

2023 Annual Status Report on Multi-year Accessibility Plan

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speak with a representative from Citizen's First

Accessibility Legislation in Ontario

In 2005, the Government of Ontario passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and its regulations. Its goal is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025 by creating, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards. These standards are the rules that businesses and organizations in Ontario must follow to identify, remove and prevent barriers so that people living with disabilities will have more opportunities to participate in everyday life. The standards are contained in one regulation called the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, also known as the IASR. Currently, the IASR is made up of five standards and several general requirements that apply to the City's business in the following areas:

- Customer Service
- Information and Communication
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces

The AODA and the Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code) work together to promote equality and accessibility. The Code states that people living with disabilities must be free from discrimination where they work, live and receive services, and that their needs must be accommodated. Under the Code, the City of St. Catharines has a legal obligation to accommodate any person with a disability regardless of whether they are an employee, volunteer, resident, or visitor. The duty to accommodate means that wherever unequal treatment or discrimination exists, it must be remedied unless the remedy would cause undue hardship. The Code has primacy over the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and its regulations.

Compliance

As required under the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* (IASR) section of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA), the City of St. Catharines prepares annual status reports on the progress of the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility. The City's 2021-2025 Accessibility Plan outlines the City's current strategy.

This annual report provides a status update on the corporation's progress achieved in 2023 towards that strategy. This includes a detailed account of the improvements to City services, programs, information, communications, and facilities through the completion of accessibility-related initiatives. In addition to meeting statutory requirements, this report demonstrates the City's commitment to the inclusion of persons living with disabilities, be they residents, employees or visitors in all the City has to offer.

The City is currently compliant with provisions under the standards of Customer Service, Information and Communication, the Design of Public Spaces, Transportation, Employment and General Standards.

Statement of Organizational Commitment

The Corporation of the City of St. Catharines is committed to developing, implementing, maintaining, and enhancing accessibility as set out under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) and its Standards for people with a disability, in a manner that:

- Reflects the principles of dignity and independence;
- Seeks to provide integrated services; and
- Provides opportunity equitable to others to obtain, use and benefit from its goods or services.

Project updates in 2023

Multi-Use Courts

The following multi-use courts were substantially completed in 2023, with final completion in 2024, and feature:

- Accessible playing surfaces and routes through the playing space
- Accessible hard surfaces connecting the municipal sidewalk

Louis Avenue Multi-Use Court

Louis Avenue Multi-Use Court Before

The photos below show pavement in need of repair and no connection to other elements in the park.



Louis Avenue Multi-Use Court After

The photos below show new accessible playing surfaces and routes through the playing space.



St. Patrick's Park Multi-Use Court

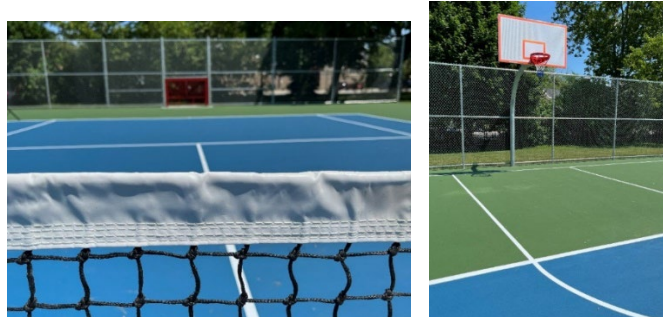
St. Patrick's Park Multi-Use Court Before

The photos below show pavement in need of repair and no connection to other elements in the park.



St. Patrick's Park Multi-Use Court After

The photos below show new accessible playing surfaces and routes through the playing space.



Harcove Park Sidewalk

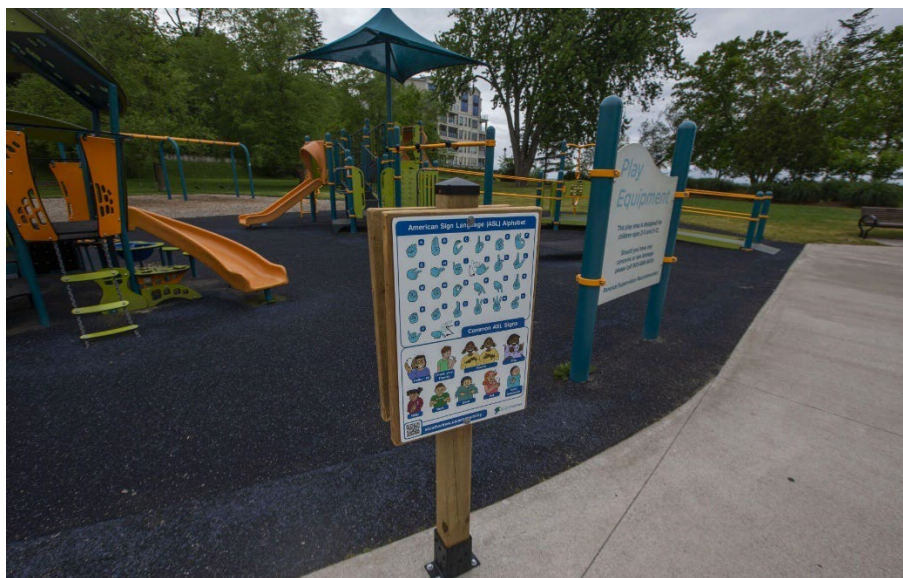
A new sidewalk from the road to the playground was constructed. The photo on the left shows Harcove Park before the new sidewalk was constructed and the photo on the right shows the completed sidewalk.



American Sign Language (ASL) Pilot Project

ASL signage depicting the American Sign Language (ASL) alphabet and common language and phrases, designed by artist Carlisle Robinson, was installed at the entrances of City recreational facilities in 2023 and across city parks in 2024. These posters are designed to enhance accessibility and bridge communication gaps for individuals who use ASL as their primary mode of communication.

The photo below shows the sign at the Lakeside Park playground.



Recreational Trails and Multi-use paths

The table below lists the trails and paths that were updated or installed in 2023. To the right of the location list shows whether it is newly constructed or an upgrade to an existing trail, and whether or not funding was received from the federal “Investing in Canada Infrastructure” (ICIP) program.

Location	New Trail	Upgrade Existing	Federal ICIP Funded
Pearson Park – South Trail Improvements		✓	✓
Fairview Park – at the Labyrinth	✓		✓
Rennie Park - North Trail Improvements		✓	✓

Pearson Park

The photos below show the upgraded pathways and trails at Pearson Park.



Fairview Park

The photos below show the new trail constructed at the Fairview Park Labrinth. A Labyrinth (sometimes referred to as a healing garden) is a walking path designed for meditation, mindfulness, and personal reflection. Labyrinths can be utilized by persons of all abilities, to reduce stress and provide gentle exercise.



Rennie Park

The photos below show the north trail improvements at Rennie Park.



Recreation

Dry-Land Recreation Programs

- Abilities in Motion (AIM) Yoga and Brock Niagara Penguins recreation programming continued in 2023. Brock Niagara Penguins is a sporting program for youth and young adults with a physical disability offering swimming, sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball & racing, handcycling, boccia, para-hockey and summer camp.
- All the programming offered at the Community and Older Adult Centres work to support those with accessibility needs.

Special Events

- All third-party events held on City properties are subject to the Accessibility Policies found within the Special Event Planning Guide.

Arenas

- At Canda Games Park (a facility co-owned by the City of St. Catharines), Brock University books sledge hockey for the Thunderblades, approximately 1.5 hours per month for their games.

Aquatics

Angel Fish (Ages 4-14 years)

- This program focuses on developing water safety habits and basic swimming skills for children with learning, physical or intellectual difficulties.

Inclusive Participation

- The community is invited to participate in all aquatics programming and the City offers free entry to any person supporting a person with a disability.

Lane Swimming

- The Aquatics Centre hosts several individuals who require an individual lane to participate in lane swimming due to their disability. This accommodation is provided through the Aquatics Accommodation program including reserving lanes a week in advance to facilitate transportation to the facility.

St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre

The Museum developed two new galleries in 2023: The Historic Welland Canals and the Isabella Frampton Hawken Gallery. Both exhibits were designed and developed with accessibility principles that were developed as part of the Interpretive Plan and in consultation with the accessibility advisory committee. This includes principles of Universal Design. Text and graphics are designed with legibility and readability for all

users with large type sizes and easy to read fonts. In addition, large print exhibit guides are available for all exhibits that provide all the exhibit text in an even larger format for those with visual impairments. All museum spaces have been designed with ease of navigation for those using mobility devices. QR codes are located throughout the exhibits for additional information that can be accessed online for those who use screen readers.

Financial Management Services

Most of the accessibility improvements made during 2023 fall under the Integrated Accessibility Standard Regulations (IASR) categories of General Requirements (procurement, self-serve kiosks, multi-year plans and policies), Customer Service (providing customer service to people with disabilities) and Information and Communications (providing feedback, requesting alternate formats and websites).

External Improvements were made to provide increased accessibility and ease of use to customers and community partners through the following measures:

- Staff have continued their requests for the support of the Communications Team to review content and make suggestions based on accessibility requirements.
- Accounts Payable has increased the use of EFT's and digital documents.
- Parking Services arranged to utilize the LanguageLine, via virtual connection, to facilitate a parking ticket screening with a member of the ASL (American Sign Language) community.
- Installation of additional pay and display parking equipment and continued use of Honk Mobile app, including use at Ontario Street Parking Garage.

Internal Improvements were made to increase accessibility within Financial Management Services and with other departments:

- Use of DocuSign internally and with external partners.
- Continued support to other departments to address funding needs for accessibility initiatives.

Employment and Communications at the City

The City of St. Catharines is committed to accessible communications for all who visit and use our services or facilities. For people employed with the City, we offer inclusive employment experiences, starting with barrier-free recruitment and selection processes, on-boarding, and supportive work environments.

The City has continued to:

- Notify the public that accommodations will be provided upon request while accessing our facilities and services.
- Promote and welcome accommodations throughout recruitment process and employment life cycle.

- Provide accessibility training to staff, volunteers, Council and Committees of Council.
- Support staff and Committees to meet virtually on platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams.
- Offer LanguageLine services in person and over the phone to assist residents in over 240 different languages including sign language and document translation.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

The City of St. Catharines Accessibility Advisory Committee held meetings in July, September, October and November of 2023 and provided comment and feedback on various projects.

Looking to the future in 2024-2025

Completed in 2024

- Elma Street Park multi-use court
- Port Dalhousie Lions Park multi-use court
- Fairview Park Community Vision Master Plan

In-Progress in 2024

- Community Park Tennis Courts
- Burgoyne Woods Park play equipment
- Bartlett Park play equipment and multi-use court
- Alex Mackenzie Park play equipment and basketball court
- Secord Woods splash pad, sun shelter and washroom
- Morningstar Mill accessibility improvements to the site
- Buchanan House accessibility upgrades
- Carousel accessibility

Starting in 2025

- Torosian Park Basketball Court & Playground
- Lakeview Park Basketball Court
- Clifford's Creek Park Basketball Court
- Berkley Park Tennis Court
- Sunset Beach Renewal