



**New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation**

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

ERIK KULLESEID
Commissioner

January 31, 2024

Nadine Moreell
Audit Director
Division of State Government Accountability
Office of the State Comptroller
110 State Street - 11th Floor
Albany, NY 12236-0001

Dear Nadine Morrell:

The Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) has reviewed the Office of the State Comptroller's (OSC) final report 2022-S-3, titled "Accessibility for People With Disabilities," which was conducted to determine if OPRHP has taken adequate steps to ensure State parks and historic sites are accessible and can accommodate persons with disabilities, including meeting State and federal requirements. Our response to the recommendations contained in OSC's report are enclosed.

Sincerely,

Erik Kulleseid
Commissioner
Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Response to the Office of the State Comptroller Final Report 2022-S-3 Accessibility for People With Disabilities

Recommendation 1: Develop processes to actively incorporate accessibility into the operation and maintenance of parks, which may include but are not limited to:

- Communicating and training park staff on ADA requirements;
- Monitoring new construction and alteration projects to ensure compliance with standards;
- Developing procedures for recording and addressing accessibility complaints; and
- Assessing potential barriers to accessibility and, to the extent feasible, addressing the newly identified potential improvement areas as well as the barriers identified in the Plan.

Recommendation 2: Improve the accuracy of publicly reported information on accessibility – communicated both online and through the signage at parks.

Recommendation 3: Document and communicate the roles and responsibilities of the ADA Coordinator, which should include requirements to coordinate compliance with ADA and investigate ADA-related complaints.

OPRHP July 31, 2023 response to 2022-S-3 draft report: OPRHP agrees with the Report's recommendations and thinks all three will improve accessibility and reinforce OPRHP's efforts to address barriers. In reviewing these recommendations, OPRHP has determined it will conduct a multi-faceted review of its policies, facilities, and programs and establish a plan to meet its long-term goals of addressing identified barriers to accessibility, including updating policies and improving procedures, as needed. This plan will include enhancing information available to the public about OPRHP's programs, their accessibility, and its modification procedures; developing a procedure to centralize and document accessibility-related complaints and their resolution; clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the ADA Coordinator; providing greater communication and opportunities for employee training on ADA requirements; engaging in additional self-evaluation; and updating the transition plan. OPRHP is working now on coordinating an inter-disciplinary team to lead these efforts.

OPRHP Implementation as of January 31, 2024:

OPRHP convened an interdisciplinary team to review the Report's findings and recommendations and to propose a long-term plan for implementing changes responsive to the Report and for improving accessibility overall. The interdisciplinary team met a number of times to discuss and develop an approach for reviewing OPRHP's policies, procedures, and existing programs and for identifying and remedying barriers to accessibility. As a result of these efforts, OPRHP is adopting new or revised policies addressing, to date, complaints/grievances, requests for reasonable modifications, service animals, and the provision of auxiliary aides and services and will be considering adoption of additional policies and procedures to improve accessibility throughout OPRHP's parks and historic sites.

The interdisciplinary team is now focusing its efforts on reviewing OPRHP's existing Transition Plan and outlining a process for its comprehensive update. This will be a multi-year endeavor that will focus first on assessing OPRHP's over 5,000 facilities at its 250 parks and historic sites to identify potential physical barriers and strategizing their removal.

Additionally, OPRHP has formally designated an ADA Coordinator and adopted guidelines to clarify the ADA Coordinator's role and responsibilities. The ADA Coordinator is a member of OPRHP's interdisciplinary team. Going forward, the ADA Coordinator will ensure the development of regular training on disability discrimination and the ADA, generally, and on the new and revised policies. The ADA Coordinator is also recommending to the interdisciplinary team additional policies and procedures and related training in other areas impacting patron services.

OPRHP has assigned staff to identify and remove accessibility signage that is inaccurate or misleading and is working with its third-party vendor, Aspira, to correct any information found to be inaccurate on its reservation site, Reserve America. The ADA Coordinator is reviewing OPRHP's public-facing website to ensure information regarding accessibility is current and accurate and will post publicly OPRHP's grievance procedures and other procedures relating to accessibility, as needed.

To complement these efforts and ensure that new construction and alteration projects comply with the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, OPRHP is also pursuing creation of a new role within its Capital Program, the Codes Compliance Director, who will be responsible for ensuring that project planning, design, construction, or alterations of OPRHP facilities comply with the applicable provisions of the 2010 Standards. The interdisciplinary team developed roles and responsibilities for the Codes Compliance Director to ensure the new position would complement the roles and responsibilities of the ADA Coordinator.

OPRHP remains committed to improving accessibility across the entire New York State Parks System and will continue to advance its multi-faceted approach to identifying and addressing potential barriers.