

TOWNSHIP OF ESSA

Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)

2004 – 2005 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

THE TOWNSHIP OF ESSA

Well-named the “Garden of Simcoe County”, Essa was surveyed in 1820 and named after the daughter of the great Indian Chief, Tecumseth, who distinguished himself as a British ally in the War of 1812. The first pioneers in the area were the Dinwoodys, McLeans and Duffs, who in 1820 settled at Cloverhill. Essa Council was first organized in 1850 under Reeve Henry Morris. With the coming of the Northern Railroad in 1855, lumber baron Jonas Tarbush with W. Proudfoot laid out the town site of Angus that became the centre of a great lumber industry, and in fact, the Pine Plains yielded masts for the Royal Navy. With the coming of the Hamilton and Northern Railroad in 1877-78, the centre of commerce moved east to become the Village of Cookstown. Thornton was established in 1833 as Henry’s Corners after original settler and Justice of the Peace, John Henry. Industries included a saw and gristmill and laminating plant. The first settlers to Baxter, originally called “Cob Coy”, followed the lumbermen in 1858. Ivy was historically famed for the “Fishery” on the Nottawasaga River. In the 1860’s grist mills, such as Bell’s Grist Mill on Bear Creek gave Utopia its start. Other historic communities in Essa include Colwell, Essa Station, Hoe Doe Valley, Grumble Hill, Elmgrove, Cedargrove, Burns, West Essa, Nicolston and Egbert. Originally known as Camp Borden, Base Borden was created as a military base, located partially in Essa, in 1916 during World War I and in 1917 gave rise to the future Royal Canadian Air Force.

The year 2000 marked the 150th anniversary of the Township. Essa is an urban/rural mix and truly a place where Town and Country meet. It is located in the heart of the County of Simcoe, about one hour’s drive north of Toronto. Essa is bordered by the Townships of Clearview and Springwater on the north, the Town of Innisfil and the City of Barrie to the northeast, The Township of Adjala-Tosorontio to the west, and the Town of New Tecumseh to the south. A large portion of Canadian Forces Base Borden is also located within Essa Township.

Today the Township of Essa continues to prosper with a strong agricultural community and substantial urban settlement in Angus, Thornton and Baxter. Base Borden remains an active training base and contributes greatly to the community’s economy.

The Township owns two arenas, two fire halls, two libraries, one each in Angus and Thornton. In addition there are numerous buildings such as the Utopia Community Hall, Angus Community Park Building, the Youth Centre in Angus and the Elmgrove Community Hall.

This document represents a summary of the improvements made since the first year Accessibility Plan was released. Township staff will continue to work in consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee toward continuous improvement of facilities and access. Among other things, this Accessibility Plan describes the measures that the Township has taken in the past, and the measures that will be taken in the future to identify, remove and prevent barriers to people with disabilities who use Township facilities and services, including staff, students, elected officials, visitors, tourists, and other members of the community. The Committee will consider all Township owned and leased properties and identify policies and procedures that would qualify as barriers under the Act.

What is a Disability?

In accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2001, a disability is defined as:

1. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement caused by bodily injury, birth defect, or illness and includes, but is not limited to:
 - a) diabetes mellitus;
 - b) epilepsy;
 - c) a brain injury;
 - d) any degree of paralysis;
 - e) amputation;
 - f) lack of physical co-ordination;
 - g) blindness or visual impediment;
 - h) deafness or hearing impediment;
 - i) muteness or speech impediment; or
 - j) physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal, or a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;
2. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
3. A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;
4. A mental disorder; or
5. An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety & Insurance Act, 1997

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN SUMMARY

The purpose of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the Province. To this end, the ODA mandates that each municipality prepare an annual accessibility plan.

Council has authorized the Essa Accessibility Advisory Committee to assist with fulfilling the requirements and intent of the Act by performing the following duties:

- Work with staff in the preparation of the Township's annual "Accessibility Plan"
- Advise Council on accessibility issues related to the operation, purchase or lease of buildings or structures or parts of buildings or structures used as Township buildings with special attention to those that the public are encouraged to visit or use as a place of employment

- Identify any potential funding that could be available to assist with the removal of barriers for persons with disabilities
- Research and report on specific matters referred to it by Council
- Perform other functions that are specified in the Regulations of the “Ontarians with Disabilities Act”

It is estimated that by the year 2020, the number of persons living in Simcoe County with disabilities will comprise roughly 20% of the population. In an effort to provide a proactive and planned approach to this significant sociological change, the Township of Essa will strive toward:

- The continual improvement of access to Township owned facilities and services for citizens and staff with disabilities.
- The participation of people with disabilities in the development and review of its Annual Accessibility Plans.
- The provision of quality services to members of the community with disabilities.
- Seeking and responding to the input and suggestions made by members of the disabled community.
- Encouraging the local business sector to provide accessible services.
- Provide equal access for all citizens to maintain a high quality of life.
- Providing public education and awareness of the benefits of inclusion for all people.

The Township of Essa Accessibility Plan was prepared by Township staff with input from members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The plan describes measures currently in place, and measures that will be taken over the next two to three years, as the budget permits, to identify and remove barriers, including staff and members of the community at large, and to encourage their participation and inclusion into the community.

The Township is committed to the continual improvement of barrier free access to municipal facilities and services.

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) assists in the preparation of an annual Accessibility Plan that will enable the Township to monitor and meet these commitments. Essa has been, and will continue to be, committed to removing barriers so that successive generations can share and participate in the growth and success of the Township.

Essa Township also shares ownership of the Northwest Simcoe Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee, in conjunction with the Townships of Clearview, Springwater, and the Town of Wasaga Beach.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is guided by the following:

Mission Statement

The Essa Accessibility Advisory Committee is committed to raising community awareness of disabilities and identifying issues that will lead to the elimination of barriers for persons with disabilities.

Mandate

The Essa Accessibility Advisory Committee is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all persons with disabilities by promoting equal opportunity and a barrier free community. The Essa Accessibility Plan will encourage and facilitate accessibility on behalf of all persons by:

- a) promoting public awareness and sensitivity to accessibility issues;
- b) encouraging cooperation among all service and interest groups to ensure a better community for all persons;
- c) identifying and documenting relevant accessibility issues and concerns with respect to all municipal property and buildings;
- d) liaising with Township staff and local organizations in addressing accessibility issues that are related to municipal properties and buildings;
- e) recognizing that the needs of all persons are constantly changing.

Terms of Reference

The Essa Accessibility Advisory Committee will:

- Advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities through the promotion of public awareness and understanding the needs of disabled persons;
- Support the development and implementation of programs, policies and by-laws which promote and create a barrier free community;
- Make recommendations to Council on strategies and policies to ensure that existing barriers are eliminated, and that no new barriers will be created;
- Identify any potential funding opportunities to assist Essa in becoming barrier free;
- Monitor the status of municipally owned and/or operated buildings, facilities and public areas to ensure that they meet the needs of disabled persons;
- Work with Township staff in the maintenance of the Essa Accessibility Plan in accordance with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act;
- Respond to relevant accessibility issues as raised by individuals or community groups;
- Provide a forum for discussion and coordination of accessibility issues with other community groups and agencies.

Accessibility Committee Composition

The Committee is comprised of members of the Essa community who have disabilities, who are caregivers to persons with disabilities, or have knowledge of issues faced by persons with disabilities. At least one member of the Township staff will be in attendance.

The Essa Accessibility Advisory Committee consists of:

Dan Heffernan	Jim Middaugh	Teresa Jazwinski
Rita Heffernan	Susan Klop	Kim MacDonald
Ron Edgar	Bonnie Kerr	Eric LeClair
Carol Trainor, Clerk	Tim Bergman, Building Inspector	

- A Chair shall be elected by a majority vote of the committee annually.
- The Committee will meet as required and, where possible, on a regularly scheduled basis.
- The conduct of business at meetings will be governed by the Township's Procedural By-law unless otherwise stipulated.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The specific objectives of the Accessibility Plan, as outlined by the Act, are as follows:

1. To remove and prevent barriers to equal access for all people with disabilities.
2. A description of the process for the identification, removal and prevention of barriers in the future.
3. A list of the facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services that the Township will review to identify and remove barriers.
4. An account of the measures the Township will take through policy, service and structural changes to identify, remove and prevent barriers and as permitted through the annual budget process.
5. Means by which the Township will make this accessibility plan available to the public.

The Accessibility Plan is a living and working document that will provide and serve as a guide for future administrations and staff to consult and follow. The Accessibility Plan will permit the Township to plan and adjust its policies and procedures to achieve a barrier-free environment in the years ahead.

TYPES OF BARRIERS

There are a number of barriers to access affecting residents and visitors to Essa. These may include, but are not restricted to, visual, hearing and ambulatory incapacity; cognitive; and sports or accidental injuries. While it is not economically possible to address each and every type of barrier, it is important that Council, staff and the Advisory Committee recognize that accessibility issues are not just limited to wheelchair ramps and parking spaces.

Hence, in the course of their duties, the Advisory Committee should work with and encourage the Township to address each facility, process and procedure from more than one point of view. The goal is to provide as much unfettered access as is reasonably and fiscally possible while not compromising the overall integrity and operational ability of the affected site or process. In this manner, the Township will be able to achieve the maximum benefit given the funding and resources available.

For the purposes of the Accessibility Plan, the Advisory Committee shall assist the Township with identifying barriers based on the following criteria:

Barriers	Examples
Physical	Buildings with doors that do not open automatically.
Architectural	Hallways or doors too narrow, where passage is impeded.
Communication	Public notices published in small, hard to define print.
Procedural	New business ventures that do not provide adequate parking or access to their service or facility.
Attitudinal	Staff who speak slowly or loudly to someone with a hearing impairment.
Technological	Township website not designed for visually impaired.

Members of Council, township staff and Committee members must keep in mind that barriers can be either “systemic” or “specific”; that is, barriers that are prevalent throughout the Township or are just specific to one process or facility. Two examples are:

A Systemic Barrier

Job postings and public meeting notices are advertised in local newspapers and on the Website. As the Township website does not have a program for the visually impaired, and visually impaired residents may not be able to read the newspaper, not all residents or viewers have equal access to the information.

A Specific Barrier

There is no elevator in the Thornton arena, therefore any person unable to manipulate the stairs is prevented from participating in events on the upper level.

Barrier Identification

The Township has a number of methods available to identify barriers. Listed below are four proposed barrier-identification methodologies which may be utilized:

Staff Audits	Staff will conduct a series of audits on Township owned properties and services to ensure the continued accessibility measurement.
Input from Staff	The Accessibility Plan will be distributed to staff and department heads inviting their participation and input with respect to identifying and providing solutions to impediments within the municipality.

Committee Audits: The Accessibility Advisory Committee will conduct site visits on Township owned buildings, parks, and services to ensure adequate access is available and that approved recommendations have been acted on.

SCAPD Audits: The Simcoe County Association for the Physically Disabled provides audits of buildings and services, and follows up with recommendations and advice on how to implement and maintain new measures.

From time to time, the Township may choose to undertake the advice and/or recommendations of outside agencies such as the Simcoe County Association for the Physically Disabled (SCAPD), the Simcoe County Health Unit or the Ontario March of Dimes to provide consultative services which can include building and policy audits, a review of criteria, engineering standards, etc. The Advisory Committee may choose to recommend to Council that the Township retain outside consultants to gather or prioritize certain data.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Parking fines increased from \$50 to \$300 for parking in a disabled space without a valid permit. This new fine will apply not only to Township parking lots, but also private parking lots.

Parking enforcement agreements have been secured with the owners of shopping centres and large parking lots to enable Township By-law Enforcement officers to ticket offenders.

Accessibility Audits were conducted on all Township owned facilities in 2003, resulting in a number of deficiencies which needed to be addressed in order to make them more inclusive. In 2004 the Accessibility Committee prioritized buildings and conducted site visits at the two arenas and two libraries which were given priority as they are the most used “public” facilities. Council was provided with a list of recommendations for these facilities, all of which were approved and at the time of writing either have been implemented or are in the process.

The following summarizes the AAC report to Council.

Thornton Arena

Overall the building was found to be quite accessible. Although the main entrance does not have automatic doors, there is a single automatic door at the rear of the building. The cement outside the door was pitted and chipped from a frost heave with a rough, uneven edge of approximately 2 inches in some places that made it difficult to cross. The Committee recommended:

- That the cement pad outside the rear automatic door be repaired and elevated for easy wheeled access.
- That designated signage and parking spaces be painted on the surface of the parking lot. (The parking lot is scheduled for resurfacing this year.)
- That the hand towel and soap dispensers in all washrooms be lowered.
- That accessible signage be placed above and outside the lobby washrooms.

- That Bell Canada be requested to relocate and lower the telephone.
- That contrasting paint colours be added to the floors and door frames to indicate exits.
- That D-handles be installed on the accessible stalls in all washrooms.
- That one row of coat hooks in each dressing room be lowered.
- That the warm viewing area be reconfigured to provide a ramp, a steel railing and open space to permit a wheelchair or scooter in front of the rink window.

The largest item, and one of most concern, is providing space for wheelchairs in the warm viewing area in the lobby. The committee proposed expanding the cement pad and adding a ramp and a steel railing to allow a wheelchair, scooter or person using a walker to utilize this seating area. Florescent paint strips were added to the bottom of the ramp, and a textured surface to prevent slippage when the surface becomes wet from snow boots. This work was completed in the fall of 2004.

There is an event hall on the second floor of the arena which is accessible only by stairs. Council is considering options for this situation, such as making the second floor into a storage room and opening the main floor storage for an additional function space to alleviate concerns regarding second floor access.

Thornton and Essa Centennial Libraries

The Committee found the Thornton Library to be largely barrier free, with these exceptions:

- Automatic door openers need to be installed.
- Head phones with assistive hearing devices should be provided for audio programs.
- Designated parking spaces painted on the parking surface and signs installed.
- The mirror should be lowered and a coat hook provided in the accessible washroom.
- The book return slot to be lowered (requires structural renovation).
- A coat rack should be installed at a lower level.
- Entrances and exits should be clearly marked with contrasting paint and signage.

As the Library Board is a not-for-profit organization, they are eligible for Provincial funding which the Township would not be eligible for. The Library Board will be asked to consider making application to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario or other funding agencies for a grant to purchase and install the required items.

The library branch in Angus was found to be the most accessible of all sites, having a level surface entrance and an automatic door. The only recommendations for the Angus Library were:

- Two designated parking spaces rather than one.
- A crash bar is to be added to the single exit door
- Towel and soap dispensers in the washrooms are to be lowered.
- Contrasting paint and appropriate signage above exits and door frames.
- The book return slot be put into the wood panel at the entrance, and lowered.
- Grab bars, towel holders and soap dispensers in all washrooms will be repositioned.
- Inflow pipes to the sinks will be insulated in both branches.

Given that the Library Board is eligible for provincial grants for accessibility issues, the Committee has suggested that the Board apply for funding to provide a voice/audio system for hearing impairment (which could be shared by both library branches), and a book grabber to reach books on higher shelves. Trillium funds are being considered for the purchase of an armchair for waiting at the circulation desk in Angus, and eventually in Thornton.

The Library has taken the initiative to make a number of changes over and above what the AAC recommended; and they are to be commended for these.

- Booktapes have been moved to public shelving so that borrowers can consult the contents on the back cover without difficulty.
- All public computers in both library branches carry magnification and narration features within the Accessibility program provided by the Microsoft operating system.
- International Symbol of Accessibility signs, with Braille, have been purchased and applied on exterior doors and accessible washroom doors at both branches.
- Wall coverings will be further stained to enhance the contrast of the white door frames.
- Shelving has been rearranged in both branches to make large type books more accessible to elderly borrowers by eliminating the use of highest and lowest shelves. An armchair has been provided in the large type area in Angus for resting, providing more suitable seating. This same options is being pursued for the Thornton branch.
- Quotes will be solicited to construct a ramp between the fiction and non-fiction rooms in Angus as there is currently a 2.25 inch rise which presents a safety hazard.
- With respect to the purchase of an audio system, the Library Board has advised that it is not recommended that audio systems with earphones be provided because of the danger of cross-contamination, and without earphones the sound level would be disruptive in the library setting.

Essa Recreation Centre

Renovations were undertaken over the summer to remedy many of the obvious deficiencies such as barrier free washrooms, change rooms and showers. Ramps (or bringing the surface to grade) will be installed at all entrances and one set of doors will be fitted with automatic openers. Recommendations are as follows:

- Lower the fire extinguisher in the viewing area (it is approximately 5 feet from the floor).
- Bell Canada to relocate and lower the pay telephone.
- A new, more accessible drinking fountain was installed.
- Rubber matting was placed in the accessible viewing area of the rink to prevent slipping and to correct inconsistencies in the floor level.

- Designated parking space signage and paint should be accentuated.
- Better signage and contrasting paint at all exits and door frames.
- Automatic door openers to be installed at the side entrance nearest the gym, and make designated parking spaces available closest to this entrance.

At some point in the future, it was recommended that a ramp be provided for the stage.

OTHER TOWNSHIP OWNED BUILDINGS

Essa Administration Centre

Improvements made in 2004 include:

- Parking fines increased from \$50 to \$300 for parking in a disabled space without a valid permit
- \$300 fine is posted at all disabled parking areas.
- One disabled parking space increased to two; freshly painted; new signage.
- Washrooms improved by ensuring swing doors; opening outward; hooks lowered.
- Contrasting paint applied to door frames.

Remaining to be done:

- Automatic door openers are required at both upper and lower level entrances.
- No access between upper and lower levels except through the exterior doors.
- Doorknobs to be replaced with levers or push bars.
- Washroom signage to include Braille symbols.
- All door frames and exits to be painted in contrasting colours.
- Textured flooring to be applied to tile flooring at exits.
- Stairwell to be painted contrasting colours in lower level.
- Contrasting paint and appropriate signage above exits and door frames.
- Inflow pipes to the sinks to be insulated in both levels
- All sink tap handles to be replaced with wristblade lever handles
- Mirrors are not slanted.

Elmgrove Community Hall

Given the requirements of the Ontario Drinking Water Standards, and the financial burden that may be involved in keeping this hall operational under these standards, the future of this building is unknown pending notification from the Ministry of the Environment about safe drinking water requirements for small institutional buildings.

Should the Township decide to continue the operation of this facility beyond December 2004, the following deficiencies will need to be addressed for accessibility:

- There are no accessible washrooms available.
- Signs are not adequate to provide direction.

- Entrances and exits are not clearly marked by the International Symbol of Accessibility.
- There are no vision panels in doors.
- Round door knobs have not been replaced with lever handles or push plate door pulls.
- Door is not equipped with a power door opener.
- Mirrors are not slanted.
- Curbs are not with line of travel lines.

Angus Community Park Building

- Need light bulbs in exit signs.
- No signs on any doors; require International Symbol of Accessibility.
- Bathroom stalls meet minimum requirements (4' 9" x 4' 9").

Youth Centre

- Path is not wide enough for two chairs to pass.
- Garbage cans/waste receptacles protrude from walls/floor, create barriers.
- Entrances are not clearly marked with the International Symbol of Accessibility.
- Require 24" of clear space beyond the door latch (outward opening).
- Round door knobs have not been replaced with lever handles or push plate door pulls.
- Door is not equipped with a power door opener.
- Wall switches and thermostat are too high
- Curb is not within line of travel lines.
- Exterior ramps are not heated.
- There are no assisted listening systems available for the hearing impaired.

- Washroom turning space is not 5'; wheelchair is not able to back in beside toilet.
- Coat hook is does not meet height requirements.
- Mirrors are not slanted.
- There are no Braille signs on the doors to indicate gender.
- There is not enough room to transfer to toilet in the Women's washroom.
- Door to toilet stall does not open outward; stall size must be increased.
- Door opening is not aligned with clear space next to toilet.
- Door to toilet is not spring type; does not have a door pull on inside.
- Washroom entrance is not clearly marked by the International Symbol of Access.
- Washrooms not designed for disabled persons are not marked to redirect patrons to barrier-free facility.

Utopia Hall

- No wheelchair access.
- No washroom access.

2004 / 2005 OBJECTIVES

New Engineering Standards will provide guidelines which will allow the Accessibility Committee to review and comment on subdivision design, sidewalks, walkways and fencing, lighting, signage, traffic signals, park development and access, grading and textures, and colour coding of walls and floor surfaces.

The Township will move toward site plan and subdivision approval processes which may require specific measures to ensure inclusive access in any new development including parking, ramps, sidewalks and barrier free path of travel.

Subdivision agreements and site plan agreements will be required to meet Engineering Standards. Safer pedestrian access would include textured pavement and crossings, way finding signals and auditory signals.

New fee schedule reflects increased fines for parking in disabled spaces.

All new sidewalks should have curb cuts with a ½ inch lip AND yellow road paint to clearly distinguish the edge of the sidewalk from the road. Sidewalks should have a cut down one side for (white) canes to ensure that visually impaired pedestrians are walking parallel to the sidewalk and do not go astray. The Committee has recommended that these changes be made to existing sidewalks as well.

Incorporate accessibility awareness into planning objectives. For example, subdivision agreements might require all sidewalks to have curb cuts and painted, textured surfaces for the visually impaired. Model home agreements for new subdivisions require wheelchair access.

Parkland must be fully wheelchair accessible with no barriers. Members of the Accessibility Committee have offered to participate in the Salmon Festival Committee which would enable barrier free access to the riverbank.

Any path of travel, whether it be a sidewalk, nature trail or hallway, should be a clear path of travel with no obstructions, overhangs or jutting out of any object.

All buildings should replace doorknobs with levers or push bars to exit, and vision panels should be installed in all doors where feasible.

The Township does not currently issue business licences so no conditions can be made on private enterprise; however, when businesses or commercial entities apply for building permits to build, renovate or expand the Township can require that accessibility measures be implemented.

Council members and Township staff should receive sensitivity training to ensure that all residents and customers are treated equally and inclusively. This program will be integrated into the employee orientation program, and will become mandatory training for all existing staff to help them understand what they can do to provide better service.

Budgetary consideration will be given to making further changes in 2005 in areas such as audio and visual systems, signage, lighting, clear paths of travel, wheelchair access and others to be identified.

In order to keep and maintain our economic goals, one of which is to provide additional opportunities for Township residents to live and work in their own community, it is necessary that opportunities for physically, visually, mental and hearing disabled residents be readily available and barrier free.

The Township of Essa is committed to improving the overall accessibility at its facilities in the years ahead. It is hoped that by working closely with staff, the community and the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Township can improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities. This Accessibility Plan is intended to be the first in a series of important steps toward identifying and removing existing barriers and preventing new ones throughout the community.