

# Standard Index of Accessibility Features That Positively Enhance the Park Experience for Visitors with Disabilities

To create inclusive park experiences, considerations must include the needs of the whole environment and the whole community. The following is a selection of standard park accessibility features aimed at thoughtfully creating a welcoming atmosphere and ensuring inclusivity for all to the greatest extent possible. Areas covered here include accessible parking, pathways, playgrounds, restrooms, seating and benches, and signage/wayfinding. Because many people with disabilities do not drive, accessible park entrances will need to be located near a TTC stop or a Wheel-Trans drop off/pickup point.

This document provides a summary of key feedback points that come up repeatedly from the public. However, it is by no means an exhaustive list and cannot be used as a stand-alone document to guide park design. Detailed requirements for each of these aspects of park accessibility as well as many other areas of it can be found in the [Toronto Accessibility Design Guidelines \(TADG\)](#).

City staff must review the TADG document and to adhere to it in the design of parks, trails, and facilities within them.

Other documents must be consulted in designing parks and trails projects. For example, the City is provincially legislated to adhere to the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#).

The AODA requires organizations in Ontario to make their services, workplaces, and public spaces accessible to people with disabilities. This is achieved by identifying and removing barriers, and by setting specific standards that organizations must adhere to. The AODA includes the five key accessibility standards of Customer Service, Information and Communication, Employment, Design of Public Spaces, and Transportation.

If there is a discrepancy between accessibility documents, the one that specifies the higher level of accessibility must be used. In addition, the TADG and AODA are living online documents that are updated.

City documents that need to be considered in the planning of accessible park design include the Toronto Multi-Use Trail Design Guidelines and the [Parkland Strategy Final Report](#).

Another useful resource is the [Guidelines and Best Practices for the Design, Construction, and Maintenance of Sustainable Trails](#) developed by the Trails for All Ontarians Collaborative.

## Parking

- Parking areas close to park entrances and any entrances for washroom use to facilitate easy access.
- Wider than standard spaces, with access aisles for easier transfer in and out of vehicles (TADG).
- Designated spaces with even wider access aisles for vans with ramps or lifts.

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- Clear signage indicating accessible parking spaces and the International Symbol of Accessibility (TADG).

## Paths and Trails

- Use firm and stable surface materials along accessible connecting routes such as:
  - asphalt whenever possible
  - minimal use of concrete and without divided sections
  - well maintained compacted gravel
  - limited boardwalk for easy navigation with mobility devices
- Provide ramps to overcome elevation changes and use of proper platforms to ensure access to all areas (TADG).
- Provide clear widths or pathways that are wide enough for mobility devices to pass comfortably.
- Level surfaces by minimizing slopes to five per cent or less to ensure ease of travel.
- On routes where running slopes are more than five per cent railings and edge protection should be used.
- Walking surface indicators/surfaces like tactile paving at crosswalks and/or near key destinations to help people with visual disabilities navigate paths and identify changes in direction and intersections.

## Play Areas

- Provide accessible benches and tables near playgrounds, both open and shaded.
- Use inclusive design with features such as
  - wide walkways
  - ramps
  - adaptive swings
  - elevated sandboxes
  - interactive games
- Incorporate sensory elements or components such as textured surfaces, sound panels and visual attributes for children with sensory processing differences.
- Use firm and stable surfaces, like poured rubber or engineered wood fibre rather than wood chips or mulch, to prevent injury and maximize accessibility around the play area.
- Use firm and stable surfaces on the way to accessible playgrounds for use by people with canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs and strollers.
- Ensure sufficient clearance or space around play equipment to allow safe and comfortable movement and access for children and caregivers with disabilities.

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- Provide a large assortment of activities to meet the needs of all children, including those with disabilities (e.g. physical, social/emotional, communication, sensory, neurodivergent, and cognitive).
- Include bike racks near the intersection of a pathway and the playground area.
- Intentionally design playground equipment to provide additional gross and fine motor support for more active and independent play.
- Provide shaded and quiet areas for rest and respite.

## Restrooms

- Add accessible restrooms with level and smooth pathways and entrances that are wide enough for wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
- Include fixtures (e.g. doorhandles and latches) designed for use with one hand and automatic soap and paper towel dispensers and place within accessible reach ranges.
- Use wider stalls and strategically place grab bars near toilets and sinks for support.
- Include a family or gender-neutral restroom with at least one adult sized change table.

## Seating and Benches

- Provide accessible picnic tables designed for easy access with wheelchairs and other mobility devices.
- Put accessible wheelchair spaces/areas near benches with a firm and stable surface.
- Add shade trees or shade structures surrounding seating areas to increase comfort and consider the movement of the sun.
- Where possible, provide back and arm rests on benches, and benches and tables with charging ports for personal electronic and mobility devices.

## Signage and Wayfinding

- Use clear and concise visual signage that:
  - is easy to read and understand.
  - has large font and high colour contrast.
  - identifies accessible routes and facilities.
- Plan to use picture symbols, like raised images, words, and/or Braille, to identify equipment within washrooms (e.g. washroom doors), playgrounds, and facilities located in parks.
- Consider:
  - Using markings on trails which indicate interesting/descriptive signs in clear and simple language.
  - Connecting to a downloadable audio descriptive component on the City of Toronto website.

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- Adding bilingual options on signage.
  - Adding QR codes with videos.
  - Including options to download content in different languages.
  - Using pictorial signs to assist those who do not speak or read English.
- Use various surface material textures or colours to provide behavioural cues and help visually organize the environment so that it is easier to understand.
- Consider using audible beacons or other auditory cues to help people who are blind or partially sighted to navigate.

### Other Features

- Include electric wheelchair charging stations with clear signage as this is a safety issue.
- Use scented plants at or near park entrances to make navigation easier for people who are blind or partially sighted.
- Designate rest areas with seating and shade at regular intervals along paths and trails.
- Provide beach wheelchairs – specialized wheelchairs with larger tires to be used on sandy beaches and in water.
- Consider that a secure place will be needed to store beach wheelchairs and that arrangements will be needed to sign them in and out.
- Provide accessible change rooms or facilities with changing tables and ceiling lifts.
- Provide a water chair and an area for its proper storage where there are accessible water features within a park.
- Provide enough lighting for safety and visibility, especially in areas with uneven terrain or at night.
- Provide drinking water sources, including bottle filling stations at both a wheelchair accessible and a standing height drinking fountain and include features such as switch/bar or automatic touchless sensors.
- Provide designated areas with signage for service animals to have access to water and to relieve themselves.
- Design assembly areas and amphitheatres with accessible seating, pathways and performance areas.
- If provided, ensure that outdoor showers and toilets are accessible.

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## Appendix 1 – Areas of Park Accessibility not Covered in this Document

The following is a list of park accessibility aspects that are not covered here, but are discussed in detail in TADG:

- Accessible stages and platforms
- Acoustics (signals and controls)
- Arenas
- Community gardens
- Eating and picnic areas
- Exterior materials and finishes
- Ground surfaces
- Interior building paths of travel and service counters in facilities located in parks and along trails
- Mobility device storage areas
- Swimming pools
- Teaching kitchens in parks facilities
- Waiting areas
- Waste receptacles
- Waterfront areas
- Windows and furniture/equipment in park facilities