



**The Municipal Corporation of the Town of Fort Erie
Accessibility Advisory Committee Minutes**

**February 25, 2025, 4:00 p.m.
Conference Room 1**

1. Call to Order

The February 25, 2025, Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m.

2. Roll Call

The Staff Resource gave the roll call.

Present: Lori Brant, Chair; Dennis Hernandez Galeano, Vice Chair; Adam McLeod; Gary Kooistra; Marilyn Abbs; Lindsay Davis; Dave Pantano

Absent: Jennica Giesbrecht, Councillor Noyes

Staff Resources: Keegan Gennings, Chief Building Official; Sean Hutton, Manager of Facilities and Parks; Bev Bradnam, Manager of Corporate and Community Initiatives

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest

There were no disclosures of pecuniary interest.

4. Adoption of the Agenda

Recommendation 1:

Moved by: Marilyn Abbs
Seconded by: Gary Kooistra

That: The February 25, 2025 agenda of the Fort Erie Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting be approved as printed.

(CARRIED)

5. Adoption of Minutes

Recommendation 2:

Moved by: Marilyn Abbs
Seconded by: Gary Kooistra

That: The January 28, 2025 minutes of the Fort Erie Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting be approved as printed.

(CARRIED)

6. Site Plan Review

6.1 440 Ridge Road North

Keegan presented the site plan for 440 Ridge Road North, a 5 storey, 80 unit building as well as separate town houses, which are shown as a “condo site”. At the previous AAC meeting, members viewed the plans for the adjacent build at 436 Ridge Road North. Keegan explained that there are covered parking spaces, a drop off area, and accessible parking spaces in the front and back. To date there are no floor plans for viewing but Keegan has provided the requirements for accessible path of travel. The drawings do not indicate curb depressions and tactile warning surface indicators and Keegan has requested those be shown in an updated plan. The building has an elevator and roof top terrace.

7. Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2019-2023

7.1 Review of Survey Responses

The AAC reviewed the first 15 comments on the survey related to “barriers to municipal services”.

Sean noted that the Gibson Centre has some renovations coming up and there will be changes to the internal front entrance.

Discussions took place regarding access to the water, specifically to beach mats going into the water and the possibility of a water wheelchair or chair rails into the water. The AAC viewed a video from Seatrac: <https://seatrac.gr/en/about-seatrac/> which shows how the product (installed in Greece) works. Sean advised that he would look at the beach mats to see what can be done. Lori noted that the Crystal Beach BIA strategy is looking at an inclusive theme. Marilyn asked about the AAC running bingo's to raise money for these projects. Bev advised that she did not think a committee of Council would qualify but would check. Bev noted that most Federal and Provincial funding opportunities are currently for educational purposes and recently the Communications Manager and Deputy Clerk applied for funding for accessible document training and were not successful.

Lori asked about the accessible parking space that was to be placed on Erie Road that was contained in the prior Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. Bev advised that there was one planned but then the parking strategy changed for Erie Road. Bev will follow-up with Engineering.

Sean confirmed that there are currently 4 accessible parking spaces at Bay Beach, 1 in the municipal lot behind Derby Road that will have an additional one added when it is redone. There is also one spot on Lincoln Road, but it was noted that the lot needs work. Sean also confirmed that there are two accessible parking spaces at the Palmwood, one in front of the Waterfront playground and 1 in the main lot at Crystal Beach Waterfront Park.

7.2 Awareness campaign re parking and block of sidewalks

AAC members agreed that social media campaigns with photos work best. Bev advised that she still has access to the City of Burlington's "Respect the Space" campaign material that can be used. Dave advised that he is interested in helping with the sub-committee. Bev will follow up with Communications staff about the campaign. Lori provided two photos of cars blocking a sidewalk for use in the campaign. AAC members were encouraged to take pictures when they witness blocking of sidewalks or blocking accessible parking space access.

7.3 National AccessAbility Week - recognition of 19 businesses that have received StopGap Ramps.

All 19 businesses will be recognized during NAAW, the last week in May. Bev will work with the Mayor's Executive Assistant on certificates for the businesses.

8. Outstanding Business

8.1 Regional Accessibility Advisory Committee

Lori advised that the Regional AAC has reached out to all AACs in Niagara to see if anyone is interested in hosting an event. There have been mixed responses; however, Bev had advised the Region that as it is the 20th anniversary of the AODA it would be great to have one similar to the one Fort Erie hosted for the 10th anniversary. Lori will respond and suggest something be held during National AccessAbility Week in celebration.

8.2 Parking Concerns

Bev advised that she misunderstood Councillor Noyes at the last AAC meeting regarding the Stevensville Post Office space. Councillor Noyes advised that the Traffic Coordinating Committee did review the information sent by the AAC, and she corrected the issue, noting that the illegal spot in front of the ramp blocks access for everyone. The Traffic Coordinating Committee will review options and the AAC also noted that there are still

poles in the middle of the sidewalk and even though someone with a regular wheelchair may be able to pass, some of the larger electric chairs or scooters may have difficulty.

8.3 Barrel Restaurant Access

A follow-up letter was sent on February 7, 2025 together with a copy of the March 17, 2023 initial letter. No response has been received.

8.4 Beatties - accessible door

Bev followed up with the Manager to request an update. Marilyn advised that she went in to Beatties and thanked them for opening the door closest to the accessible parking space.

8.5 A & W toilet dispenser

Keegan advised that staff have spoken with the manager who was unaware that it was changed and not in compliance, staff have also sent a report to the builder noting the deficiency. To date there has been no response.

(Following the meeting, staff reached out on February 26, 2025 and were advised that it has been fixed. Pictures were provided by Keegan).

Remove from outstanding.

8.6 Transit Issues

Lori noted that there was a good article in the Observer covering the January 30, 2025 public session held in the Town Hall atrium. Bev read the Mayor's overview of the meeting held on February 5, 2025 with the Chair of the Niagara Transit Commission and the General Manager.

Lori advised that she booked transit on the weekend and she watched the bus come all the way from Niagara Falls to pick her up and take her to South Coast, a 5 minute drive and questioned how this can be efficient.

Bev advised that she had reached out to the Town Solicitor who confirmed that there is a dispute resolution section/process in the agreement related to termination.

Lori noted that the 10 year Master Plan that was displayed at the January 30, 2025 public session, showed an option that would take 80 minutes to get from Fort Erie to Port Colborne and questioned how this serves Fort Erie residents. All of the options come at a higher price than the Town residents are currently paying. Members suggested that a poll should be sent to residents to ask if they are okay with transit costs for Fort Erie going from \$800,000 - \$1 million when the Town ran it, to now being over \$4 million in 2025, with 400 times less the service. Lori noted that before there was also the ability to get same day booking but now you have to plan two weeks out and share buses with both specialized and non-specialized riders, prolonging trips.

It was agreed that, as an Advisory Committee, members need to share their concerns with Council again and ask for follow-up to the September resolution that was passed, adding in additional details that have since come to light. The biggest concern is that we were promised the same or better service but in reality, it is 4 times the cost with less service, no dedicated buses and more difficulty to book and secure rides. The real issue is that concerns need to be heard and realistic changes made, especially as Transit is now shown as a line item on the property tax bill.

It was agreed that the resolution to Council will be resent with additional details, as follows:

Recommendation 3:

- Whereas:** The Accessibility Advisory Committee has received numerous service-related concerns following Niagara Region Transit's assumption of transit service provision in Fort Erie; and
- Whereas:** Dedicated vehicles are no longer stationed within the Town to provide both OnDemand and Specialized transit services; and
- Whereas:** The current service hours only allow bookings to begin at 7:00 a.m., whereas Fort Erie Transit previously operated from 6:00 a.m., impacting many local employees; and
- Whereas:** Booking availability ends at 10:00 p.m., despite being advertised until 11:00 p.m. in other areas of the Region; and
- Whereas:** The current transit service provision does not adequately meet the needs of the Fort Erie community; and
- Whereas:** Prior to service amalgamation, Fort Erie had six OnDemand vehicles in continuous service, with access to an additional three, as well as three specialized vans dedicated solely to Fort Erie residents; and
- Whereas:** The Accessibility Advisory Committee has been informed that as of March 1, 2025, an additional vehicle will be allocated to Fort Erie, with plans for two more unless a fixed route is established in East Fort Erie; and
- Whereas:** The Accessibility Advisory Committee has become aware of a new policy of the Niagara Transit Commission, whereby drivers are not allowed to pull into driveways under any circumstances whether it be on demand or specialized transit and persons with disabilities are already feeling vulnerable utilizing the service; and.

Whereas: The Accessibility Advisory Committee seeks clarity regarding service provisions and operational concerns.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

Council formally requests that representatives from Niagara Region Transit and service provider Voyago attend a future Council meeting to address the following:

- **Service Provisions for Fort Erie:**
 - The number of daily booking slots available for Fort Erie and whether this is a fixed allocation.
 - The overall booking allocation process.
 - The number of vehicles designated for OnDemand and Specialized services and whether a fixed number is assigned to Fort Erie.
- **Operational Standards:**
 - Performance metrics and policies regarding abandoned ridership.
 - Complaints specific to Fort Erie riders and how they have been addressed.
 - Ridership data, including the number of attempted bookings where no ride was available.
 - Niagara Transit Commission consult persons with disabilities before implementing any policy that directly affects people with disabilities.
- **Financial Accountability:**
 - A breakdown of the additional \$3 million in annual funding and the services Fort Erie taxpayers receive in return.
 - The cost of the additional vehicle allocated as of March 1, 2025, as well as the projected costs for the proposed two additional vehicles and/or a dedicated fixed-route service.
- **Community Concerns:**
 - Issues raised by the Accessibility Advisory Committee regarding dedicated vehicles, booking times, pick-up and delivery locations for persons with disabilities, and hours of service.

Committee members also questioned what the cost would be to have Fort Erie take over the transit again (legal, capital, operational), noting that it would still be under the \$4 million that the Region is charging tax payers and the additional costs that may result from the 10 Year Master Plan.

8.7 Accessible Archery

Marilyn advised that she was told by Niagara Falls Archery to check back in May as they will need to determine how many volunteers would be needed to help. Members will also follow-up with Barefoot Bush Craft to see if they could offer accessible archery.

8.8 Senior's Stepping Out Event - June 14, 2025

The AAC has a table booked for this Saturday, June 14, 2025 event and it is hoped that all members will be able to participate.

9. New Business

9.1 Access Now

During a recent speaking engagement in Toronto, Bev was on a panel with Jonathan from Access Now and was excited to learn that they offer an APP that the AAC was looking at using to show accessible businesses and locations within the community. Bev had a Teams meeting with Jonathan Marriott, Director, Partnership with Access Now, who explained the benefits of the APP and its accurate, authentic information that empowers the user. Qualifiers are red, yellow and green and users can also upload photos. Access Now also offers a “verified” feature which is conducted by reviewers with lived experience. They have conducted verified projects for Destination Toronto, Destination Montreal and Destination Ottawa as many other areas. Some of the verifications range from \$500 to \$1,000 per location. Bev explained that currently there is no budget and Jonathan advised that sometime funding does become available and they will also provide a letter of support for any type of funding application.

Jonathan also explained that they offer a “Map Mission” event that is similar to a scavenger hunt that can involve the community and usually takes two hours to do a downtown mapping. On boarding for the mission is usually 40-45 minutes, which can be purchased as well and they also do a reflection session after to capture the “ah ha” moments. Anyone can download the APP and start adding details. Bev had asked if there is ever any push back from businesses and he responded that it is an opportunity to educate business owners on the importance and benefits of making businesses accessible. Jonathan also noted that they also have an “Access Outdoors” link that depicts the accessible features for natural trails using different icons, notes and identification of barriers. Jonathan noted the importance of highlighting if a business has no accessible washroom but there is one in close proximity, say at a library, which will let the user know that there are options within close proximity if they are planning a trip. Dave noted that he has worked with Access Now in the past and may be able to assist with mapping.

9.2 Friendship Trail Access

Lori questioned if there could be an accessible access trail from the Friendship Trail to Rebstock Road, especially with some of the new development in the area. Bev advised that this was asked last year, and the Law Clerk had confirmed that there are no unopened road allowances that would be able to connect directly. Cherry Hill Boulevard is an unimproved, partially unopened road allowance from the Trail to Michener Road, but users would need to travel along Michener Road that has no sidewalks and deep ditches.

10. Next Meeting Date

The next AAC meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, March 25, 2025 at 4:00 p.m. in Conference Room #1 at Town Hall.

11. Adjournment

Recommendation 4:

Moved by: Marilyn Abbs
Seconded by: Adam McLeod

THAT: The February 25, 2025, meeting of the Fort Erie Accessibility Advisory Committee does now hereby adjourn at 5:21 p.m.

(CARRIED)