Accessible Playground Consultation

Participating Municipalities:

- Municipality of Adelaide Metcalfe
- Municipality of Lucan Biddulph
- Municipality of Middlesex Centre
- Municipality of North Middlesex
- Municipality of Southwest Middlesex
- Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc
- Municipality of Thames Centre
- Village of Newbury

Background

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was enacted in 2005 with the overarching goal for making Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by the year 2025. Under this legislation, an accessible Ontario is to be achieved through the development, implementation and enforcement of accessibility standards.

Accessibility features in the exterior environment will be regulated primarily through the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg 191/11). It should be noted that there are a few areas of the exterior public realm currently regulated by Ontario's Building Code, such as routes within a site to barrier-free entrances, passenger loading zones and parking lots with barrier free parking.

Accessibility of buildings will continue to be regulated through Ontario's Building Code. Ontario's Building Code was updated in 2015 to provide elements within buildings. It should be noted that the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation regulates some building elements associated with providing access to service, such as service counters, fixed queuing lines and seating in waiting areas, whether these elements are indoors or outdoors.

The Standard requires municipalities to consult with people with disabilities in certain circumstances to develop design solutions that reflect local conditions and meet the needs of all users. Consultation is required when a municipality plans to construct or redevelop:

- Exterior paths of travel
- Recreational trails
- Outdoor play spaces
- Accessible on-street parking

There is no one-size-fits-all way to consult people with disabilities. The way you consult and how you determine the final design details is up to your municipality.

Version Date: February 2017

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide municipalities with a guideline when developing or redeveloping an outdoor play space.

Accessible outdoor play spaces feature firm and stable surfaces that can support mobility aids and absorb the shock of a fall to help prevent injuries, as well as features that stimulate all senses – like a water play area or sandbox to enjoy through touch, or a sound area with chimes and other noise makers which can be enjoyed through hearing. They also incorporate active play components that allow children of all abilities to experience climbing, sliding and swinging.

Before developing a new outdoor play space or redeveloping an existing one, a municipality is required to consult with the public and people with disabilities on the needs of children and their caregivers with a variety of disabilities. Municipalities must also consult with their Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC).

The consultation process must address requirements for accessible play spaces for children and caregivers with various disabilities including, but not limited to, sensory and active play components.

Consultation Process

The following individuals were consulted in the development of this document.

1. Consult with local municipal parks and recreation staff.
2. Consult with Accessibility Advisory Committee
3. Online Survey – to allow the public to provide input into the document

Accessible Playgrounds

The following are a list of elements that a municipality should incorporate into an outdoor play space. The following elements have been included in this document as a result of the consultation process listed above.

1. Accessibility Features

Municipalities shall incorporate accessibility features, such as sensory and active play components into the design of outdoor play spaces. These should address the needs of children and caregivers with various disabilities.

Structures should be designed to challenge users of all abilities in a variety of ways, and allow for self-directed play. Structures should be intuitive and simple to understand and use. Include ramps and/or transfer systems to some of the elevated play components.

Offer varied play experiences by providing a variety of play components, opportunities and experiences (e.g., cognitive, problem solving, physical play, graduated challenge, balance and coordination, body control, sliding, spinning, swinging, bouncing, tactile, sensory, etc.)

Integrate play areas that invite engagement between children of diverse abilities.

A minimum of 20% of features incorporated shall be accessible.

Examples of accessible features:

- Play counters
- Crawl tubes/tunnels
- Sand tables
- Ramps connecting components
- Play Panels

- In addition, municipalities shall ensure there is one accessible swing available. Consideration should be given to adults with disabilities, where possible.

Examples of accessible swings:

- Arch swing
- Inclusive Swing Seat

2. Surfaces

Surfaces must be firm and stable, with characteristics to reduce impact and injuries.

Use surfacing that accommodates anyone using a mobility device, such as a cane, walker, wheelchair or scooter.

Surfacing is one of the most significant considerations, given its importance to facilitating easy access to play equipment and experiences, travel to/from and throughout the play area, and safety. It can also be the costliest component of the installation, making accessible play spaces more expensive than traditional playgrounds.

Examples of accessible surface materials:

- Engineered Wood Fiber
  Processed wood ground to a fibrous consistency, randomly sized. Free of hazardous substances. Not to be confused with wood chips.

- Poured-In-Place
  Poured-in-place is a seamless synthetic surface that is formed with a chemical binder and rubber filler.

- Tiles
  Synthetic tiles and mats are a combination of a chemical binder and rubber filler. Intertwining strands create a “trampoline effect” that cushions falls.

- Wood Chips/Bark Mulch
  Bark mulch comes from urban tree management and landscaping programs. Bark mulch may contain twigs and leaves. Wood chips generally do not contain twigs or leaves. Wood sources should be checked prior to chipping for toxins or allergens.

3. Seating areas

Consider providing at least one accessible seating area so that a caregiver with a disability can comfortably observe their child. Install benches with backs and armrests that are strategically placed throughout and surrounding the space, preferably in a shaded area.

Design considerations – A seating area with a bench should extend approximately 1500 mm (60”) beyond the end of the bench, and be a minimum of 1220 mm (48”) deep, to accommodate an individual using a mobility device. These measurements are based on dimensions for a 1828 mm bench (72”).

4. Path of travel

Ensure that there are accessible routes at least 1500 mm (60”) wide, connecting the playground with access elements such as sidewalks and parking lots. Providing accessible walkways will also help children and caregivers with disabilities move into the play areas and between play equipment.

Design requirement – Clear width: Minimum 1500 mm (60”).
Surface: Firm, stable and slip resistant.

Slope of any pathway must meet the Standards minimum requirement for exterior paths of travel. Pathways to and throughout the play space should provide circulation/access to all spaces/equipment.

Sidewalk Slopes

Design requirement – Running slope: no steeper than 1:20 (5%).

Exception: sidewalk beside a roadway can be steeper than 1:20 (5%), but must not be steeper than the slope of the adjacent roadway.

Recreational Trail Slopes

Design requirement – Gentle running slopes are recommended, to minimize the amount of strength and stamina required to use the trail.

Entry Points

Entry points into play spaces should be a minimum of 1000 mm (39”) to allow a mobility device to gain entry, while excluding larger vehicles not considered appropriate for this purpose.

5. Other Considerations

- Through park planning, choose a geographically accessible location within the community. It should be a space that meets the needs of the community.
- Design with existing site characteristics to help minimize the cost of redevelopment.
- Ensure sufficient parking to accommodate users, whether on-site or on-street.
- Ensure that the accessible play structures are integrated into the plan for the entire site.
- Ensure fencing does not increase barriers. Instead it should provide a sense of comfort for both children and caregivers.
- Provide sight lines for supervision.
- Aim to minimize distance from park entry or parking lot to play space.
- Where possible, consider providing accessible washrooms near the play space.
- If possible, consider lighting for your play space. This is not required, but may enhance the space.