ERCA that may help with the provision of goods or services to a person with a disability.
- d) Assisting persons with a disability with accessing goods or services provided by ERCA.

6.15 The ERCA will log and maintain records which will record the details of the training provided, as well as the name of the person, location, and date the training was completed.

7.0 ASSISTIVE DEVICES

7.1 The Authority acknowledges that persons with disabilities may elect to use their own personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from the goods and services offered by the Authority.

7.2 Should a person with a disability be unable to access ERCA's goods and services through the use of their own personal assistive device, the ERCA will ensure the following measures:

- a) Determine if the provision of the good or service is inaccessible, based upon the individual's requirements.
- b) Assess potential accessible service delivery options to meet the needs of the individual.
- c) Notify the person with a disability of an alternative method of providing the goods or service and how they can access the alternative, temporarily or on a permanent basis.

8.0 SERVICE DISRUPTION

8.1 Notice will be provided when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access Authority services are temporarily disrupted.

8.2 Notice of the disruption must include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or service, if any, that are available.

8.3 If a temporary service disruption of the website is planned, advance notice shall be provided to the extent possible.

8.4 In the event of an unplanned service disruption, notice will be given as soon as feasibly possible.

8.5 Notice will be given by posting the information about the service disruption at a conspicuous place on premises owned and operated by the ERCA, as well as by posting the information on the ERCA website (www.erca.org) and providing audio messages by the automated telephone attendant for the facility where the service disruption is going to take place.

9.0 FEEDBACK PROCESS

9.1 Should a member of the public wish to make a complaint regarding the accessible provision of goods or services they have received:

- a) The member of the public can advise the ERCA of their complaint or concern through any of the following means:
 - i) Make a submission through the on-line feedback form available on the Essex Region Conservation Authority website www.erca.org
 - ii) Send an e-mail outlining the nature of the complaint or concern to the following e-mail address: accessibility@erca.org
 - iii) Contact by telephone the Department Head or designate responsible for delivering the goods or services for which there is a complaint or comment. If the Department Head is not known, complaints can be directed to the General Manager;
 - iv) Attend the office and meet the Department Head or designate responsible for delivering the goods or services for which there is a complaint or comment;
- b) A response will be provided to anyone providing a complaint or comment regarding the provision of accessible goods and services, in the same manner as the complaint or comment was received, within 30 days.
- c) If deemed appropriate, a complaint or comment regarding the provision of accessible goods and services may be directed to the Essex Region Conservation Authority General Manager for recommendations on how to address the complaint or comment.
- d) If agreement on the resolution of a complaint cannot be reached, the complainant has the option of presenting the complaint to the Board of Directors for final disposition.