

## **The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report to Council**

**SUBJECT:** StopGap Ramp Accessibility Initiative  
**DATE:** 2025-07-15  
**REPORT #:** CAO-25-030  
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**DEPARTMENT:** CAO/Administration

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### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

As part of the Town's ongoing commitment to improving accessibility and inclusion for all, staff are preparing to launch the StopGap Ramp Program, a practical and visible initiative designed to enhance access to storefronts across Niagara-on-the-Lake. This initiative is grounded in the Town's commitment to inclusion, as outlined in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lens within Council's Strategic Plan. It reflects a meaningful and visible step toward reducing physical barriers and improving access to public spaces for all.

StopGap ramps are lightweight, portable, and non-permanent wooden structures designed to address single-step barriers at storefront entrances. These ramps provide an immediate improvement for people using mobility devices, pushing strollers, or facing other physical access challenges. Ramps are to be deployed only during business hours and stored securely when not in use.

Accessibility advocate Pamela Turner Smith brought this issue forward after years of highlighting the inaccessibility of businesses in Niagara-on-the-Lake, particularly within the Heritage District. Many local storefronts, especially those housed in older buildings, feature one or more steps at the entrance, creating barriers that make it difficult, or sometimes impossible, for individuals with mobility challenges to access the shops and services inside. This lack of access has long excluded residents and visitors alike who rely on wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility supports, limiting their ability to participate in local commerce and community life.

This initiative is modelled on the successful StopGap program implemented by the Town of Fort Erie, among other areas. For its launch in Niagara-on-the-Lake, \$7,500 was set aside in the 2025 Operating Budget to fund the fabrication and distribution of approximately 15 custom ramps. These will be provided free of charge to eligible local businesses that meet specific criteria, including having a single-step entrance between 2 and 9 inches and sufficient clearance for safe ramp deployment. Eligible applicants must also submit photographs and entrance measurements, confirm landlord awareness (if the property is leased), and provide proof of \$2 million liability insurance. Participating businesses will be required to sign an

agreement with the StopGap Foundation, accepting full responsibility for the use, storage, and maintenance of ramps.

In recognition of the Town's unique character and historical charm, staff consulted the Municipal Heritage Committee (MHC) to ensure the program aligns with heritage considerations. The Committee was supportive of the initiative and provided feedback to enhance both safety and aesthetics. In response, one heritage-approved colour will be selected for all ramps to ensure visual consistency throughout the program. While the ramps are already designed with a textured non-slip surface to prevent slipping, the Committee emphasized the importance of noticeable colouring to further support user safety and ramp visibility. Business branding, decals, or logos will not be permitted on the ramps. Ramp dimensions will be determined to achieve the minimum footprint necessary for safe entry, thereby preserving the streetscape while enhancing accessibility.

The program concept and proposed rollout were also reviewed by the Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (JAAC), which has expressed strong support for the initiative. Their endorsement reinforces the community-wide value of this effort and ensures that accessibility best practices are upheld throughout implementation.

Pending Council's support of this program, applications will be scheduled to open in July 2025, and ramps will be fabricated and delivered in fall 2025. Eligible businesses will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis. Staff will monitor uptake and track feedback from participants and the public to inform future planning and potential enhancements.

## **NEXT STEP / CONCLUSION**

Pending Council's support of this Information Report, staff will move forward with public communication and program rollout. A news release will be issued to raise awareness and promote the program, supported by information shared through the Town's website, social media channels, and local business networks. All eligible storefronts in Niagara-on-the-Lake will be encouraged to apply.

If demand for the ramps exceeds initial supply and community feedback remains positive, staff will explore opportunities to expand the program in future years. Specifically, staff plan to recommend additional funding in the 2026 budget to support a second round of ramps. It is anticipated that future expansion could be supported through the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) Reserve Fund, provided the program aligns with MAT funding criteria related to enhancing the visitor experience and improving tourism-serving infrastructure.

The StopGap Ramp Program offers a low-cost, high-impact solution that demonstrates the Town's commitment to removing barriers and improving the quality of life **and experiences** for residents and visitors alike. It is a meaningful example of how small, community-driven solutions can make a significant difference, especially when they are inclusive, collaborative, and grounded in local values.

Please see below for pictures of sample StopGap ramps that were shown to some local businesses earlier this year:



## ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix I – StopGap Ramp Accessibility Initiative – MHC Information Report