

HOW ACCESSIBLE ARE HAMILTON MOUNTAIN PARKS?

MOUNTAIN NEWS INVESTIGATES WITH THE HELP OF ACCESSIBILITY ACTIVIST ANTHONY FRISINA

MARK NEWMAN
mnewman@hamiltonnews.com

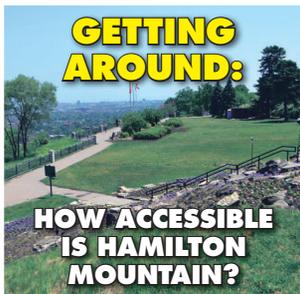
Hamilton Community News has been looking into accessibility on Hamilton Mountain. We visited some Mountain parks, libraries, recreation centres and shopping malls. To assist us we enlisted the help of accessibility activist Anthony Frisina. Most of those visits took place last fall and they were all completed before Frisina registered as a candidate for Hamilton City Council. This article looks at Sam Lawrence Park, Mountain Drive Park and T.B. McQueston Community Park.

Perched at the west end of Concession Street at the top of the Jolley Cut with a magnificent view of the lower city sits Sam Lawrence Park.

A former quarry, the 7.5-hectare site was originally named Ross and then Patton Park and in 1960 it was renamed in honour of former Hamilton mayor and labour activist Sam Lawrence.

The city is planning a \$16.2 makeover of the park over the next 20 years and for Anthony Frisina, who uses a wheelchair to get around, the upgrades can't come soon enough.

"Without question the terrain is horrendous for people with accessibility issues," Frisina said. "Transitioning on different surfaces for me was a challenge, let alone someone who uses different mobility devices or who has an invisible disability. This park is most definitely difficult



to navigate. As I travelled through the poorly kept asphalt that is overdue for an upgrade, my balance was shifting due to the uneven surface to match the cracks."

Frisina noted the interpretive map at the park is not particularly helpful for folks with vision issues.

"It was missing braille or any tactile features for those who are blind or low vision to access," Frisina said. "It could also use an audible feature."

The long stairway from the parking lot also did not pass muster.

"As I made my way through the trail, I was met with a wheelchair users' kryptonite, stairs," he said. "How do you expect mobility device users to get up top? Is it always that we must take the long way around?"

Frisina said the park also needs a paratransit drop off area with room for wheelchairs to manoeuvre.

We then visited Mountain Drive Park at the northern end of Upper Gage.

"The upkeep of the pavement was in much better condition," Frisina said. "Often time maintenance gets overlooked and can be an accessibility hazard for many people with disabilities and even those without disabilities if not progressively kept in good condition."

Frisina noted the park has a play structure, but there is no accessibility for people who have mobility issues, and it was poorly



Mark Newman/Metroland

Anthony Frisina says the stairs at Sam Lawrence Park (top) are a barrier, and Mountain Drive Park (above) should have a wheelchair accessible swing and the playground should be accessible for people with mobility issues.

designed for people with vision issues.

"I would love to see a wheelchair accessible swing, at all parks," Frisina said "We can't look at money as a factor when we are talking about inclusion, that's just simply immoral and unethical and an exclusionary way of thinking if we value all our citizens in Hamilton equally."

Frisina added the washrooms at the park were locked and not accessible.

"We expected these washrooms to be open year-round," he said.

Since the visit, portable washrooms have been add-

ed and removed and the 3.2-hectare park will see \$2 million worth of upgrades this summer/fall and next year, including new, accessible washrooms.

The final park we visited was T.B. McQueston Community Park on Upper Wentworth just south of the Linc.

The 13.15-hectare park features several amenities including a large trail and sports fields but presents a challenge for people with accessibility issues.

"It was a nice park, paved relatively nicely with smooth terrain," Frisina noted. "Plenty of pic-

nic tables, but what about accessible picnic tables? I'm not just talking about those tables where a mobility device user can be stuck at the end of the table because even the picnic tables there had no room for wheelchair to sit comfortably under them."

Frisina said he felt uncomfortable at one point because the sloped paved trail did not transition into flat ground smoothly and safely. "This park also had a play structure with no accessible way to it," Frisina said. "Every park was missing colour contrasting elements that are vital for

those who are blind or low vision. Auditory signals for those who require that should be installed."

Kara Bunn, the City's manager of parks and cemeteries, said accessibility is included as part of the park planning process.

"The City pays mind to accessibility and inclusivity for all age categories and abilities and will continue to explore options for more accessible park features when planning future projects or completing upgrades at park locations," Bunn said.

Up next, a visit to some Mountain libraries.

HOW ACCESSIBLE ARE HAMILTON MOUNTAIN LIBRARIES?

MARK NEWMAN

mnewman@hamiltonnews.com

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Our first stop was the Concession branch, a small neighbourhood library on Concession Street and Cliff Avenue.

Anthony Frisina, who uses a wheelchair to get around, noted the library has a one-step threshold at the entrance which makes it difficult for people with mobility devices to access.

"Just as I entered the building, I noticed the push button door opener was a little low," said Frisina, who suggests access buttons be changed from round to rectangular to make them easier to reach.

Inside the library, Frisina noted the building was spacious and easy for him to get around.

"One thing I did not see was the presence of braille or access to alternative formatting," he said. "Something that should be available at every library."

Frisina said while the aisles were wide open, reaching the books on the upper and lower shelves posed a challenge.

"I suggest grabbers for every aisle and shelf to aid in accessing books independently," he said.

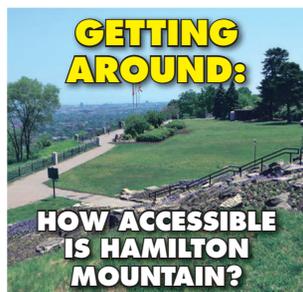
The washroom was open and accessible, Frisina noted.

"All in all, I found it very comfortable to get around the building," he



Mark Newman/Metroland

Accessibility advocate Anthony Frisina noted the Concession library was spacious and easy for him to get around. Anthony Frisina says the ramp at Terryberry library was a challenge to navigate.



"Organizations need to be more mindful that it is not enough that a person who uses a mobility device is able to access everything independently."

— Anthony Frisina

said.

Over at the Sherwood library, Frisina was happy to see the ramp leading to the main entrance, although there was construction going on at the time of the visit that made getting to the ramp a bit of a challenge.

Again, he would prefer a rectangular door-opening button.

"Like Concession, grabbers would help make access to top and lower shelves more user-friendly," Frisina said. "There was access to more lower tables and they were easy to get to."

Checking the accessible

washroom, Frisina noted amenities like the grab bar were not located in a useful spot or easy to find.

"I would love to see more attention to the way the amenities in accessible washrooms are located and a push button door would be an improvement," he said.

Our final stop was on the west Mountain at the Terryberry library.

"This library first and foremost had an uncompliant ramp to enter the building," Frisina said. "It was a trek to get to the door. As an experienced person who uses a wheelchair, I found it tough to

navigate my manual chair."

Frisina said the push button door opener needs to be better located and rectangular in shape for better access.

"Accessing the inside of the library was a challenge with higher and lower shelves, but everything was organized and the staff was there to support along the way," he said, adding grabbers in each aisle would make it easier to reach for books.

Frisina said accessible services should be posted where they can be easily spotted, rather than having to ask library staff.



"Organizations need to be more mindful that it is not enough that a person who uses a mobility device is able to access everything independently," Frisina said.

Dawna Wark, director of public service at the Hamilton Public Library, said book grabbers are "an excellent suggestion for consideration."

Wark noted HPL staff are always on hand to retrieve items that cannot be easily reached.

"At the time of construction both Sherwood and Terryberry ramps met or exceeded the accessibility requirements for wheelchair and walker access," Wark said. "We are now aware that they are considered existing non-conforming, meaning that

they are suitable for one person to use at a time or have a slightly steeper incline. New buildings incorporate the most up-to-date requirements, including ramp width and angle of incline."

Wark said individuals with specific accessibility concerns can call ahead to a branch or visit hpl.ca for a listing of accessible features, adding many branches post checklists of accessible features at entrances.

In addition, Wark said members with print disabilities are referred to the Centre for Equitable Access which has an extensive collection for public library members.

Next week, a look at some Mountain recreation centres.

HOW ACCESSIBLE ARE HAMILTON MOUNTAIN REC CENTRES?

MARK NEWMAN
mnewman@
hamiltonnews.com

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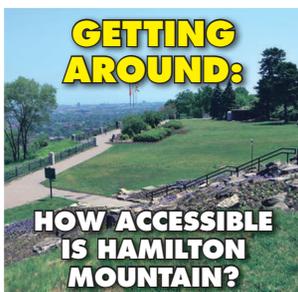
Prior to visiting the four Mountain recreation centres we were in touch with Hamilton communications/media relations officials to let them know we were going to be dropping by.

We were welcomed by the staff at all four places who were interested in what Frisina had to say.

The first stop was the Sir Allan MacNab rec centre on Magnolia Drive.

Frisina, who uses a wheelchair to get around, said he was concerned with the signage at the entrance. "The sign said, 'please stand behind the Plexiglas' and I would prefer it said, 'please wait behind the Plexiglas' to be inclusive," Frisina said, adding the six feet social distancing sign was "another imposition of language."

Frisina looked at the washrooms and change rooms as well as the activ-



ity rooms.

"Entering the rooms there were mechanical door openers," Frisina noted. "The space between storage lockers and benches was a little tight. There needs to be more space for someone in a wheelchair or who uses another mobility device to move around and reach the locker."

Frisina said the mechanism used to open and close the lockers needs to be more user-friendly for people with accessibility issues.

"I also noticed the space in the washroom was tight," Frisina said. "We need to measure from the biggest depth perception and go from there and consider whether we are left-side dominant or right-side dominant."

The Sackville Hill Seniors Recreation Centre on Upper Wentworth had few accessibility issues.

"Automatic doors, wonderful open concept space where check-in spaces were accessible for all," Frisina noted. "The facility was spectacular and everything from my point of view seemed feasible."

The next stop was the Hill Park Recreation Centre and Frisina was not im-

pressed.

"Hill Park requires massive changes," Frisina said. "Getting to the building along a broken-down pathway was my first obstacle and then finding a push button door unit that was poorly positioned."

Inside, Frisina said information and other markings were not posted where they could be easily spotted nor were they easy to read.

"Space was very tight and transitioning to rooms without markings will be a challenge for many," he said. "Many hangers and hooks were too high for people who use mobility devices."

Frisina noted activity spaces were clear, with standard tables and accessories neatly put away.

However, in cooking, baking and craft areas, the sink had no clearance for a wheelchair.

At the Huntington Park rec centre Frisina had trouble finding the push button door opener.

"It was there, just poorly placed," he said. "Entering the building the signage was like previous stops. There needs to be more inclusive language."

Frisina said the washrooms were tight for space to manoeuvre his wheelchair.

"The showers were poorly positioned for users with mobility devices and the standard lockers were difficult to reach."

Unique to Huntington, Frisina noted, was the rubberized flooring that made it difficult for him to roll his wheelchair on.



Mark Newman/Metroland

Anthony Frisina says there were few accessibility concerns at the Sackville Hill Seniors Recreation Centre. Left: Anthony checks out the accessible washroom at the Huntington Park Recreation Centre.



"There were some ramps and surface changes that require transition strips," Frisina said. "A few areas had motion sensor lights which is ideal, but to turn on lights was a challenge."

Frisina said he recommends installing rectangular push button door openers.

"They have the most adjustability and flexibility for different needs within our community," he said.

Chris Herstek, director, recreation and Rom D'Angelo, director, energy, fleet and facilities management at the City of Hamilton,

sent us the following joint response to Frisina's comments and concerns.

"The recreation facilities operated include a diverse portfolio of buildings, these buildings, were built in 1973 (Hill Park), 1983 (MacNab), 1992 (Sackville Hill Seniors Centre) and 1993 (Huntington Park). While some buildings were built with the intention of being a recreation facility, other buildings were acquired to meet emerging recreational needs so many facilities have had retrofits and renovations done throughout the years to support expan-

ded and accessible operations. All sites are compliant and as capital funds become available, we ensure all renovations meet the latest codes and standards. Recreation centre accessibility assessments and facility features are listed for most facilities on www.hamilton.ca/recreation/locations. For the past two years, the recreation division's inclusion team has also been working with the Rick Hansen Foundation to assess the City's recreation facilities. The information provided by Mr. Frisina on his experience visiting centres will assist us in this continuous improvement journey."

We were going to visit the Westmount rec centre but it was undergoing repairs and renovations at the time.

Up next, a visit to a couple of Mountain shopping malls.

HOW ACCESSIBLE ARE MOUNTAIN SHOPPING MALLS?

MARK NEWMAN
mnewman@
hamiltonnews.com

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Our visit to a couple of busy Mountain malls was a journey of accessibility.

The first stop was CF Lime Ridge on Upper Wentworth.

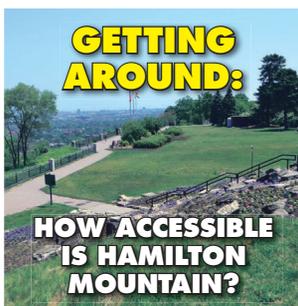
"Motion and push button sensors to get through the doors with my bundle buggy was my first encounter," Frisina said. "The button outside should be placed on the opposite side of the door that opens to make manoeuvring easier. That was not the case at Limeridge Mall."

Once inside, Frisina said he found himself trying to move across a carpet in his wheelchair.

"The surface elevation change is a concern as it impeded my momentum going forward," he said.

Due to time constraints, Frisina was unable to visit each store, but he did make observations.

"I noticed a lot of similarities of overstocking merchandise to impede or pose a challenge for people with mobility devices to get through aisles safely," he said. "The challenge is amplified when a store has small or difficult turning radiuses and I saw most stores have bar type counters making it hard for me to pay and receive my goods without extra physical exertion."



Frisina looked to make his way to the second floor but found the public elevator in the middle of the mall was out of order and the only other elevator he could find was in a department store a fair distance away.

That's not helpful for people who are visually impaired or use devices to get around.

Frisina said the signs directing people to the other elevators included the name of a store that no longer exists in the mall.

"In corresponding with guest services, the following day, I was told the elevator had been down for about a week and they were waiting on a part and due to the age of the elevator, the part is hard to obtain," Frisina said. "This is a very important accessibility feature that is used by everyone and those with strollers, walkers and other mobility devices cannot be inconvenienced by such a lengthy delay."

Grabbing a bite at the food court, Frisina pointed out the area had elevated counters that were not wheelchair friendly.

"I respect the fact the Limeridge Mall has family and gender-neutral washrooms in addition to the customary male/female washrooms," he said. "One thing, though, there's not an accessible button to push to get in the doors."

Heading to the second floor using the department store elevator, Frisina noted there were no specific directions on how to get to the lift.



Accessibility advocate Anthony Frisina was not impressed when he found the main elevator at CF Lime Ridge was not working during a visit last March.

"I respect the fact the Limeridge Mall has family and gender-neutral washrooms in addition to the customary male/female washrooms. One thing, though, there's not an accessible button to push to get in the doors."

- Anthony Frisina

"That was rather surprising," Frisina said.

Next, it was off to Westcliffe Mall on Mohawk Road West, a place Frisina is familiar with.

He gets his hair cut there.

"Aisle congestion is

tough in most stores and conversations with folks on the other side of the counters are difficult; so is accessing products on higher shelves," Frisina said. "Everyone at this mall is very helpful. I would like to see wider

aisles, but like most stores, that sacrifices the amount of stock one store can carry at one time."

Frisina noted the washrooms at Westcliffe Mall were "pretty standard" and could be improved.

Hamilton Community News reached out to CF Lime Ridge owners Cadillac Fairview and Westcliffe Mall owner the Sitzer Group for comment on Frisina's remarks.

Michele Enhaynes, senior manager, external communication at Cadillac Fairview, sent us the following comment.

"Cadillac Fairview (CF) is committed to creating welcoming and accessible spaces to better serve our guests, building occupants and communities and plans to complete a full ac-

cessibility review of CF Lime Ridge in 2023 through the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Program (RHFAC). To date, 28 CF retail and office properties have received RHFAC certification and the recently transformed restroom at CF Lime Ridge was renovated under guidance from a RHFAC certified assessor. CF remains focused on improving frequently accessed points (both online and in person) across our Canadian portfolio. We appreciate hearing from the community on ways to make our environment more accessible and have already looked at ways to update access points at our entrances based on the feedback."

We have yet to hear from the Sitzer Group.