

# Zest Communities Multi-Year Accessibility Plan



The Zest family of companies is committed to excellence in serving all customers including people with disabilities. All goods, services and facilities will be provided in a manner that upholds the principles of dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity.

## A Message from the President

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The Zest partners are committed to providing exceptional customer service to all our customers including those with disabilities. We are passionate about offering goods and services that respect our customers' rights to:

- Dignity
- Independence
- Integration
- Equal Opportunity

This handbook has been prepared in accordance with Zest's Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Policy and to meet the operational and training requirements as outlined in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act [AODA]. The Zest family of companies is committed to ensuring that all employees, volunteers, students and third parties providing goods and services on our behalf have the necessary knowledge, skills, and training to offer accessible services to customers with disabilities.

Providing our customers with quality goods and services at the highest standards is at the very core of what we do. By putting customers first, we can build a strong and sustainable future for our customers, our employees, and our communities. Through the combined efforts of the Zest partners, we will play our part in realizing a fully accessible Ontario for people with disabilities by the year 2025.

We encourage each of our staff and service contractors to review the contents of this handbook and, having done so, sign and return the Acknowledgement Form on page 20 to the Human Resources Department or Department Manager as soon as possible.

Thank you,

Tony DiFruscio

# Introduction

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Zest Communities is committed to fulfilling our requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. Zest Communities is committed to treating all people in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in inclusion and equal opportunity. We are committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner and will do so by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility and meeting accessibility requirements under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Zest Communities is committed to develop, implement, and maintain policies that govern how the organization achieves or will achieve accessibility through meeting this Regulation. To facilitate this commitment, Zest Communities has established, maintained, and documented a multi-year accessibility plan, that is reviewed and updated at least once every five years to identify progress made in addressing barriers.

## General Requirements

### (i) Accessible Emergency Information

Zest Communities is committed to providing residents and clients with publicly available emergency information, plans or public safety information in an accessible way upon request. This information will also be available to the public.

Zest Communities has provided and will continue to provide employees with disabilities with individualized emergency response information when necessary, and as soon as practically possible. If an employee who receives individualized workplace emergency response information requires assistance, with the employee's consent the workplace emergency response information will be given to the designated employee. Additionally, Zest Communities has created a process for documenting issues of accessibility and recording and providing accommodation for individualized accessible emergency response information. Zest Communities will continue to review the individualized workplace emergency response plans, when necessary, i.e. the location of the employee changes and/or there is a change in disability.

### (ii) Accessibility Policies and Plans

Zest Communities has implemented and maintained a multi-year plan that outlines strategies and actions to identify, prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities.

- The IASR is incorporated into our policies and Accessible Customer Service handbook. Our policy requires that the handbook must be read, reviewed, and signed by every employee upon hire.

### (iii) Training

Accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities is integrated in Zest Communities core values and for that reason, Zest provides training to employees and volunteers on Accessibility Standards and on the Human Rights Code as it relates to people with disabilities. Zest Communities has taken the following steps to ensure employees are provided with the training needed to meet current standards and legislation:

- Provide educational or training resources in an accessible format that considers the accessibility needs of a person with a disability.
- Ensure new employees and volunteers complete training within 30 days of employment or placement.
- Keep and maintain a database of the training participant's names and dates of completion.

# Past Achievements to Remove and Prevent Barriers

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## Customer Service

The following measures have been implemented by Zest Communities:

- The accessible customer service policy and handbook was published to Staff on ADP.
- Every effort will be made to inform customers of temporary disruptions. Where disruptions occur notice will be provided to customers with disabilities by:
  - Posting notices in conspicuous places including at the point of disruption e.g. elevator, door, at the main entrance and the nearest accessible entrance to the service disruption
  - Posting notice of disruption on the Zest Communities' web page(s)
  - Contacting customers personally by telephone or email
  - Verbally notifying customers when they are making appointments.
  - By any other method that may be reasonable under the circumstances that are suitable based on the customer's disability
- Completion of training for all employees is tracked and recorded.
- Comments relating to our programs and services regarding customer service are welcomed and appreciated.
- A customer with a disability that is accompanied by a guide dog, service animal or service dog will be allowed access to any area of Zest Communities that is open to the public unless otherwise excluded by law.
- Customers with disabilities will be notified that documents related to Accessibility Standard can be made available upon request and in a suitable format.

## Information and Communication

Zest Communities has undertaken the following plans to ensure compliance with this standard:

- A feedback process has been established that is accessible and consists of alternate formats such as in person, by telephone, email or in writing.
- Our website has been designed to be user-friendly for people with a range of needs.
- Everyday documents such as signs and menus are easy to read and shared on screen where applicable.

## Employment Standard

Zest Communities is committed to inclusive and accessible employment practices that attract and retain individuals with disabilities. We have taken the following steps to notify the public and employees that, when requested, Zest Communities will accommodate people with disabilities throughout the recruitment and onboarding process.

## **Recruitment**

- Specify that accommodation is available for applicants with disabilities in recruitment material and with regards to interviews and assessments.
- Inform employees of policies supporting employees with disabilities. This information will be provided to new employees as soon as practicable after hiring.
- Provide updated information on accommodations policies to employees when changes occur.
- Consult with employee to determine suitability of format or support.

## **Documented Individual Accommodation Plans**

Zest Communities is committed to producing and providing documented individual accommodation that includes the following:

- Participation of the employee requiring the individual accommodation plan.
- Ability to request outside medical evaluation to determine if accommodation can be achieved and how.
- High level of privacy.
- Regular review and updates.
- Reason for denial if applicable.
- The means of providing Individual Accommodation Plans in a format that considers the needs of the employee.
- And if required, include individualized workplace emergency response information.

## **Return to Work**

Zest Communities is committed to developing and putting in place a process for developing individual accommodation plans and return-to-work policies for employees that have been absent due to a disability. Zest Communities has developed and maintained a return-to-work process for our employees who have been absent from work due to a disability and require disability related accommodations to return to work. The process includes steps Zest takes to facilitate the return-to-work process & uses the documented individual accommodation plans.

## Proposed Accessibility Initiatives

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Initiative (s)	Projected/Anticipated Outcome or Result	Timeline/Status
<b>Improve access to resources for people with disabilities</b>	Incorporate AODA discussions into our regular health and safety meetings to be proactive in approach to accessibility, identify barriers and generate on going discussion around accommodation.	The AODA discussions will be incorporated by June 2024.
<b>Further Educate Employees</b>	Deliver training to employees that educates them on both seen and unseen disabilities.	Complete by December 30, 2024
<b>Ensure accessible customer service</b>	Ensure Zest Communities has an accessible "Contact Us" page that provides various methods of communication.	Complete by June 2025
<b>Digital Experience</b>	Ensure major upcoming projects prioritize AODA compliance	Complete by 2025-2026
<b>Strategic Plan</b>	Ensure language and all pieces in strategic plan addresses and considers accessibility internally and externally	Complete by 2025-2026