

# City of St. Catharines

## 2024-2025 Annual Status Report on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

### Introduction

This 2024-2025 Annual Status Report updates the City of St. Catharines' progress on its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan by detailing the specific measures taken during 2024-2025<sup>1</sup> to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

### Statement of Commitment

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, facilities or services

### 2024 Accessibility Achievements

The following section highlights key actions completed in 2024 to enhance accessibility across the City.

#### Community, Recreation and Culture Services

##### St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre:

In 2024, the Museum developed two new galleries: the James Grant Exhibition Gallery and the Stan Mikita Exhibition Gallery. Both exhibits were designed and developed using accessibility principles established during the interpretive plan process and in consultation with the St. Catharines Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC). These principles include Universal Design. Text and graphics were created with legibility and readability in mind, featuring large type sizes and easy-to-read fonts to support more users.

New high-contrast stair nosing was installed in the stairwell to the second floor.

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<sup>1</sup> To September 1, 2025

## **Museum Exhibits:**

QR codes are located throughout new museum exhibits for additional information that can be accessed online for those who use screen readers.

Large print exhibit guides are available for all exhibits, providing all text in a larger format for those with visual impairments.

## **Parks, Playing Fields, Courts and Green Spaces**

**Multi-Use Courts:** New courts at Elma Street Park and Port Dalhousie Lions Park were completed with accessible playing surfaces and hard surface routes connecting to other park elements and municipal sidewalks.

### **Elma Street Park Multi-Use Court**

#### **Before**



#### **After**



**After**



**Port Dalhousie Lions Park Multi-Use Court**

**Before**



**After**



## After



**Fairview Park:** Completed the Community Vision Plan.

## **St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Facility**

The **St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatics Facility** has earned a **Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification – Gold** for its inclusive design.

Key accessibility features at the facility include:

- Ramps for pool entry
- Water wheelchairs
- Height-adjustable change tables for adults
- A lift in the universal change room

To remove communication barriers to Deaf individuals, the facility also provides the **Language Line Service Solutions**, offering on-demand sign language interpretation to assist individuals with registration and other needs.

## **Aquatics programming and initiatives**

The **Angel Fish** program focuses on water safety and swimming skills for children (4-14 years) with learning, physical, or intellectual difficulties.

The **Aquatics Accommodation program** enables individuals with disabilities to reserve lanes in advance, making participation easier.

The City waives the entry fee for a support person assisting an individual with a disability in aquatics programming.

## **Other recreational initiatives**

The Niagara Thunderblades, a sledge hockey team within the Brock Niagara Penguins ParaSport Organization, use the ice arena for approximately 1.5 hours per month at **Canada Games Park** for their games. The park is owned and operated by a consortium that includes the Regional Municipality of Niagara, Brock University, the City of St. Catharines, and the City of Thorold.

## **AIM Yoga (Abilities in Motion) – programming is ongoing**

Programming at Community and Older Adult Centres supports individuals with disabilities, including participants with low vision and children with autism receiving personal support.

## **Special Events**

All third-party events held on City property must comply with the AODA requirements set out in the City of St. Catharines Special Event Planning Guide.

## **Accessible Chess & Checkers, Port Weller Community Centre**



Funding – Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility Senior Active Living Centres

## **Corporate Support Services – Human Resources**

**AODA Supervisory Training:** On December 11, 2024, 21 City supervisors were trained on the AODA Compliance module, “Making Accessibility Part of Everyday Business.”

## **Engineering, Facilities and Environmental Services (EFES)**

### **Walkway Program**

Walkway improvements completed in Montebello Park.

### **Projects**

EFES staff attended meetings of the AAC during 2024 to:

- share a summary of the sidewalk reconstruction on Forest Hill Road (Old Glenridge)
- present the Waterfront Access Plan
- receive feedback on the draft Active Transportation Plan
- receive feedback on Lakeside Park and Sunset Beach washrooms

### **Office of the Chief Administrative Officer**

Chief Administrative Officer, David Oakes met with the AAC to discuss the need for a dedicated accessibility staff position at the City of St. Catharines. This request was put forth by the Mayor in the budget process.

## **Planning and Building Services (PBS)**

### **Planning**

The Planning Department continues to receive accessibility feedback during the site-plan review process from a member of the AAC.

### **Building Services**

The Chief Building Official presented information to the AAC about the Province of Ontario Initial Recommendations Report of the Design of Public Spaces Standards Development Committee.

## **St. Catharines Public Library**

### **Accessibility Services Provided:**

- 1,008 individuals used accessibility tools such as the accessibility computer or magnifying glass (Jan 1, 2024 – September 1, 2025).
- 668 customers used the Visiting Library Service due to inability to physically visit the library (Jan 1, 2024 – September 1, 2025).

### **Facility Improvements:**

- Updated the door operator at the James and Church Street Central Library entrance with a “wave scanner”.
- Moved public computer service from the second floor to the first floor at the Central Library for improved accessibility.

### **Support Services:**

- Offered proctoring services to four students requiring accommodations (e.g., quiet space, text-to-speech software).
- Registered one additional customer for the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) service.

## **Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) Accomplishments in 2024**

### **Direct Policy & Municipal Influence**

- An AAC member was appointed to the City of St. Catharines Fee Waiving Task Force.
- The committee requested inclusion of applicable language regarding playground and universal washrooms in the St. Catharines Facility Accessibility Design Standards (FADS)
- In April 2024, Council passed the motion "that the FADS document be reviewed line by line by the AAC and report any suggested updates." The AAC continues to do this work.
- The committee advocated for a dedicated Accessibility Coordinator position at Council where an AAC member spoke on behalf of the committee to the motion.
- The AAC formally recommended that city staff consider the adoption of a City Scent-Free Policy.
- An AAC member reviewed 24 site plans for accessibility as part of the municipal site plan approval process.

### **Consultation on City Plans & Projects**

The committee:

- Received a presentation on the Central Library Branch Renovation and provided recommendations.
- Provided feedback on the Waterfront Access Master Plan.
- Provided feedback on the draft Active Transportation Master Plan.
- Received a presentation regarding the City's Sports Field Strategy.
- Received a presentation and update on improving the accessibility of the Lakeside Park Carousel.
- Endorsed the recommendation of the Environmental Stewardship Committee to consider the costs of drone shows as opposed to fireworks displays in the future, for accessibility reasons.

### **Community Engagement & Advocacy**

- Some AAC members attended the Mayor's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Townhall meeting.
- The AAC responded to a request from the St. Catharines Downtown Association with a letter of support for an Inclusive Community Grant application.
- The AAC responded to a letter received from Beacon Christian School regarding business entrances with a step.

### **Committee Development & Research**

- Some AAC members attended Niagara's AAC Committees' Spring Workshop.
- An AAC member undertook research and prepared a summary document: "FADS and other Municipalities" to inform the committee's ongoing review of the City of St. Catharines FADS document.
- Two AAC members shared resources for developing a scent-free policy, including guides from the Canadian Human Rights Commission and existing policies from the Alliance for Healthier Communities and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

## 2025 Accessibility Achievements to Date and Future Initiatives

### Community, Recreation and Culture Services

#### Parks, Playing Fields, Courts, and Green Spaces

**Community Park Tennis Courts:** Replaced pavement and added accessible hard surface connections to the municipal sidewalk and parking lot.

**Before**



**After**



**Secord Woods Splash Pad, Sun Shelter, and Washroom:** This project features accessible/inclusive play features, at-grade activation controls, universal washroom designs, accessible picnic tables, sun shelter, and accessible hard surface connections. The site is served by public transit.



## **Engineering, Facilities and Environmental Services**

### **The Walker's Creek Trail Realignment and Pedestrian Crossing (PXO) at Lakeshore Road:**

This project features a new accessible, paved, 3m-wide multi-use trail realignment and extension section at Walker's Creek Park to accommodate the long-awaited newly installed Pedestrian Crossing (PXO) by the Niagara Region at the very busy Lakeshore Road. This city's Active Transportation initiative, in collaboration with the Niagara Region, focuses on pedestrian-friendly modes of transportation and will provide a safe and accessible trail connection, offering enhanced mobility choices to ensure continuous, connected routes throughout the city.

**Before**



**After**



## **Looking to the Future: 2025-2026 Projects**

The following projects are in progress in 2025:

- Alex Mackenzie Park play equipment and basketball court
- Bartlett Park play equipment and multi-use court
- Burgoyne Woods play equipment
- Burgoyne Woods pickleball courts
- Sunset Beach Renewal
- Accessibility improvements at Morningstar Mill (ongoing construction)

## **The following projects were initiated in 2025:**

Berkley Park multi-use court

Clifford's Creek Park basketball court (deferred to 2026)

Lakeview Park basketball court

Torosian Park basketball court & playground

## **Legal and Clerk Services**

### **2025 Municipal By-election (Port Dalhousie)**

Accessibility accomplishments:

- To ensure AODA compliance and meet Elections Ontario standards all voting locations were assessed and selected using the City's Polling Place Accessibility Checklist. Entrances had automatic door openers or temporary attendants on voting days.
- Accessible voting equipment (audio ballots, tactile keypads, sip-and-puff devices) was available at designated locations. Magnifying sheets, and signature guides were available at all locations.
- Election staff and temporary poll workers were trained in accessible customer service, including assistance for voters with various disabilities. Communication supports like large-print and plain language instructions were available on request.
- Election information was available in accessible formats, upon request (e.g., large print, accessible PDF, plain language version) and election web content met WCAG 2.0 Level AA standards.

Any barriers to accessible voting were identified and logged for action prior to future elections.

### **Other:**

Plans for the inclusion of an "accessible format and communication support availability statement on municipal and task force agendas.

The Clerks Office sought accessibility input regarding the development of an Artificial Intelligence Policy for the City.

**Engineering, Facilities and Environmental Services**

Parnell Road and the proposed Walker’s Creek Trail Head Improvements were reviewed at an AAC meeting, including a 3.0-metre-wide protected crossing at Richelieu Drive. The new sidewalk proposed on Townline Road West was also reviewed and discussed.

**Niagara Region’s GO Station Precinct Development Project**

Several accessibility and active transportation upgrades were completed as part of a bundled project **in coordination with** the Niagara Region’s GO Station Precinct Development project. A new sidewalk on the north side of Ridley Road is under construction and a new PXO will be installed. Widened sidewalks and a new multi-use path were added to improve connectivity to the GO Station. New sidewalk ramps were installed at Permilla Street, and a new sidewalk and improved lighting will be added Cameron Park.

**Before – Ridley Road**



**After – Ridley Road**



**Before – Permilla Street**



**After – Permilla Street**



**After – New Road to GO Station and Multi-Use Path**



Looking ahead to the Facer Street Design Study and Engineering Services a project that includes a Community Visioning exercise to create features to emphasize its unique cultural attributes, such as beautiful, walkable streets, in conjunction with the planned reconstruction of the road and renewal of underground infrastructure. The AAC will be involved as part of the visioning process for input.

Also looking forward, the Merritt and Chestnut Road Reconstruction Project will rebuild Merritt Street, extend Chestnut and Mountain Streets, and upgrade road and underground infrastructure. It will also improve active transportation through new bike lanes, sidewalks, and trail connections. AAC input will be included in the review process.

### **Facilities**

Accessibility and other renovations at Buchanan House will be completed by the end of 2025.

An accessible washroom and elevator has been installed at the Folk Arts/Robertson School building (hosts 'Bridges Niagara') amongst other renovations. These will be completed by the end of 2025.

An accessibility ramp will be added to the Bill Burgoyne Arena by the end of 2025.

Morningstar Mill is undergoing restoration and other renovations including the addition of accessibility components to be completed by the end of 2025.

Beginning in 2026 the St Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre will undergo the construction of an elevator.

### **Fire Services and Fire**

The grand opening of Station 2 Firehall on Linwell Road.

### **St.Catharines Public Library**

#### **Facility Relocation:**

- Relocated the Merritt branch to the Pen Centre with extensive accessibility enhancements.

#### **Parking:**

- Changed access to the Central Branch library garage to permit-only in early 2025 while maintaining two accessibility parking spaces for registered users with a

valid Ontario Accessible Parking Permit and library card.

## **Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) Accomplishments in 2025**

### **Direct Policy & Municipal Influence**

- Council requested City staff prepare a report regarding the introduction of a scent-free policy for City facilities
- An AAC member reviewed 24 plans (to September 1, 2025) for accessibility as part of the municipal site plan approval process.

### **Consultation on City Plans & Projects**

The AAC received presentations from various departments on key City initiatives, including:

- Recreation Facilities and Programming Master Plan Update
- Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF), Accessible Housing Incentive
- Update on the Review of the Design of Public Spaces (DOPS)
- Introduction to the STC Official Plan Update
- St. Catharines Public Library, Pen Centre Library Branch Design
- St David's Road & Townline Road Reconstruction Phase 2
- Parnell Road (Vine Street and Niagara Street Reconstruction)
- Municipal And School Board Elections
- Economic Development and Tourism – LOVE STC website

### **Committee Development**

- Site Plan Review became a standing item on the AAC Agenda
- A review of the AAC workplan will be undertaken by the Accessibility Coordinator to determine status of items for inclusion in future municipal accessibility plans.
- Formation of AAC Sidewalk Working Group

## **Accessibility Coordinator Accomplishments (May to September)**

### **AAC Committee Business**

- Undertook the process to fill a vacancy on the AAC and added emergency evacuation information to the AAC Agenda documents.

### **Consultations and Feedback**

- Provided accessibility, inclusion, and AODA feedback on the draft Community, Recreation and Culture Services Special Event Planning Guide.
- Provided feedback on the STC Housing Accelerator Fund – Downtown

Forgivable Loan Program (DFLP), specifically regarding eligible costs for Barrier-Free Dwelling Units.

- Consulted on barrier-free requirements for Citizen's First kiosk installation at Dunlop Drive Older Adults Centre.
- Provided feedback to the Clerk's department on the AAC application form for new applicants.
- Participated in an accessibility, inclusion, and safety planning walkabout for an event at Merritton Lion's Club Community Centre.
- Provided AODA compliance requirements for WCAG 2.0 AA for Parking RFP.
- Provided AODA compliance requirements for Human Resource Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) RFP.

### **Regional and Inter-Municipal Collaboration**

- Represented St. Catharines on a working group with staff from Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Grimsby, and St. Catharines, led by the Region of Niagara's Shared Services Portfolio and contributed to drafting Terms of Reference for an internal corporate accessibility working group to be implemented at each of the five municipalities.
- Met with Niagara Regional Transit representatives regarding conventional, specialty and micro transit.

If you have any questions or require this document in an alternative format, please contact mailto:<mailto:accessibility@stcatharines.ca>

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