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## **1. PURPOSE**

This Policy ensures that Markham Public Library (“MPL”, or “the Library”) meets or exceeds the standards set by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* by providing accessible library services to the Markham community.

## **2. ACCESSIBLE COMMITMENT STATEMENT**

MPL’s vision is to be the place where Markham’s diverse communities come together to imagine, create, learn and grow. To this end, MPL is committed to providing service in a way that respects the dignity and independence of individuals with disabilities, fosters inclusion, and strives to identify, prevent and remove barriers to access and participation.

MPL commits to meeting its responsibilities under the *AODA* as follows:

- Communicating information through a variety of channels to account for the different needs of our customers
- Creating a welcoming and respectful environment in all our spaces, physical or virtual
- Designing and maintaining public spaces that can be navigated inclusively
- Delivering content in a variety of formats
- Delivering programs and services that accommodate the needs of library users with disabilities
- Championing community services and resources that foster inclusion and barrier-free access
- Providing the appropriate accommodations for staff and volunteers to undertake their responsibilities;
- Maintaining feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement in the area of accessibility

## **3. PRINCIPLES**

Library policies and services are developed in consideration of the needs of individuals with disabilities. In particular, MPL’s services are developed and delivered in a manner that respects the principles of integration, dignity and independence for individuals with disabilities.

**Dignity:**

To ensure the dignity of individuals with disabilities, service design and delivery must take into account barriers to access so that people with disabilities are provided the same quality service as every other customer.

**Independence:**

MPL will strive to ensure that individuals with disabilities are able to access services without staff intervention based on their own preferences.

**Integration:**

Individuals with disabilities will have opportunities to participate in services alongside other customers in order for all to benefit from opportunities for community cohesion and connections.

**4. DEFINITIONS**

**Accessible Formats** – Include, but are not limited to, accessible electronic formats, Braille, text transcripts, large print, recorded audio, and other formats accessible to persons with disabilities.

**Assistive Device** – A technical aid, communication device or other instrument that is used to maintain or improve the functional abilities of people with disabilities. Personal assistive devices are typically devices that members and guests bring with them such as a wheelchair, walker or a personal oxygen tank that might assist in hearing, seeing, communicating, moving, breathing, remembering and/or reading.

**Barrier** – Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his/her disability. This includes the following types of barriers:

- Physical or architectural;
- Informational or communications;
- Attitudinal; and,
- Policy, practice or procedural.

**Communication Supports** – Include but are not limited to sign language, plain language and other communication supports that facilitate effective communication.

**Disability** – A key feature of the AODA is its definition of "disability". Under the AODA, the definition of "disability" is the same as the definition in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*:

*Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement including, but not limited to:*

- *Diabetes mellitus*
- *Epilepsy*
- *A brain injury*
- *Any degree of paralysis*

- *Amputation*
- *Lack of physical coordination*
- *Blindness or visual impediment*
- *Deafness or hearing impediment*
- *Muteness or speech impediment*
- *Physical reliance of a guide dog or other animal, or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device*
- *A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability*
- *A learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language*
- *A mental disorder*
- *An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety & Insurance Act, 1997*

The definition includes disabilities of different severity, visible as well as non-visible disabilities, and disabilities with intermittent effects.

**Guide Dog** – A highly-trained working dog that has been trained at one of the special facilities to provide mobility, safety and increased independence for people who are blind.

**Service Animal** – In this Policy, a service animal is:

- Any animal used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to the disability, and bearing appropriate identification; or
- An animal for which the individual provides a letter from a physician confirming that it is required for reasons related to their disability.

**Support Person** – A support person means, in relation to a person with a disability, another person who accompanies him or her in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to goods and services.

## **5. ACCESSIBILITY PLAN**

In order to achieve our accessibility goals, MPL has developed a multi-year *Accessibility Plan*. The *Accessibility Plan* was developed by a cross-functional team of staff that helped to identify barriers to access that customers with disabilities may face. The *Accessibility Plan* will be reviewed and updated at least once every five years.

## **6. ACCESSIBILITY PLAN FOR LIBRARY STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

MPL will provide appropriate accommodation for employees and volunteers, as per the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. If an employee (or volunteer) discloses a disability that requires accommodation, MPL will work with the employee to make reasonable provisions to support the employee's effectiveness and contribution to the library. MPL management staff will take appropriate measures to maintain the privacy of its employees throughout this process.

## **7. COMMUNICATIONS**

### Accessible Formats and Communication Supports

MPL will endeavour to provide information about its services to people with disabilities using the appropriate accessible format or communication support wherever possible. MPL will notify the public about the availability of accessible formats and communications supports.

### Accessible Websites and Web Content

MPL will ensure its online content conforms to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A and subsequent standards.

## **8. ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE**

The Service Regulation of the AODA establishes accessibility standards specific to customer service. The following outlines MPL's response to this standard with respect to the following areas:

- Accessible Customer Service
- Assistive Devices
- Service Animals
- Support Persons
- Notice of Service Disruptions
- Feedback Process
- Training
- Accessible Formats

### Accessible Customer Service

MPL is committed to extending its Customer Service and Customer Service Standards to all customers, and will ensure customers with disabilities are provided a welcome, inclusive service experience.

MPL offers specialized services specifically designed to support customers with disabilities. Some of these include:

- Collections in multiple formats for clients with print or visual disabilities
- Facilitated access to the Centre for Equitable Library Access services
- Programs specifically designed for customers with disabilities including adapted technology programs
- Toys and educational aids to support children with sensory processing disorders, cognitive disabilities or neurological differences
- Borrowing collections of assistive devices

### Assistive Devices

The Library will allow persons with disabilities to use their own personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from the services offered by the Library. Should a person with a disability

be unable to access the Library's services through the use of their own personal assistive devices, the Library will ensure the following measures:

- Determine if service is inaccessible, based upon individual requirements.
- Assess service delivery and potential service options to meet the needs of the individual.
- Notify person with disability of alternative service and how they can access the service, temporarily or on a permanent basis.

### Service Animals

For the purpose of this policy, a 'service animal' is defined as either:

- A "guide dog," as defined in section 1 of the Blind Persons Rights' Act; or
- A "service animal" for a person with a disability. For the purpose of this Policy, an animal is a service animal for a person with a disability if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for the reasons relating to his or her disability.

The Library will allow the person and the animal onto all Library facilities, and will ensure that the person is permitted to keep the animal with them. A customer with a disability that is accompanied by a guide dog or service dog will be allowed access to premises that are open to the public unless otherwise excluded by law.

Service Animals are usually recognizable by their identification. If it is not readily apparent that the animal is being used by the customer for reasons relating to his or her disability, staff may request verification from the customer. Verification may include:

- A letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons related to the disability;
- A valid identification card signed by the Attorney General of Canada; or,
- A certificate of training from a recognized guide dog or service animal training school.

The customer accompanied by a guide dog or service animal is responsible for maintaining care and control of the animal at all time.

### Support Persons

A 'Support Person' refers to someone who accompanies a person with disabilities in order to help him or her with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with accessing goods or services.

MPL allows people with disabilities who require it, to be accompanied by a support person in all branches. The Library reserves the right to request that a person with a disability be accompanied by a support person, in the event that it is considered necessary to protect the health and safety of the person with a disability or others on the premises.

Some guidelines for inclusion of Support Persons in programs and services include:

- Customers should notify a staff member of the presence of the support person.
- Support persons are not required to pay an additional fee for admission to library events or programs, nor are they registered as an additional participant.

- If there is confidential information to be disclosed, consent must be received from the person with the disability.

#### Notice of Service Disruptions

The Library will give notice of disruption to services used by individuals with disabilities to access service. Notice of the disruption shall include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration and a description of alternative facilities or services, if any, that are available. Notice will be posted physically in the library facility and on the website.

#### Feedback Process

Should a customer wish to express a concern regarding the service they have received, this may be conveyed in person, via e-mail or telephone to the Branch Manager where the service was provided. The information to be provided should include personal contact information, the date, a description of the incident or situation, and what action is being requested to resolve the situation. This information and the resolution will be recorded in the Library's Issue Management Database.

- The Branch Manager will attempt to resolve the complaint in a timely manner, with the assistance of senior library staff as required.
- The customer will be contacted after a resolution has been reached.

Should a customer wish to provide the Library with a suggestion on how to improve our service:

- The customer can contact the Branch Manager and provide suggestions via email, telephone or in person.
- All suggestions will be recorded in the Issue Management Database.
- The customer will be notified in a timely manner of how the Library will proceed with their suggestion.
- Staff response will include: an explanation of how the suggestion will be implemented, a response indicating further investigation or an explanation why the Library is unable to implement the suggestion.

The Library will ensure that all staff (regular and contract employees) and volunteers have been trained in Accessible Customer Service, MPL's Accessibility Plan and the AODA.

#### Accessible Formats

MPL will provide required information in a format that takes into account the person's disability.

Material printed in-house and publications produced on behalf of the Library will contain a note indicating, "alternate formats are available upon request" and include relevant contact information. The Library and the person with a disability will agree upon the format to be used for the document or information, subject to feasibility requirements.

Requests for alternative formats will be honoured in the most practical manner depending on the media chosen, the size and complexity of the document, the quality and source of the documents, the feasibility of the request (including the cost) and the number of documents to be converted.

It should be noted that when a request for one of these formats is received and deemed feasible, staff will make every attempt to respond to the request in the most practical manner

and to the satisfaction of the customer. If it is determined that the format requested is not feasible, then other alternative methods of providing the information will be explored that will still meet the needs of the customer (e.g. explaining the information verbally etc.).

The process for requesting alternative formats is as follows:

- Staff member receives request from member of the public for alternative format.
- Staff completes alternative format request form, forwarding it onto the responsible manager.
- The responsible manager will determine feasibility.
- If feasible, staff proceeds with alternative format request.
- If not feasible, staff contacts individual with feasible solution.

Feasibility will be determined based upon cost in relation to size of document and amount of time associated with processing the document request.

The time frame attached to the conversion process varies depending on the media chosen, the size, complexity, quality of source documents and number of documents to be converted. Documents shall be returned in a timely manner depending on the factors previously noted.

Conversion will be processed in-house wherever possible. When a member of the public requests a piece of Library documentation in an alternate format, the Library (and not the customer) shall be responsible for the cost of the conversion to the alternate format.

If a request by a person with a disability is made pursuant to the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection Act*, the customer shall be responsible for payment of the prescribed fee but not for any costs associated with conversion to an alternate format.

In-house printing, where possible, shall adhere to the CNIB's Clear Print Standards.

## **9. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **CEO / Directors shall:**

- Ensure that they and their employees understand and comply with this Policy.

### **Managers / Supervisors shall:**

- Ensure that they and their employees understand and comply with this Policy;
- Enforce this Policy.

### **Library Administration:**

- Develop and distribute this Policy; and,
- Update this Policy per the Review Schedule.

### **Employees shall:**

- Ensure compliance with this Policy and all related policies and legislation.

**10. RELATED POLICIES / LEGISLATION**

- Customers First Policy (POL-Pub Serv)
- *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*