



NYC Parks

Five Year Accessibility Plan Under Local Law 12 (2024-2028)

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General

Local Law 12 (2023) requires every New York City agency to develop and implement a five-year accessibility plan, in consultation with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD).

The plan shall include at a minimum:

1. The steps the agency is taking and will be taking over the next five years to ensure that the agency's workplace, services, programs, and activities are accessible to and accommodating and inclusive of persons with disabilities; and
2. Information regarding ongoing and planned projects over the next five years that are related to improving physical, digital, and programmatic access, and effective communications for persons with disabilities, including, but not limited to: any alterations or structural changes to facilities or premises that are owned and operated by the agency or contracted for use by the agency or access to such agency's services and programs; and additional steps to make the agency's programs and services more accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities.

The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) is responsible for preparing, updating, and implementing this five-year accessibility plan. In addition to this plan pursuant to Local Law 12 of 2023, in June 2024, Parks published and posted an [ADA Transition Plan](#) to our website.

In compliance with Local Law 27 (2016), every City agency is required to designate a Disability Service Facilitator (DSF) to coordinate its efforts to comply and carry out its responsibilities under the ADA and other federal, state, and local laws and regulations concerning accessibility for persons with disabilities.

NYC Parks' Disability Services Facilitator/ADA Accessibility Coordinator is:

Christopher Noel
The Olmsted Center, 117-02 Roosevelt Avenue, Flushing, NY 11368
646-632-7344

To contact the Accessibility Coordinator use the form found [here](#).

To file a grievance, use the ADA Compliant Procedure and Form found [here](#).

NYC Parks' website contains useful information for individuals with disabilities, including:

1. [Information on Accessible Facilities, Adaptive Hubs, and Accessible Events](#)

2. Five-Year Accessibility Plan (this document)
3. [NYC Notice of Rights Under the ADA](#)
4. [NYC Parks Complaint Guide](#)
5. [Website Accessibility Statement](#)
6. [Reasonable Accommodation Request Form](#)

Mission of Agency

NYC Parks manages over 30,000 acres of the City's land. Our parks improve New Yorkers' health and quality of life, providing oases of beauty, recreation, and relaxation, particularly in communities of need. We empower people through participation and trainings, enhance the public's health from fitness classes to forests, and restore our environment's health and resiliency. Our parks connect and unify diverse constituencies through stewardship, learning and celebration, thereby strengthening and attracting investment to communities, the building blocks of our great City.

Our vision is to create and sustain a restorative and thriving park system for all. Our mission is to grow, maintain, and program a world-class park system prioritizing equity, access, safety, and nature. Our value pillars include: nature and environment, equity, cleanliness, and safety, health and wellness, people and culture. NYC Parks works to strengthen the health and well-being of individuals, their communities, and our city's environment, with our commitment to equity undergirding all that we do.

Executive Summary

In 2023, New York City passed Local Law 12 requiring city agencies to create a five-year accessibility plan, in consultation with the MOPD. Since the passage of the ADA in 1990, NYC Parks has made great strides in moving toward a fully accessible park system. At the same time, we acknowledge there is more work to be done. This plan reflects the state of NYC Parks' accessibility efforts and our goals for the future.

The agency will focus on five areas within this plan. The five areas include:

Physical Access - Our vision to create and sustain a restorative and thriving park system for all poses significant challenges given the thousands of facilities built prior to accessibility standards and regulations. With an average yearly commitment of over \$500 million for capital projects, our staff design and construct ADA-compliant sites and buildings. Common practices include prioritizing pathways over ramps or stairs, standardizing accessible site elements, working with our vendors to make their products as accessible as possible, and building accessibility into every part of our facilities. We implement ongoing assessments to gather information on our facilities and note the accessibility challenges so that we may have a complete picture and plan to address

these challenges moving forward. This information will be integral in future conversations with elected officials funding our capital projects. Project by project the agency builds a more accessible park system.

Digital Access - NYC Parks prioritizes digital accessibility to ensure all patrons, including those with disabilities, can access and use online content effectively. The agency ensures that its complete range of media shared online is accessible including presentations, mass e-mails, web content, social media posts, and videos. Our virtual meetings include closed captioning and ASL interpretation ensuring all park patrons may participate.

Programmatic Access - While many of our events are accessible, NYC Parks also offers inclusive and adaptive sports and recreational programs. These events are geared specifically towards people with physical disabilities. We also have adaptive hubs, which are fully accessible recreation centers that offer programs for patrons with disabilities and provide information on what NYC Parks offers citywide. Patrons with disabilities requiring a reasonable accommodation at our events may do so by contacting the agency three days in advance. Our event calendar on our website offers events that are held in accessible locations.

Effective Communication - NYC Parks ensures that patrons with disabilities can receive and convey information to effectively use and enjoy our facilities and services. This is achieved by offering auxiliary aids and services upon request. These options provide multiple ways for community members to participate in meetings, programming, and events.

Workplace Inclusion - NYC Parks adheres to the City's Equal Opportunity Policy, ensuring a discrimination-free work environment, including compliance with reasonable accommodation policies for employees with disabilities. In addition to the agency implementing the 55-A program, which hires persons with disabilities into competitive roles, the agency has partnered with advocacy organizations to increase visibility. We aim to have a diverse, welcoming, and inclusive workplace for all city workers including employees with disabilities.

The five categories of our accessibility plan illustrate our mission is to grow, maintain and program a world-class park system prioritizing equity, access, safety, and nature.

Accessibility Statement

NYC Parks strives to help all New Yorkers discover how New York City's parks can enrich their lives, promoting physical and emotional well-being, and providing venues for fitness and peaceful respite for the widest possible audience.

Accessibility is a central pillar of NYC Parks' mission to grow, maintain, and program a park system promoting equity, access, safety, and nature. Throughout all agency processes, we emphasize accessibility as a key consideration and look to increase our approach for improving access throughout our facilities and programming cared for and managed by NYC Parks.

In compliance with federal, state, and local laws, we implement policies and procedures to identify and remove existing barriers while designing new facilities so that we promote a safe, accessible environment for everyone accessing New York City parks. All NYC Parks' accessibility efforts advance our goal of providing equal access systemwide for our patrons, partners, and employees with dignity and respect. We are also committed to providing equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities at our facilities and programming.

Agency Plan

Physical Access

NYC Parks implements physical improvements to key community resources including: playgrounds, public restroom buildings, ballfields, recreation centers, pools, and greenspaces. We also offer expansive programming and events to strengthen the social fabric and vitality of neighborhoods. Our park facilities are essential building blocks in our city's resurgence. Through strategic prioritization of communities most in need, we collaborate with area residents in the design of their park's reconstruction, and in the ongoing care of their community's greenspaces and recreational amenities, thereby enhancing neighborhoods and attracting investment.

Our extensive portfolio contains thousands of facilities built prior to the enactment of the ADA. While these pre-ADA existing facilities may not be fully compliant, most have some accessible features or portions that are accessible. ADA compliance is a requirement for all facilities newly constructed or materially reconstructed.

Progress on our Capital Plan ensures more accessible facilities are constructed each year. NYC Parks has invested over \$5.35 billion in capital projects over the past decade, an average of over \$500 million for facility improvements per year. which has translated into accessibility improvements citywide. NYC Parks ensures ADA compliance in design and construction by drafting construction documents with ADA compliant designs. For already funded capital projects the agency will continue to build compliant with ADA regulations.

Starting in Fiscal 2023, the agency reports the accessibility statistics in our projects on a citywide basis through the "eligible capital projects including accessibility improvements"

metric in the Mayor's Management Report (MMR). Every single facility that we build with our partners is an investment in improving accessibility. The accessibility section of our website provides information to patrons of all abilities and our [Capital Projects Tracker](#) provides information about facilities under construction so our patrons with disabilities may know before they go. Descriptions of accessible facilities can be found on our website under "About Parks" "Accessibility" "Accessible Facilities" found [here](#).

Landscape Architects working on our exterior site projects aim to make each site as accessible as possible. Pathways are designed to prioritize sloped walkways with less than 5% grade, minimizing the use of ramps. Stairs are limited to secondary pathways and only in conditions where necessary because of existing topographic conditions. Many of our standard site detail drawing sheets include ADA at their core. Standardized accessible site furnishings including tables, chairs, drinking fountains, and bottle fillers, are contained throughout our standard drawing set. Standard drainage covers and frames used in publicly accessible paved areas meet ADA standards.

Architects designing our buildings start all design projects with a full survey to identify any accessibility issues requiring reconstruction. Designs include ramps, lifts, elevators, with the proper clearances and fixture locations, mountings, and fixture types, to bring all our facilities into compliance. The designers ensure all common areas, such as lobbies, restrooms, locker rooms, and offices, meet accessibility standards required by the ADA in the most equitable way possible. Our standard drawing set template includes an ADA standards sheet containing many of the building blocks necessary to meet regulations. Agency staff refer to this sheet during both design and construction.

We develop common practices that allow us to preserve site accessibility without high maintenance. One example is using low-maintenance paving surfaces. While stone screenings are ADA-compliant, they require intensive and continued care to maintain an even surface, so this material is avoided in our designs. This shows that we think not only about conditions following construction but also about the accessibility of materials as they age over time. We also emphasize accessibility as a key component for vendors, as indicated in our standard specifications.

Our standard play equipment specification requires ADA compliance. Play equipment suppliers vetted by the agency know ADA standards and provide compliant play structures for children of all abilities. We strive to exceed ADA standards for play equipment and have worked with manufacturers to create innovative, new, engaging, and accessible components.

The agency has inspected all playgrounds with in-house staff for accessible site features. These comprehensive evaluations identified barriers to accessibility within our playgrounds. NYC Parks works with the Historic House Trust (HHT), a 501(c) non-profit

organization, to preserve the city's 23 publicly owned historic sites. In 2020, HHT hired a consultant team from United Spinal Association to complete a comprehensive study of all 23 of its partner sites. These complete facility class understandings are something we wish to replicate across our portfolio.

Recently the agency has begun a capital needs assessment of its facilities throughout our portfolio using in-house staff as time and resources allow. The knowledge learned through the HHT study illustrated the usefulness of inventorying an entire facility class. Facility accessibility is a key metric that is being gathered in these investigations. We will continue inspecting NYC Parks' facilities with in-house staff or by hiring consultants as resources and funding allow.

Public restrooms serve the basic needs of all patrons and recreation centers serve multiple varied needs through year-round programming. We will maximize the effectiveness of our assessment effort by starting with and prioritizing complete accessibility surveys of these facility types. These efforts will be followed by assessment of our other facilities.

As many of our site-based projects are funded by elected official partners, we will use this information to inform planning and funding requests for capital improvements. As we speak with the elected officials, we will share the accessibility status of the already evaluated facilities within their districts as the data becomes available. We believe shining the spotlight on the importance of accessibility will lead to our funding partners placing as much focus on accessibility as we do. As we bring newly funded projects into an accessible future the agency continues to move toward its goal of a completely accessible system.

Digital Access

NYC Parks is committed to ensuring our digital content is accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. We are continually improving the user experience for everyone and applying the relevant accessibility standards. NYC Parks' digital accessibility is overseen by our Digital Media and Content Strategy Teams, which coordinate the production of content of our online presence. Compliance with digital media accessibility is managed by the teams. The teams are trained in digital content accessibility and content is reviewed in-house before distribution. NYC Parks' Website Accessibility Statement is posted in the "About Parks" "Accessibility" page and can be found [here](#).

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) defines requirements for designers and developers to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. It defines three levels of conformance: Level A, Level AA, and Level AAA. Our digital content is partially

conformant with WCAG 2.1 level AA. Partially conformant means that some parts of the content do not fully conform to this accessibility standard.

All images that are used on the website are assigned meaningful alternative text descriptions which convey the information and purpose of the image with the use of programmatic alt text.

The creators of NYC Parks' electronic documents are aware of and follow the principles of accessible document creation as outlined in the MOPD's Accessible Documents Guide, Accessible PPT Guide and Accessible PDF Guides. There is a review process in place to ensure that all electronic documents are made accessible prior to public distribution. There is also a plan in place for the remediation of documents previously created that weren't created in an accessible format beforehand.

Social media posts and corresponding images are given meaningful alternative text descriptions on Parks platforms including Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, and LinkedIn using the platforms' built-in alt text mechanisms. Our social media posts avoid the use of ASCII text. Videos posted to social media include Closed Captioning (CC) or embedded captions where CC is not supported, that includes indications of significant background sounds, names of who is speaking, and not just regarding auto-generated captions.

Parks mass emails include accessible features including accessible templates, headings, and alt text for images. Virtual public meetings are accessible via Zoom and there are captions and ASL interpretation available to those who request it prior to the meeting. Zoom also provides AI generated captioning.

NYC Parks will continue to assess the accessibility of its digital content through self-evaluation.

Programmatic Access

NYC Parks offers a variety of inclusive and adaptive sports, and recreational programs throughout many of our recreation centers. These events are geared specifically towards people with physical disabilities. Individuals can find events or programs that fit their needs on our "All Events" "Adaptive Programs" page found [here](#).

Each year, NYC Parks hosts a variety of public events, many of which include inclusive or adaptive activities for persons with disabilities. This includes family festivals in parks and our free summer movie series - Movies Under the Stars. Many of these events are held in accessible locations within large parks and playgrounds across the five boroughs, with bathrooms on site.

Adaptive hubs are fully accessible recreation centers that lead their borough in offering programs for New Yorkers with disabilities. These hubs are also locations where patrons can go to get more information on what NYC Parks offers citywide for patrons with disabilities. As newer recreation centers become available through future capital construction, NYC Parks will make an effort to increase inclusive and adaptive recreation programs for persons with disabilities.

Reasonable accommodation for all public events must be scheduled three days in advance using the contact information located at the bottom of the event flyer as per NYC Local Law 28. A list of events at accessible locations can be found on our Events Calendar by checking the “Events in Accessible Locations” filter under “Type” found [here](#).

Effective Communication

NYC Parks strives to ensure that people with disabilities can receive and convey information related to our programs and facilities in a manner that is accessible and consistent with their preferred communication methods.

NYC Parks will provide, upon request at least three days prior, auxiliary aids and services leading to effective communication for persons with disabilities so they can participate equally in NYC Parks’ programs, services, and activities in adherence with Local Law 28. Individuals can request auxiliary aids and services through contact information found on all program flyers as required by Local Law 28, the [online reasonable accommodation request form](#), [the printable form](#) mailed to our Accessibility Coordinator, or calling 311.

NYC Parks will continue to use established methods for providing in-person sign language interpretation, assistive listening devices, documents in braille, and closed captioning of videos when requested at least three days prior. These established methods include video remote interpretation and Communication Access Realtime Transcript (CART). NYC Parks’ Media Labs provides screen reader and magnification software on publicly available computers.

The NYC Parks Capital Division Architecture unit tracks all projects with assembly areas to ensure that hearing loops have been or will be included in all projects that require them under Local Law 51. We also aim to provide hearing loops in our projects that include large instruction areas (large fitness areas, large computer labs, large classrooms) to provide this accommodation to our deaf or hard of hearing patrons.

Workplace Inclusion

NYC Parks complies with the City's Equal Opportunity Policy (EEO Policy). This provides a work environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation based upon any legally protected status or protected characteristic, including but not limited to having a disability.

Compliance with the [City's EEO Policy](#) includes adherence with the [City's Reasonable Accommodation Policy](#) which provides applicants and employees with reasonable accommodation based upon disability and other categories, to perform the essential functions of their job and equal employment opportunities. Our agency provides tools, technology, and workspaces that are accessible to employees, such as ergonomic office equipment and the availability to access technology such as magnification, voice recognition, and screen readers. Our policies and procedures are in adherence with DCAS' "[Reasonable Accommodation Procedural Guidelines](#)."

Our agency has attended numerous MOPD events in the past and has partnered with AHRC NYC and PII (Partnership for Inclusive Internships) to increase visibility for candidates with disabilities. Our Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Officers review all job descriptions to ensure that the language provides the essential job duties and calls for the position to be disability inclusive.

The agency implements the 55-A program which hires persons with disabilities for competitive positions within the agency and a 55-A Coordinator who answers all questions, concerns, and comments regarding all open positions within NYC Parks. We also provide internships and fellowship opportunities for people with disabilities through programs such as the PII.

As an agency, we strive to ensure that we incorporate accessibility into our workplace procedures and events, and promote our jobs to diverse recruitment resources, including those that serve people with disabilities.

Methodology

In preparation of this five-year plan, Parks used several self-evaluation tools offered by the MOPD to measure our compliance which falls under Title II of the ADA and Local Laws administrative requirements.

Additionally, we've reviewed feedback based on past comments from our Parks ADA Advisory Committee, which enables us to receive valuable insight regarding our properties directly from persons with disabilities (PWD) and/or organizations that service constituents with disabilities living in the NYC area.

Prior to the creation of this report, our capital needs assessments (which include accessibility data) were already underway for many of our facilities. This plan offered the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment that capital needs assessments will continue gathering accessibility data. This consistent approach within each facility class will allow us to have a useful dataset once each facility class is completed.

This plan was available in draft format for public comment from 03/14/2024 until 05/03/2024. One comment in total was received during the comment period. The commentor requested more information be included on our website regarding our ADA Advisory Committee. NYC Parks will work to include this information on the agency website in the future.

Training

NYC Parks will continue to offer educational opportunities and training to our employees, some of which will be mandatory, to ensure that they are performing their duties and interacting with individuals in a way that is respectful, inclusive, and free from discrimination. This effort includes training offered by the City, DEIB Office and the ADA Accessibility Coordinator such as Our Common Ground-Strengthening the Workforce, Everybody Matters: Diversity and Inclusion, Disability Etiquette and Awareness, Structured Interviewing, How to Create Accessible Documents, and other mandatory accessibility-related trainings. Mandatory trainings are anticipated to be offered at least every two years.

Glossary

Accessibility – Referring to usability by a person with a disability, applying to an environment, product/service, program, or activity.¹

Adaptive Hub – Fully accessible recreation centers that offer programs for patrons with disabilities and also provide information on what NYC Parks offers citywide.

Agency – Referring to the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation (also referenced as NYC Parks or Parks).

AHRC NYC – Advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 – The federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities and guaranteeing people with disabilities have the same opportunities to participate in state and local government programs.

Capital Division – The division responsible for redesigning and rebuilding most facilities (sites and buildings) within NYC Parks' deeded land. Typical projects include playgrounds, bike paths, sea walls, outdoor pools, public restroom buildings, boardwalks, sports fields/courts, natural areas, and recreation centers.

Capital Plan – The planned spending strategy to improve the city's assets and infrastructure over the next ten years. The Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) oversees the budget. The plan is funded primarily through the issuance of bonds and also includes funding from federal, state, and private grants.

Capital Project – A project constructed by NYC that has a value greater than \$50,000, in place for at least five years, must be contiguous part of a system, and extends the useful life of the asset, generally funded through bond sales.

Capital Project Tracker – The website that tracks all Capital Division projects underway during design, procurement, construction, and completion. The tracker allows all members of the public to view status of each capital project.

¹ [Northeast ADA Center, Accessible.](#)

Construction Documents – The construction drawings and contract book (specifications, contract requirements, and other written documents) that instruct the contractor on building the proposed design.

Digital Accessibility – Practice of making digital resources usable by people of all abilities, including individuals with disabilities.

Disability – A legal term referring to a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities.²

Equal Opportunity – Meaning a person with a disability has the same chance to get a job, receive services from a state or local government, or access a business/nonprofit as someone without a disability.³

Facility – All or any portion of buildings, structures, sites, complexes, or equipment including roads, walks, passageways, and the site where the building, property, structure, or equipment is located.⁴

Individual/Person with a Disability – Someone who has a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such a disability, or is perceived by others as having such a disability⁵.

Mayor’s Management Report (MMR) – The report released twice a year that serves as a public account of the performance of City agencies, measuring whether they are delivering services efficiently, effectively, and expeditiously.

PII – Partnership for Inclusive Internships, a program of the AHRC which partners with NYC and NYC government agencies to provide internships to persons with disabilities.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) - Defines requirements for designers and developers to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. It defines three levels of conformance: Level A, Level AA, and Level AAA.

² [ADA National Network, What is the definition of disability under the ADA?](#)

³ [Northeast ADA Center, Equal opportunity.](#)

⁴ [Legal Information Institute.](#)

⁵ Adapted from: [Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)

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NYC Parks