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The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Information Report

SUBJECT: StopGap Ramp Accessibility Initiative

DATE: 2025-07-09

REPORT #: CAO-25-029

SUBMITTED BY: Bruce Zvaniga, CAO

DEPARTMENT: CAO/Administration

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Staff are preparing to launch a StopGap Ramp Program aimed at increasing accessibility for businesses in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This initiative is grounded in the Town's commitment to inclusion, as outlined in Council's 2022–2027 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, temporary wooden ramps designed to help individuals safely access storefronts with a single step. They are portable, non-permanent, and intended to be deployed during business hours or upon request.

The program will provide these ramps to eligible storefronts with a step at their entrance. The Town has allocated \$7,500, which is expected to fund approximately fifteen custom ramps. Applications will open to all eligible local businesses in July, and ramps will be delivered to participating businesses in Fall 2025 on a first-come, first-served basis.

This initiative is modelled on the successful program launched by the Town of Fort Erie. Locally, the project was brought forward by accessibility advocate Pamela TurnerSmith, who has championed this solution for several years. Pamela highlighted the inaccessibility of many businesses in the historic shopping district and other areas throughout Niagara-on-the-Lake. Her leadership and advocacy have been instrumental in bringing this project to life. The Town's Joint Accessibility Advisory Committee (JAAC) is also aware of and supportive of the program.

This memo is being shared with the Municipal Heritage Committee for awareness and transparency. Staff anticipate that pending Council approval, accessibility ramps may begin to appear as early as Fall 2025.

Business Eligibility Criteria

To ensure safety, suitability, and program integrity, participating businesses must meet the

following requirements:

- Be located within the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake
- Have a single-step entrance between 2 and 9 inches at the primary public access point
- Provide sufficient clearance for safe ramp deployment and usage
- Ensure the landlord is aware and has no concerns (if the property is leased)
- Submit photos and measurements of the entrance with their application
- Sign an agreement with the StopGap Foundation, including:
 - Acceptance of responsibility and liability for ramp use
 - Commitment to store the ramp when not in use and maintain it (e.g., snow/ice removal)
 - Provision of proof of \$2 million liability insurance

Heritage Considerations

To maintain the visual integrity of Niagara-on-the-Lake's heritage streetscape, staff are recommending the following design parameters for all ramps installed through the program:

- Businesses will be able to choose from pre-approved ramp colours that align with the Town's heritage palette. These colours will be applied consistently Town-wide.
- No decals, logos, stickers, or business branding will be permitted on the ramps.
- Ramp dimensions will be tailored to provide the minimum footprint necessary for safe entry, depending on the entrance height.

The ramps are lightweight, non-permanent, and equipped with a built-in non-slip surface. Businesses will be permitted to use their ramps during business hours and will be required to store the ramp when not in use, specifically outside of business hours.

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



NEXT STEP / CONCLUSION

Staff will be bringing forward an Information Report to Council on July 15, 2025, outlining the program details and proposed implementation. Should Council support the initiative, applications will open shortly afterward.

Ramp fabrication and delivery are anticipated in Fall 2025, beginning with the first eligible businesses selected through a first-come, first-served process. Staff will continue to monitor uptake and consider opportunities for future program expansion or enhancement based on feedback and demand.