

## **2024 ADA Transition Plan Annual Update**

## **Background**

In September of 2022, City staff in collaboration with community stakeholders, consulting firms, and engineering teams, completed an updated ADA Transition Plan. The purpose of this Plan is to guide the City in implementing and advancing the culture of inclusivity and accessibility for all residents which includes increasing access to the City's programs, services, activities, parks, and facilities for individuals with disabilities. Each year, the City will prepare an Annual Report based on the work that various departments have performed to provide information relating to the City's Transition Plan progress.

## **Guidance for Implementation**

In its first full year as a subcommittee of the Commission on Aging and Disabilities, the ADA Advisory Committee continued to provide invaluable guidance and support to staff striving to demonstrate the City's commitment to accessibility and inclusion. Official membership increased to include 9 members this year and the group welcomed an average of 16 attendees at each meeting. The Committee successfully achieved the goals included in its 2024 work plan, including:

- Supporting the City's Disability Services. The Committee gathered monthly for a total of 11 meetings in 2024 with busy agendas which included the review and analysis of inquiries and grievances received by the community, guest speakers from the City describing their roles related to ADA compliance and advancement, planning for local staff and community accessibility-related events, and sharing personal experiences and suggestions for improvement.
- Promoting the execution of the City's ADA Transition Plan. The Committee began analyzing the prioritization process and resources included in the Transition Plan to increase confidence in advocating for the City's commitment to action.
- Resource and referral. Committee members and meeting visitors dedicated their time to sharing information about the City's ADA/Disability Services and staying up to date on local and national topics, trends, and concerns.
- Training and education. The Committee's involvement in planning and presenting accessibility-focused events enabled over 20 in-house disability awareness trainings provided for City departments as well as multiple events available for the community during 2024.

The City's Disability Access Liaison Team grew to 16 dedicated staff members representing various City departments in 2024. Through sharing expert knowledge related to the function and responsibilities of their departments, these Liaisons worked to address accommodation requests, inquiries, and grievances from the community. Additionally, the Team prioritized projects aimed at fulfilling the recommendations included in the ADA Transition Plan.

In February of 2024, the full time job title previously named "Disability Rights and Advocacy Manager" was updated to "Inclusion & Accessibility Division Manager." This role continues to

include the designation of ADA Coordinator for the City. In addition to overseeing all aspects of ADA implementation, this individual is responsible for creating and maintaining communication processes for community members and City staff, developing disability service-related policies and processes, developing and coordinating trainings for departmental staff, and managing the Parks & Recreation Department's new Inclusion & Accessibility Division.

### Construction Projects

The Capital Planning and Engineering Bureau completed several projects dedicated to improving accessibility in 2024.

### Facilities

The City completed two major accessibility-focused facility projects in 2024 including an elevator modernization at the Police and Fire Headquarters and construction of the new Evanston Animal Shelter which is fully ADA-compliant.

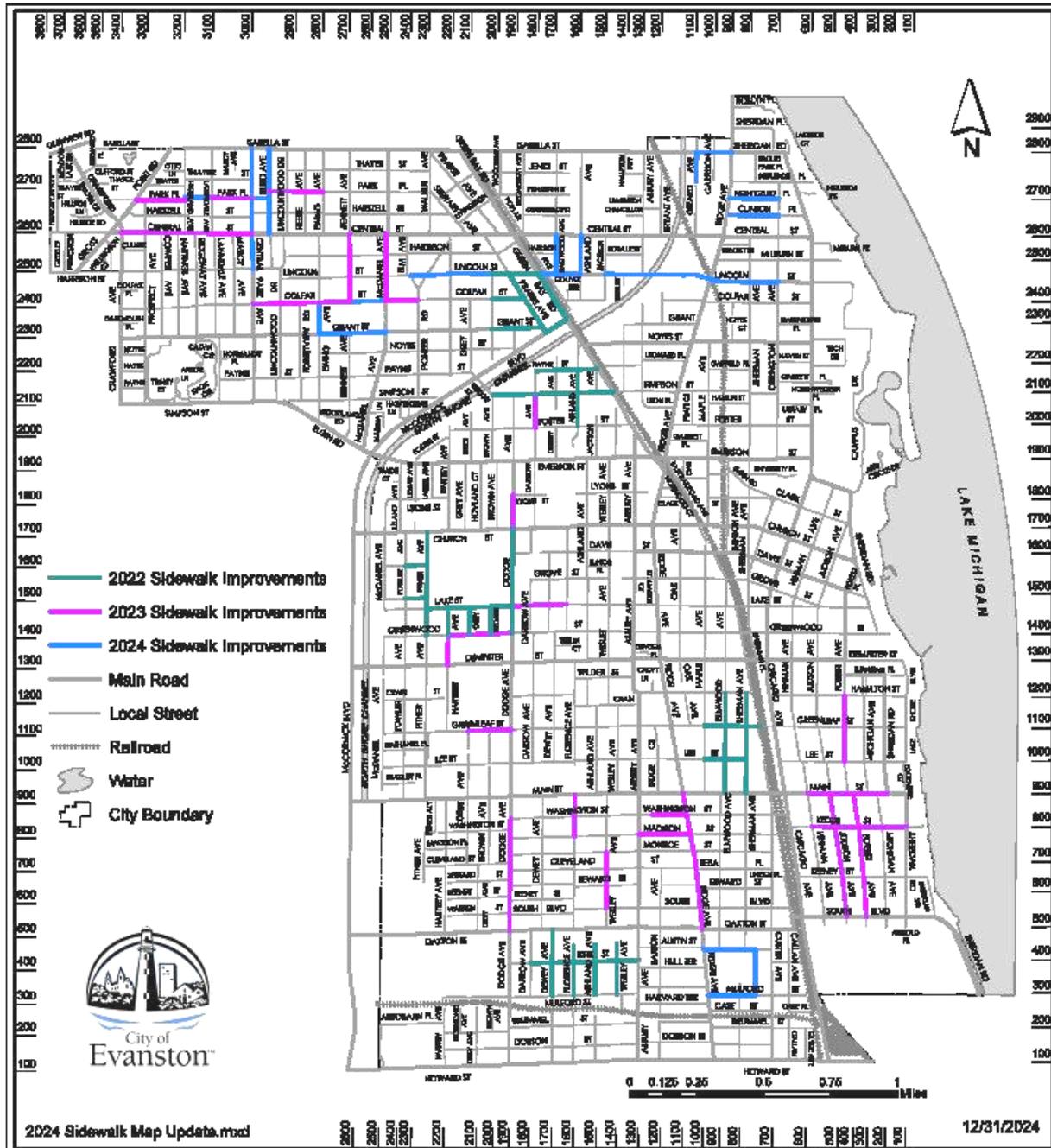
### Parks

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Skate Park        | 295 linear feet of 10-foot wide multi-use trail was installed in addition to 190 linear feet of public sidewalk   |
| James Park        | 950 linear feet of 12-foot wide multi-use train was installed   |
| Larimer Park      | New playground installed which includes ground-level and elevated accessible components. Seating areas with adjacent spaces for individuals using wheelchairs were added. 780 linear feet of accessible pathways created.   |
| Independence Park | New playground installed which includes ground-level and elevated accessible components. Seating areas with adjacent spaces for individuals using wheelchairs were added. 545 linear feet of accessible pathways created in addition to 340 linear feet of public sidewalk. An accessible paved plaza space and an accessible route to a public stage were added. |
| Centennial Park   | Two accessible picnic pads installed with paved pathways, accessible picnic tables, and accessible grills   |

Larimer and Independence Parks received installation of the City's first outdoor visual communication boards which will now be included in all future playground project updates. Use of these boards provides the opportunity for individuals to use pictures and written words to express themselves, in addition to educating all visitors about communication diversity and tools.

## Right-of-Way

The City's Sidewalk Improvement Program organizes project locations following an equitable priority system for rating sidewalk construction and replacement. It includes phases focused on meeting the community's needs and reaching ADA program access. In 2024, the City removed and replaced approximately 33,800 square feet of sidewalk. A map of the 2024 progress is included below.



The City continues to look to the U.S. Access Board's PROWAG (Pedestrian Right Of Way Accessibility Guidelines) when updating right-of-way services. PROWAG provides scoping and technical requirements to ensure that sidewalks, curb ramps, on-street parking, driveways, intersection crossings, and pedestrian push buttons, in addition to other rights-of-way elements, are readily accessible and usable by pedestrians with disabilities. A list of right-of-way projects completed in 2024 is included below.

| <b>Location:</b>                                      | <b>Right-of-way work completed to meet ADA standards:</b>   |
|---|---|
| Hartrey from Greenleaf to Dempster                    | Sidewalk project  |
| Greenleaf from Grey to Pitner                         | Sidewalk project  |
| Leon Place - Simpson to Ridge                         | Work completed to meet ADA standards at all intersections   |
| Various locations                                     | Work completed to meet ADA standards at all intersections as part of the 2024 MFT Street resurfacing project  |
| Maple to Hinman                                       | Work completed to meet ADA standards as part of the Main Street corridor project  |
| Alley North of Colfax Street, East of Bryant Avenue   | Improved four curb ramps at alley entrances to meet ADA standards   |
| Alley North of Leonard Place, East of Green Bay Road  | Improved two curb ramps at alley entrances to meet ADA standards  |
| Alley North of Simpson Street, East of Ashland Avenue | Improved four curb ramps at alley entrances to meet ADA standards   |
| Grant Street and Grey Avenue                          | Improved eight curb ramps to meet ADA standards   |
| Oakton Street and Callan Avenue                       | Improved four curb ramps to meet ADA standards. Installed pedestrian crossing with bump out, two new solar powered LED crossing signs with pedestrian push buttons, and striping                    |
| Thayer Street and Crawford Avenue                     | Improved four curb ramps to meet ADA standards. Installed pedestrian crossing with bump outs, two new solar powered LED crossing signs with pedestrian push buttons, and striping                   |
| Washington Street and Asbury Avenue                   | Improved four curb ramps to meet ADA standards. Improved pedestrian crossing with bump outs, relocation of two existing solar powered LED crossing signs with pedestrian push buttons, and striping |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Near St. Francis Hospital                      | Improved ten curb ramps to meet ADA standards. Removed and replaced approximately 800 lineal feet of deteriorated concrete sidewalk  |
| Phase 1 Sidewalk Locations throughout the City | Improved approximately 35 curb ramps to meet ADA standards. Removed and replaced approximately 3,500 lineal feet of deteriorated concrete sidewalk: Sidewalk Improvement Program               |
| Phase 1 Sidewalk Locations throughout the City | Improved approximately 35 curb ramps to meet ADA standards. Removed and replaced approximately 2500 lineal feet of deteriorated concrete sidewalk: 2024 Alley and Sidewalk Improvement Program |

## Updates to City Programs, Services, and Activities

### The City Embraces the Hidden Disability Sunflower

In April of 2024, the City emphasized a commitment to supporting individuals with hidden disabilities by becoming an official business member of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program. Embracing this internationally recognized program demonstrates a commitment by City staff to complete disability awareness training and to assist individuals displaying a sunflower by providing additional empathy, support, time, and resources. This program benefits everyone in the community by increasing awareness of hidden disabilities as well as illustrating the fact that every individual experiences situations in which additional support would be beneficial.

### Parks & Recreation Department

In February of 2024, the City purchased what would become the Parks & Recreation Department's newest community center. "South End Community Center" is a 14,500 square foot recreation space which includes a gymnasium, large open play area, activity rooms, a preschool room, and a cafe space. With Accessible Recreation programming and events historically being scattered throughout the City's community centers, a priority of this space has been giving our Accessible Recreation participants and programming a permanent home. South End also houses our Inclusion & Accessibility Division staff. The unique collaboration of various Parks and Rec Divisions including our gymnastics, Ecology, and preschool teams, has provided new inclusive opportunities for visitors of all ages with continuing program expansion to come. Several accessibility features have been added at South End including the City's first sensory room, a dedicated space to support sensory regulation. A large visual communication board is available in the play area to provide alternative modes for self-expression. Other accessibility tools include social stories, white boards, noise-canceling headphones, and other small sensory items available for visitors to check out at the front desk.

April of 2024 brought a large change to Evanston's previously named "Special Recreation" program area. In striving to be role models for the community, our Inclusion & Accessibility team

updated the program area name to “Accessible Recreation,” demonstrating language that is respectful and affirming. The Inclusion & Accessibility Division provides support and services that create opportunities for independence, autonomy, success, and achievement of any personal goals that motivate an individual’s recreation participation. Accessible Recreation programs are specifically designed based on each participant’s unique abilities, goals, and needs. This programming continues to expand to serve additional populations within the disability community.

New signs were installed at all five of Evanston’s beaches with sign colors and fonts chosen to increase accessibility for individuals with low vision. These signs include language emphasizing inclusion and awareness of individuals with varying abilities and needs. Updated warning flags alerting visitors to swim bans and advisories were added to all swimming beaches this year which include written word identifiers to improve accessibility for individuals who cannot distinguish between the various flag colors. Lee Street and Clark Street beaches designated specific areas where visitors could enjoy the beach without the presence of recreational equipment in the air including balls, frisbees, and/or kites. These “No Throw Zones” were meant to allow individuals with disabilities, families with young children, and anyone who may feel comfortable in a less active sand space to be more at ease. The previously placed accessible Mobi-mats along with new signs provide clear dividers identifying zone borders.

The Parks and Recreation Department updated their vendor contracts in summer of 2024 to include a required commitment from all instructors and outside organizations to meet the City’s Inclusion and Accessibility policies. New Inclusion resources were created to be included with all contracts to educate vendors about supporting individuals with disabilities in Parks & Recreation programming.

### **Transportation and Mobility Services**

The City’s Bicycle Access Voucher Pilot program, launched in October, included an Adapted Bike Voucher (EABV) option for community members who would benefit from accessible biking equipment. EABV offerings included electric tricycles, recumbent bicycles, standard E-bikes, and E-cargo bikes.

Transportation and Mobility staff began collaboration with transportation service providers including CTA (Chicago Transit Authority), RTA (Regional Transit Authority), Metra, and Pace to communicate the Evanston community’s needs and concerns in an effort to improve accessible transportation. The City is continuing to build out Evanston’s network of ADA-compliant concrete bus pads and installed 13 pads in 2024.

### **Information Technology Department**

A digital accessibility working group was formed in July of 2024. This team includes various City departments whose primary focus continues to be coordination of the City’s website overhaul to meet new ADA standards, WCAG 2.1, level AA, in all digital communications by April of 2026.

Direct engagement with the disability community including visits with the Commission on Aging and Disabilities and ADA Advisory Committee, in addition to external and internal surveys for residents and City staff, provided valuable feedback to guide the start of the City’s RFP process for this project.

**Administrative Services: Parking**

Parking staff continue to manage the W Permit Space program, which converts public curb space to a permitted parking space for individuals with physical disabilities who would benefit from parking their vehicles near their homes. The program currently manages about 90 spaces and the application and renewal process was streamlined this year for improved transparency and communication with the applicants.

Parking meter staff completed projects in City-owned garages and surface parking lots to bring existing accessible spaces into compliance with current laws. Accessible parking signs were updated and spaces were made wider at the 1800 Maple garage and the Sherman Plaza garage. New accessible parking spaces were installed on the 1700 block of Maple, where two metered spaces were converted into signed accessible spaces on the West side of the block adjacent to the Northwestern Medical building. Lot #5 at 2218 Ashland was seal-coated and two accessible spaces were installed.

The Pooch Park, a space jointly operated by the City of Evanston and Skokie Park District, also received accessibility improvements with the addition of an accessible parking space. Installation was a joint effort with the City painting lines for the space and Skokie installing new signs.

**ADA/Disability Services Trainings**

Disability awareness and education continues to be a priority in Evanston. In addition to the training opportunities established with support from the ADA Advisory Committee, City Departments prioritize division-specific virtual and in-person trainings that increase accessibility and inclusion related to their specific roles in serving the community. Below is a comprehensive list of trainings completed by City staff in 2024.

| <b>Training:</b>   | <b>City Department/s Represented:</b>  |
|--|--|
| Police Assistance: Service Animals                                 | Police   |
| Disability Awareness: Individuals in Custody                       | Police   |
| Autism Awareness   | Police   |
| Digital Accessibility: Various Trainings                           | IT   |
| Disability Awareness Event: JJ’s List Disability Awareness Players | Administrative Services/Parking, Parks & Recreation, Public Works, City Manager’s Office, Police, Community Development, |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | Library, Communications  |
| U.S. Access Board PROWAG (Pedestrian Right-Of-Way Guidelines) | Public Works, Parks & Rec, Administrative Services/Parking   |
| Person-first vs. Identity-first Language                      | Disability Access Liaison Team: various Departments  |
| Service Animals Lifeguard Training                            | Fire Department  |
| Hidden Disability Sunflower Program                           | All City Departments   |
| Alzheimer's Awareness Month and Dementia-Friends Training     | Health and Human Services, Parks & Rec, 311, Administrative Services, City Clerk's Office, Community Development, Police, Property Maintenance, Public Works |
| Mental Health First Aid Training                              | Health and Human Services, Parks & Rec   |
| RTA Paratransit Programming                                   | Transportation and Mobility, Parks & Rec   |
| Disability Pride  | Disability Access Liaison Team: various Departments  |
| National ADA Virtual Conference                               | ADA Coordinator  |
| National ADA Symposium  | ADA Coordinator  |
| Illinois Recreation Therapy Association Conference            | Parks & Rec  |
| ReelAbilities Disability Film Event                           | Parks & Rec  |
| Unmasking Neurodiversity                                      | Parks & Rec, City Clerk's Office   |
| Crisis Prevention Institute: Verbal Intervention Training     | Parks & Rec, Library   |
| Inclusion Services: Support for Parks & Rec Programming       | Parks & Rec  |
| Summer Camp Directors' Orientation: Inclusion Panel           | Parks & Rec  |
| Disability Awareness Training                                 | Library  |

Community Events Offered:

- Monthly ADA Advisory Committee Meetings
- Aging Well Conference, Evanston Accessibility Tours: May 2024
- ReelAbilities Disability Film Event: July 2024
- Emergency Preparedness Fair, Evanston Accessibility Tours: September 2024

## ADA Inquiries, Grievances, and Resolutions

Evanston benefited from a large increase in communication related to ADA/Disability Services this year. This communication is vital to the continued improvements to accessibility and inclusion in the City's programs, services, and activities. This year, community members' inquiries and grievances were communicated via direct email and phone call to the ADA Coordinator, email to the City's Disability Services email address, electronic Inquiry/Grievance Form, 311 ADA/Disability Service request, or through the newest communication option, in-person appointments at South End Community Center.

Inquiries are identified as a way to share feedback, suggestions, and requests for ADA alterations and/or accommodations. Grievances are identified as communication about situations in which an individual feels that discrimination occurred. The steps in place once receiving this communication remain consistent with the ADA Coordinator connecting with applicable City staff to come to a resolution. Below are the total number of City inquiries, grievances, and resolutions communicated in 2024. Resolutions noted "still in progress" include requests related to extended City projects.

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Inquiries                     | 32 |
| Grievances                    | 5  |
| Grievance Resolutions         | 2  |
| Resolutions Still in Progress | 3  |

Equally important to accessibility within government-run programs, services, and activities is access to the businesses and commercial services located within the City. All inquiries of this nature which are received are communicated to these local business and service providers, and the City is committed to providing ADA resources and support to everyone in the community.