

Aurora seeks input on rec programs for persons with disabilities

If you, or someone you know, is a person with a disability, the Town of Aurora would like your feedback on recreational programs.

Now, through February 14, the community can provide insights on community programs and facilities through an accessibility lens as the Town develops a Recreation Needs Assessment for Persons with Disabilities.

This initiative was identified as an action item within the recently approved Parks and Recreation Master Plan in June 2023, said the Town of Aurora in a statement. It is also part of the Town's commitment to providing fair and equitable access to programs and services. The goal of the survey is to identify the specific recreational program needs and preferences of persons with disabilities in our community, and to develop a plan to address the identified needs in our programming.

The finished assessment, they stress, will be comprehensive, evidence-based and directly informed by the needs and preferences of persons with disabilities and to develop a plan to address the identified needs.

For the purposes of the feedback process, the Town defines disability as an umbrella term that covers a broad range and variation of conditions, chronic illnesses, impairments, activity, or participatory limitations or restrictions, that may be visible or invisible, permanent, episodic, or temporary.

Disability is an evolving term that considers access barriers a person may experience because of the design of the built environment, policy, program or thing.

In addition to the online surveys one is for persons with disabilities, the second for caregivers in-person feedback sessions are also planned.

The first of five focus groups, each for persons with disabilities, have been scheduled beginning on Tuesday, February 6, from 1 to 2 p.m. over Zoom. Further virtual focus groups on this platform will take place on Sunday, February 11, from 3 to 4 p.m., and on Tuesday, February 13, from 7 to 8 p.m.

Two in-person sessions will take place at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex Tuesday, February 6, from 7 to 8.30 p.m.; and Thursday, February 8, from 9.30 to 11 a.m.

A virtual focus group tailored specifically for family members and caregivers of persons with disabilities will take place on Thursday, February 8 from 7 to 8.30 p.m. over Zoom.

An additional focus group for Community Organizations and Service Providers is also in the works.

To register for any of these sessions, contact consultant Jodi Ball at jodi@jconsultinggroup.ca or call 905-399-5634.

The online surveys and feedback portal are located at engageaurora.ca/rna.

Improving recreational opportunities for people with physical disabilities is a key tenet of the Town's 2022-2026 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

Goals in this document, which was reviewed at the Town's Accessibility Advisory Committee last Wednesday, January 10, include retrofitting existing built environment barriers at recreational trails, outdoor public use eating areas, outdoor play spaces, exterior paths of travel, accessible parking and facilities and removing barriers in each of these areas according to Aurora's municipal Accessibility Design Standards.

Tasks on the to-do list through 2026 include the installation of power door operators at all municipal facilities to accommodate residents with mobility assistance devices; improving accessibility at Victoria Hall, potentially including a ramp at the front entrance of the downtown landmark and offering a universal washroom; updating accessible changerooms at recreation centres; and addressing acoustic accessibility in community facilities.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter