# 2026 Annual Status Report on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

## Introduction

The 2026 Annual Status Report outlines the City of St. Catharines' progress in implementing its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan by summarizing the measures taken between September 1, 2025, and September 1, 2026, to identify, remove and prevent barriers for persons with disabilities.

This report covers the final reporting period of the City's 2021-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and reflects the City's ongoing commitment to fostering an accessible and inclusive community. This work aligns with the City of St. Catharines' 2023-2027 Strategic Plan and its guiding principle of Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Following the inauguration of Council, a new 2026-2028 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will be presented to Council and will establish the City's accessibility priorities and actions for the next planning period.

## Accessibility Policy Implementation

### Statement of Commitment

The City's statement of organizational commitment is set out in the City's Accessibility Policy

### Support Persons

The City continues to waive admission fees for a support person who accompanies a person with a disability into City facilities and programs where admission fees apply. (Accessibility Policy s. 4.25.2, p. 9).

# Measures Taken to Remove and Prevent Barriers

## Community, Recreation, and Culture Services

Community, Recreation and Culture Services continued to improve accessibility across parks, recreation programs, cultural services, and community facilities through infrastructure upgrades, inclusive programming, and service enhancements.

### Completed Accessibility Improvements

The City continued to incorporate accessibility features into park renewal and redevelopment projects throughout the reporting period. Completed projects included

the installation of an accessible swing at Community Park, accessibility enhancements associated with the Burgoyne Woods playground and pickleball courts, and significant accessibility improvements at Sunset Beach.

**Community Park, 4 Seymour Avenue, St. Catharines - Accessible Swing (Ward 1)**



Image: Community Park, 4 Seymour Avenue, St. Catharines (Ward 1) - Accessible Swing

Enhancements at Sunset Beach included a second Mobi-Mat®, paved trails and connecting pathways, an accessible playground featuring a glider and at-grade-play elements, a rubberized play surface, accessible picnic tables, and a separate pedestrian walkway at the park entrance.

**Sunset Beach, 12 Lombardy Avenue – Accessibility (Ward 5)**



Image: Sunset Beach, 12 Lombardy Avenue, St. Catharines (Ward 5) – Mobi-Mat® and accessible parking spaces

Accessibility improvements were also completed at Morningstar Mill through facility renovations described later in this report.

**Upcoming Accessibility Improvements**

Additional accessibility improvements are underway across the City's park system. Projects anticipated to be completed in Fall 2026 include accessibility upgrades at Alex McKenzie Park, Bartlett Park, and Berkley Park. Further improvements are expected in Spring 2027 at Torosian Park and Lakeview Park.

Accessibility upgrades are also planned through the Fall 2026 Parks Renewal Plan. These future projects include multi-use courts and playground improvements at Guy Road Park and Shauna Park, as well as playground enhancements at McCaffrey Park and Barley Drive Park.

### Culture Services

Following a comprehensive review of the St. Catharines Cultural Investment Program in 2025, accessibility supports were introduced for applicants and grant recipients who are Deaf or have disabilities. Eligible applicants may now receive funding assistance to support grant application preparation and final reporting requirements, reducing barriers and promoting equitable access to cultural funding opportunities.

### St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre

The St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre continued to apply accessibility principles established in its Council-approved 2019 Interpretive Plan. Universal Design, accessible exhibit design, readability, and inclusive visitor experience considerations informed the development temporary exhibits, including *Honouring Indigenous Aid, Souvenirs*, and the *Youth Sports Teams Exhibit***.** These principles will continue to guide future museum initiatives, including the planned Discovery Park redevelopment.

### Facility Accessibility Improvements

The refurbishment of the Welland Canals Centre exterior viewing platform includes elevator access, representing a significant investment in maintaining accessible public access to the facility. Completion is anticipated in Fall 2026.

### St. Catharines Kiwanis Aquatic Centre

### Accessible Aquatics Programming

The Angel Fish program continued to promote equitable access to aquatic recreation by providing water safety and swimming instruction for children aged four to fourteen with learning, physical, or intellectual disabilities. Between five and ten children, accompanied by a parent or caregiver, participated in the program each season.

### Individualized Accommodations and Supports

Aquatics continued to provide individualized accommodations to support participation in swimming programs. Approximately 30 participants currently receive accommodation supports across 60-65 swims each week. These accommodations assist individuals with disabilities, participants who experience technology barriers, and those requiring specialized registration processes. Staff work directly with participants and caregivers to identify and implement accommodations that best meet individual needs.

## Municipal Works

Municipal Works supported accessibility through staff training, meeting with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), and improvements to municipal infrastructure and public spaces.

### Staff Training and Awareness

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) training was incorporated into the seasonal employee onboarding program, with the Accessibility Coordinator delivering mandatory in-person training to approximately 150 new and returning seasonal employees.

### Accessibility – Snow and Ice and Infrastructure Improvements

Municipal Works staff engaged with the AAC regarding snow and ice removal and collaborated with Accessibility and Inclusion staff, Culture and Recreation and Community Services staff and Legal Services staff on the development of the Garden City Golf Course Blue Flag Guideline.

Throughout the reporting period, Municipal Works staff worked closely with the Accessibility Coordinator to address disability-related accommodation requests and accessibility barriers within municipal infrastructure. This work included the implementation of site-specific accommodations and accessibility improvements designed to enhance safety, independence, and access for residents with disabilities.

## Corporate Communications

Corporate Communications promoted accessible communication practices across the organization through improvements to digital accessibility, staff education, and public awareness initiatives.

### Digital Accessibility

Staff reviewed the accessibility of the City's website and digital content and led the transition to a new web content management system. Training was provided to all City web content creators on accessible publishing practices.

### Accessible Communications and Staff Resources

Staff distributed a "plain language" fact sheet to support accessible communication practices. Communications staff also assisted with closed captioning for Human Resources video content and collaborated with the Accessibility Coordinator to update the 2021 edition of the City's *How to Create Accessible Documents* booklet.

### Community Awareness and Outreach

Corporate Communications developed accessible graphic design materials for Blue Flag Guideline signage at the Garden City Golf Course and supported the 2026 Accessibility Matters Here Award through marketing and promotional activities designed to increase awareness and encourage community participation.

## Legal and Clerks Services

### Legal Services

The Accessibility Coordinator consulted Legal Services on disability-related accommodation requests and the development of the Garden City Golf Course Blue Flag Guideline.

### Clerks Services

Clerks Services continued to incorporate accessibility into election planning. Staff presented the City's Accessible Election Policy to the AAC and gathered feedback to inform election preparations.

Clerks Services staff and the Accessibility Coordinator also jointly delivered a presentation on accessible elections and the City's Drive-Thru Voting program as part of a panel discussion hosted by the Ontario Network of Accessibility Professionals.

### Training and Election Resources

Staff participated in training related to accessible election technology intended for use at advance voting locations.

In preparation for the 2026 Municipal and School Board Election, Clerks Services and the Accessibility Coordinator developed an *Accessible Customer Service Election* Handbook. The handbook provides election officials with practical guidance on supporting voters with dignity, independence, integration and equal opportunity. Its content will also serve as the foundation for other election worker training materials.

## Engineering, Facilities and Environmental Services

### Engineering & Construction

Engineering and construction projects continued to incorporate accessibility, active transportation, and barrier free design principles. The Merritt Street, Chestnut Street Extension, and Mountain Street Reconstruction Project advanced into construction and includes enhancements intended to improve pedestrian safety, connectivity, and access to businesses, services and community destinations.

The Facer Street Design Study and Engineering Services Project continued during the reporting period, exploring opportunities to improve accessibility, active transportation infrastructure, pedestrian safety, streetscaping, and community connectivity. Members of the AAC were engaged throughout the study process to help identify barriers and inform inclusive design solutions.

The Parnell Road and Townline Road West reconstruction projects entered the construction phase and are expected to be completed by the end of 2026. Parnell Road will include an improved, protected Walker's Creek Trail crossing with an all-way stop at Richelieu Drive. Townline Road West will feature a new multi-use path on the south side and a connected sidewalk on the north side.

Design is being initiated for the York Street Reconstruction Project between Welland Avenue and Carlton Street, including a new Greenway identified in the Active Transportation Master Plan.

**Accessibility Improvements – Pedestrian Bridges**

Accessibility improvements were achieved through the replacement of two pedestrian bridges in Walker's Creek Park. The new bridges feature increased widths and more gradual approach grades, improving safety and usability for all users.

**New Pedestrian Bridge in Walker's Creek Park at Costen Blvd (Ward 5)**



Image: New pedestrian bridge in Walker's Creek Park located at Costen Blvd. extension

### Facilities Projects

### Completed Accessibility Projects

Several major facility improvement projects incorporated accessibility upgrades during the reporting period. Completed projects included accessibility renovations at the Folk Arts/Robertson School building, which now features accessible washrooms on all three floors, an elevator, and other interior accessibility improvements.

Accessibility enhancements were also completed at Morningstar Mill, including a new accessible viewing area and improved pathway surfaces through the main site.

### Projects Scheduled for Completion in 2026

Several accessibility-focused projects are anticipated to be completed by the end of 2026, including a new side ramp and front entrance modifications at Merritton Community Centre, accessible soccer change rooms at Lancaster Park, a new accessible clubhouse at Garden City Golf Course, and completion of the elevator and accessible washroom project at Buchanan House.

### Looking Ahead to 2027

Elevator construction at the St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre is expected to being in 2027. Future projects also include a two-storey mausoleum addition at the Victoria Lawn Cemetery featuring an elevator and universal washroom, as well as accessibility upgrades at the Port Dalhousie Library.

## Planning and Building Services

### Accessible Public Engagement

Planning and Building Services staff proactively worked with the Accessibility Coordinator to ensure public open houses were planned and delivered with accessibility considerations in mind. This included establishing processes for responding to disability-related accommodation requests and supporting meaningful public participation.

### Accessibility in Planning Processes

Planning staff sought input from the Accessibility Coordinator during the development of the City’s Construction and Mobility Management Plan Guidelines to ensure accessibility considerations were integrated into construction planning and mobility management practices.

Planning leadership and the Accessibility Coordinator initiated discussions to explore leading accessibility practices used by comparable municipalities in site plan review

processes. The objective was to inform future planning practices and identify opportunities for staff training.

## Human Resources

Human Resources advanced workplace accessibility through recruitment practices, staff training, procurement activities, and accessibility-related policy initiatives.

### Recruitment and Training

Closed captioning was incorporated into the City's recruitment video, Why Work at the City of St. Catharines: Hear from Our Team, in collaboration with Corporate Communications and the Accessibility Coordinator.

The New Supervisor Development Program was enhanced through the addition of a 2.5-hour accessibility and AODA training session delivered by the Accessibility Coordinator.

### Workplace and Facility Accessibility Initiatives

Human Resources contributed to the research, development, and preparation of a Council report regarding a Scent-Free Awareness Program for City facilities. The work was completed in collaboration with the Accessibility Coordinator, and Manager, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety staff also applied accessible graphic design principles to new Respectful Conduct signage and ensured placement considered accessibility requirements.

### Accessibility in Procurement and Onboarding

Accessibility considerations were incorporated into the Human Resources Information System procurement process through inclusion of digital accessibility requirements with the Request for Proposal documentation.

The department also continued to maintain records of AODA training completion and ensure accessibility training remains a component of onboarding for all employees.

## Corporate Support Services - Customer Service

Citizens First staff reinforced accessible communication and service practices through training and use of the City's *Customer Service Excellence Guide*, which promotes the use of plain language, service flexibility, accessible formats, and respectful, inclusive interactions that support residents' diverse needs.

Citizens First staff supported the implementation of Cityworks, a modernized service request platform that strengthens the tracking and resolution of resident concerns, including accessibility-related service requests and facility accessibility issues.

## Information Technology

Information Technology continued to incorporate accessibility and usability considerations into the procurement, configuration, and implementation of new technology solutions in 2026. The City's ongoing transition from legacy systems to modern platforms, including Microsoft 365, SharePoint, and Dayforce, improved access to information, self-service options, and digital usability for staff. Information Technology also supported the deployment of mobile devices for field staff, providing access to built-in accessibility features and flexible access to corporate systems while working remotely.

The CIO and Accessibility Coordinator began discussions on integrating digital accessibility requirements into the City's technology procurement framework, including the potential inclusion of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 requirements in future software RFPs.

## Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Accessibility and Inclusion staff continued to support corporate accessibility initiatives, internal communications, and organizational awareness throughout the reporting period.

### Accessibility and Inclusion

### Corporate Accessibility Initiatives

The Manager, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, in collaboration with Human Resources staff and the Accessibility Coordinator, prepared a report regarding the implementation of a Scent-Free Awareness Program for City facilities. The report responded to a Council request arising from an issue identified by the AAC.

### Accessible Internal Communications

Accessibility and Inclusion staff collaborated with the Accessibility Coordinator to review disability-related content for the monthly *Inclusive Insider* staff newsletter and support its digital accessibility. Disability accommodation statements were incorporated into staff training invitations to encourage awareness and participation.

## St. Catharines Public Library

The St. Catharines Public Library (SCPL) continued to enhance accessible services, facilities, and digital resources to support equitable access for all library users.

**Accessibility Services and Supports**

The St. Catharines Public Library continued to provide a broad range of accessible services and resources, including accessibility workstations, large print materials, audiobooks, Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) services, magnification supports, and the Visiting Library Service for customers unable to attend library branches in person.

During the reporting period, accessibility workstations were used 1,822 times, accessible collections and services requested 909 times, and the Visting Library Service supported 456 customer visits.

**Facility Accessibility Improvements**

Accessibility improvements at the Merritt Branch included the installation of a program room door operator and an accessible laptop bar to improve independent access and usability.

**Accessible Program Room Entry – Merritt Branch, 221 Glendale Ave (Ward 1)**



Image: Accessible Program Room Entry – Merritt Branch, 221 Glendale Ave (Ward 1)

The Library's Accessibility Policy was reviewed and updated by the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the City's Accessibility Coordinator and subsequently approved by the Library Board.

### Digital Accessibility Initiatives

The Library advanced accessibility through the implementation of a new Integrated Library System, scheduled for launch in November 2026. The system includes Polaris Leap and Vega Discover online catalogue, both of which have been assessed as meeting WCAG 2.2. requirements.

### Future Accessibility Projects

The Library also applied for grant funding to support accessibility improvements associated with the Central Library renovation project.

## Accessibility Advisory Committee Accomplishments

The AAC continued to provide advice to Council and staff on accessibility-related initiatives, infrastructure projects, policies, and community engagement.

### Committee Meetings and Governance

The AAC held eight meetings between September 1, 2025, and September 1, 2026.

### Facility and Infrastructure Reviews

The Committee reviewed accessibility considerations related to several City facility projects, including the Garden City Golf Course clubhouse, a proposed egress ramp at Bill Burgoyne Arena that was later determined not to proceed, and accessible change room additions at Lancaster Park.

### Policy and Program Advice

Committee members provided feedback on accessibility-related policies, plans, and initiatives, including snow and ice removal practices, the Accessible Elections Policy, and the Garden City Golf Course Blue Flag Guideline.

### Technical Input and Site Plan Review

An AAC member of the Sidewalk Working Group met with Engineering and Facilities Services staff and the Accessibility Coordinator on two occasions to review curb ramp design drawings. This collaborative work supports the integration of accessibility requirements into municipal standards, specifications, construction reviews, and

contractor accountability processes. The member also reviewed 21 site plans through the municipal site plan approval process, providing accessibility input as part of the review process.

### Community Partnerships and Outreach

Committee members participated in a variety of community outreach, partnership, and learning opportunities. These activities included attendance at Sunset Beach reopening, participation in the Ridley College Adaptive Sport Try-It-Day, planning efforts related to a Local AAC Workshop, attendance at the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility AAC Forum, and attendance at a Welland AAC meeting.

The Committee also continued representation on the City's Special Event Fee Reduction Task Force and partnered with seven local municipalities to pilot the 2026 Accessibility Matters Here Award in St. Catharines.

Members also received a presentation from a community speaker on mental health and stigma.

### Grant Support and Advocacy

The Committee provided a letter of support the City's application to the RBC Barrier Busters Grant Program in partnership with the Rick Hansen Foundation.

### AAC Presentations and Other Advisory Work

The AAC received presentations on the Code of Conduct, the 2024-2025 Annual Status Report on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, and the Ontario Street Corridor Secondary Plan, and continued to provide advice on accessibility matters involving other public sector organizations, including the Niagara Transit Commission.

## Looking Ahead

### 2026-2028 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

This Annual Status Report represents the final reporting period under the City's 2021-2025 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

Following the inauguration of Council, a new 2026-2028 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan will be presented to Council to establish accessibility priorities and actions for the next 2-year planning cycle.

### Accessibility Planning and Compliance Improvements

The City is implementing a more coordinated accessibility planning, reporting and compliance cycle to better align accessibility initiatives with Council terms and legislative requirements under the AODA. This approach will support continuous improvement, accountability, and the effective implementation of accessibility initiatives across the organization.

## Conclusion

The City of St. Catharines remains committed to identifying, removing and preventing barriers for persons with disabilities. The actions outlined in this report demonstrate continued progress toward a more accessible and inclusive community.

As the City prepares the 2026-2028 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, it will continue working with residents, staff, and community partners, and the AAC to build on these achievements and advance accessibility across municipal services, facilities, programs and public spaces.

Respectfully submitted,

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