Creating a Livable Niagara Falls Through Complete Streets

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What is a Complete Street Policy?

A Complete Streets policy formalizes a community’s intent to plan, design, and maintain streets so they are safe for all users of all ages and abilities. These policies will direct transportation planners and engineers to consistently design and construct the right-of-way to accommodate all anticipated users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation users, motorists, and freight vehicles.

Complete streets can be achieved through a variety of policies including ordinances and resolutions; rewrites of design manuals; inclusion in comprehensive plans and zoning regulations1.

Making the Case for Complete Streets

Walking and bicycling have both been frequently overlooked as village, town, city, state, and federal governments focus their effort and funds on building infrastructure heavy transportation systems for motorized means. Yet there are a growing percentage of people that want to change the common notion of transportation and mobility. They want livable communities where they can commute to work, socialize and recreate by foot and bicycle.

Recent socio-economic and cultural trends highlight the desire for walkable and bikeable communities. The 15-Year Report on Walking and Biking determined that, as of 2009, 12 percent of all trips are now made by bicycle or foot, a 25 percent increase from 2001, even though there are often not adequate facilities for safe walking or bicycling. Bicyclists and pedestrians make up 14 percent of traffic fatalities, although federal funding for biking and walking projects is approximately 2 percent of the federal transportation budget2.

While new national initiatives, such as Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School, are examples of programs that support pedestrian facility development, problems persist. In 2010, 4,280 pedestrians and 618 bicyclists were killed and roughly 59,000 pedestrians and 52,000 bicyclists were injured3. Though these

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totals have decreased somewhat in recent years, pedestrian and bicyclist safety is an ongoing problem that should continue to be comprehensively addressed at all levels of government.

Creating a walkable and bikeable community starts with the built environment: having destinations close to each other; siting schools, parks, and public spaces appropriately; allowing mixed-use developments; having sufficient densities to support transit; creating commercial districts that people can access by bicycle, foot and wheelchair; etc. Most walking trips are less than .5 mi (0.8 km), so having a compact environment is essential. Similarly, while half of all household trips are three miles or less, fewer than 2 percent of those trips are made by bicycle. The connection between land-use planning and transportation planning is critical to safely and effectively accommodate trips by foot and bicycle.

**Economic Advantages**

Developing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure has economic benefits. Studies have found that bicycle infrastructure improvements can have a positive overall impact on business, and that people who walk or bike to a commercial area spend more money per month than those who accessed the area by automobile. The removal of any on-street parking is often thought to negatively impact business, but reports show adding facilities such as bicycle racks and bicycle lanes can actually increase economic activity, and also help create a buffer from moving traffic that aides both pedestrian and bicyclist activity (Clifton, Morrissey & Ritter, 2012). Finally, improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure can lead to positively impacting real estate values. Homes near bicycle paths have been found to support higher sales prices, and areas that facilitate walkability and attract pedestrians sustain higher rents, revenues and resale values.

**Health Benefits**

The health benefits of walking and bicycling have been well-documented by public health and medical professionals. As the focus of healthcare transitions from treatment to the prevention of disease, walking and biking (often referred to as Active Transportation) are being promoted as an accessible and easy way to improve both our current and future well-being.

As a result, urban planners, engineers, and public health professionals are increasingly working together to create pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly

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environments that promote these activities for both leisure and transportation purposes. Researchers who study the effect of the built environment on walking and biking have discovered that numerous variables affect such decisions. The proximity of destinations, the presence and quality of sidewalks or bicycle lanes, perceptions of safety and security, the steepness of grades, the presence of other people, separation from traffic, and aesthetics are all factors that can encourage or discourage people from walking or biking. Policies and roadway features can also help promote active transportation, such as the use of wayfinding signage and pedestrian and bicyclist-oriented crossing signals. Through the implementation of complete streets, communities can help people live longer, healthier and prosperous lives.

**Context Sensitive**

However, community context is also very important. Whereas large cities around the globe, from New York to London to Montreal, for example, gain high profile media attention about their efforts to make their streets more livable and inviting, smaller communities in urban, suburban and rural settings are also making great strides. Complete Streets are not a one-size-fits all scenario, but are about providing the access and opportunity appropriate to local context, and about leveraging changes to the built environment to make communities more vibrant and appealing. Often these changes build confidence in a community and spur additional private investment, sparking a virtuous cycle of neighborhood change.

**Case Study (Hamburg, NY)**

Starting in 2002, the Village of Hamburg, NY utilized a Complete Streets approach to restore value and vitality to their village’s traditional Main Street.
This approach has had many benefits that have transformed their streets into vibrant, people-friendly places where property values have surged and population returned.

The New York State Department of Transportation was planning a $13 million complete reconstruction of the village’s commercial thoroughfare, a roughly two-mile segment of Route 62 (Main Street) and Buffalo Street. Residents formed the “Imagine Hamburg” committee and worked with the state to establish a walkable, bikeable corridor. The village started an education campaign, including several design workshops where village residents could raise concerns, make suggestions, communicate their values and collaborate with planners on a vision and design. This effort alleviated the initial skepticism and allowed all parties to overcome suspicion and build a strong consensus on how to proceed.

Construction began in 2005 and was finished by 2009. Four roundabouts replaced traditional intersections and the corridor went on a “road diet” which removed excess travel lanes allowing for the addition of enhanced bicycle and pedestrian amenities. Since completion - shoppers, strollers, joggers and cyclists have returned while congestion has eased. For the first two years following completion, car accidents on the new road dropped by 66% and injuries by 60%7. This has lead to the resurgence of private investment and property values.

Village leaders understood that it was not enough to re-design their streets, private development had to be supported and enhanced. The village created building design guidelines that were incorporated into the local zoning code to strengthen their desire to encourage the traditional development that represented the historic character of the community. These design guidelines included zero-setback rules to ensure buildings are pedestrian oriented and are built up to the sidewalk with good first floor fenestration and signage standards. They also included upper-floor residential by requiring two-to-three story buildings to increase the number of people living along their main street. The guidelines created an environment of predictability and synergistic development, maximizing the return on public roadway investments, which were essential to attracting private investment.

Since 2005, business owners spent a total of $7 million on 33 building projects. The number of building permits rose from 15 in 2005 to 96 in 2010 and property values along Route 62 more than doubled over the same period. In 2012, the village’s Main Street was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, which brought tax incentives that may lead to still more development8.

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Safety Assessment

The Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) created a density map that identifies reported locations of bicycle and pedestrian injuries and fatalities throughout the City of Niagara Falls. The data comes from the Accident Location Information System, during the period of September 2013 through August 2016. Areas of higher crash incidences are shown in red and include the area around Niagara Street Elementary School.
Course Overview

The Complete Streets workshop in Niagara Falls, NY was held on May 13, 2017 at the Niagara Street Elementary School. Justin Booth, Executive Director of GObike Buffalo, facilitated the discussion.

The agenda contained several main elements: an introduction and visioning exercise, a presentation on the key elements of Complete Streets for Niagara Falls, policy recommendations for sustainability and a group exercise to identify actions to address the current challenges inhibiting the community’s ability to walk and bicycle safely.

Each element of the course presented was designed to assist the participants in developing a community that supports all modes of travel safely. During the visioning session participants discussed various issues and defined how they would like to see their vision take shape. The presentation educated participants on why complete streets are important, creative engineering strategies to implement them and policy ideas for long-term sustainability. Provided was an overview on each along with a menu of options that may be considered in developing Complete Streets. Participants then walked the community observing issues in the built environment that inhibits access for bicyclists and pedestrians. Once returning the group worked collaboratively to discuss solutions to their local challenges observed during the walking tour and their intimate knowledge of the local community. These solutions were related back to the visioning session and a discussion commenced on next steps.

Overall, the workshop was intended to help Niagara Street Elementary School community develop an environment to support healthy, environmentally sustainable and community friendly transportation choices while establishing a strong basis to apply for future resources creating positive momentum for the identified vision to achieve complete streets.

Vision

To start the workshop, participants were asked to introduce themselves and briefly present their individual vision in implementing Complete Streets for the City of Niagara Falls. Each participant’s comments were recorded and related to at the end. The purpose of this was to allow everyone the opportunity to air his or her concerns and issues in a constructive manner. The comments from this exercise were referred to throughout the course as an aide to identify appropriate recommendations for moving the discussion forward as a way to reach the city’s vision.

The following are the participant’s vision statements:

- A safe place for children to walk to and from school.
- More crosswalks; less traffic congestion.
• Interested in ways to slow traffic, making it safe for children to walk to school and to the park.
• A Niagara Street where cyclists and pedestrians feel like they have more right of way.
• Getting more neighborhood residents out into the community and creating place/opportunity for businesses to succeed.
• To make Niagara Falls more bikeable.
• Easier for families to use Niagara Street to access the school and Gill Creek Park.
• Encourage “sharing the road” and helping people understanding what that means.
• Educating cyclists about the rules of the road; encouraging right behaviors.
• Better community health, and specifically lower rates of diabetes.
• Interested in reasonable methods for making the neighborhood more walkable and bikeable.
• Would like sidewalks to remain more accessible (all-season); safer for kids to walk near park & school.

Observations

Participants walked Niagara Street and discussed the impact of the built environment on the safety for all users. The following observations were made:

Front of School (Niagara Street Side)
• Consensus supports traffic calming on Niagara Street in front of the school.
• The school has challenges in this area with parents double parking during pick-up and drop-off times.
• Recommendations included pulling curbs out to slow traffic and high-visibility crosswalks (perhaps adding an artistic element that is relevant to the school).

24th and Niagara
• Lanes are wide (perhaps as wide as 15 feet) and while both sides of the street have parking lanes, full parking capacity is rarely reached.
• There might be an opportunity to repaint the road to narrow the driving lane and add a bicycle lane.
• To address double parking and congestion in front of the school, a larger drop-off zone could be established; idea of a “student escort” option to bring students to the doors from drop-off farther up the street. The school should endeavor to educate parents about the opportunities/spaces available to park/pick up/drop off children.
24th Street
• This road has a very wide traffic lane (and street parking); it could easily accommodate a bike lane, which would serve both to calm traffic and offer a safe route to the school by bicycle.

School Courtyard
• The courtyard offers an exciting place-making opportunity. Having a conversation between the school and the community to identify needs will help determine how to activate the space. Participant suggestions included Math & Movement, games, sectioning/outdoor seating, performance space, outdoor movies.

25th and Welch
• Welch (one-way, heading west toward 24th Street) is where bus drop-off and pick-up takes place. 25th Street terminates at Welch; the crosswalks at this intersection do not align on the north and south sides of Welch and create a diagonal (longer) crossing distance for students.
• Recommendations include using paint to shorten the crosswalks and extend the pedestrian space into the street.

Welch Avenue
• One-way residential street, but very wide.
• Recommendations include painting out the bus drop-off location to better define the space and its function. Adding a bike lane (the street has ample width to accommodate the addition with the additional appeal of being quieter, with lower traveling speeds and less traffic) would create a corridor for biking to school and an alternative to biking on Niagara Street.

Welch Avenue and 27th Street
• Addition of street trees along Welch would have an additional traffic-calming effect in the area around the school in addition to environmental benefits. With power company subsidy and volunteer activation for planting, trees offer a relatively low-cost solution for improving the streetscape.
• This area offers opportunities for pop-up complete streets; recommend engaging residents and encouraging their participation in improvement projects.

30th and Niagara Street
• The 50-University bus stops frequently along Niagara Street.
• Recommend bump-outs at the intersections along Niagara — many of which are staggered between 24th and 30th — to increase visibility for pedestrians and promote ease-of-use for the bus line.
Gill Creek Park

- Consensus that the area needs traffic calming. While the posted speed limit drops near the Niagara Street School and Gill Creek Park, the street is very wide and traffic patterns are not well delineated.
- No visible crosswalks in the area — these need to be painted and established to alert motorists to expect pedestrians crossing and to offer safe access to the park from both sides of Niagara Street.

Hyde Park Boulevard

- Wide, high-traffic road that accommodates but does not encourage pedestrians or cyclists: the intersection offers no pedestrian timer/signal at present and the curb-to-curb crossing distance limits use (including pedestrian access to the Royal Cafe, a local economic development project). Crosswalks had been ground out but the timeline for re-striping is not certain.
- The overall conclusion is that this intersection requires further analysis; possibilities for improvement included a double roundabout to calm traffic, limiting the number of lanes and/or adding a designated bus lane and adding a pedestrian refuge island to aide crossing.
- This corridor is under NYS Department of Transportation jurisdiction. The city should reach out to region 5 and determine both short term long term opportunities to address current needs.
- Plans exist for a trail/bike path connection along Gill Creek between Buffalo Avenue and Hyde Park Boulevard addressing all crosswalks along the corridor; a proposal to support this project was submitted to the CFA but not funded.
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Niagara Falls, NY

Project Area:
Proposed Gill Creek Trail

1 inch = 300 feet

Project Location

Disclaimers: Digital files are based on data from various sources. The City of Niagara Falls, NY assumes no responsibility or legal liability for the accuracy, completeness, reliability, timeliness, or usefulness of any information presented. For interpretation, refer to the City's GIS Coordinator.
Recommendations

To implement the recommendations and address concerns raised by participant observations during the walking audit, traffic calming measures should be put in place along Niagara Street to better define it as a complete street. Traffic calming is the combination of measures that reduce some of the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for vulnerable road users (pedestrians and bicyclists). Traffic calming uses physical measures to slow motor vehicle speeds and encourages desired behaviors to maximize safety, such as yielding to pedestrians and bicyclists. Typical traffic calming measures include cross-section measures, such as street trees, narrower lanes, and on-street parking. They also include periodic measures, such as curb extensions, speed tables, and chicanes. Traffic calming is an important tool to develop a complete street and help improve walking and bicycling conditions.

A resource that provides references to all applicable design guidance is the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA): Achieving Multi-Modal Networks; Applying Design Flexibility and Reducing Conflicts; which can be accessed online at: (https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/multimodal_networks/fhwahep16055.pdf)

This design guidance will support the City of Niagara Falls in achieving their vision for complete streets.

Specifically for Niagara Street, the lane widths, which vary depending on the functional classification and context of the roadway has a particularly discernible impact on safety. The traditional approach of sizing lanes has opted for wider lanes to accommodate driver error and to attempt to increase throughput. However, research reveals that wider lanes hinder both of these objectives. Karim (2015) examined the relationship between lane width and crash rates.

- Wider lanes (over 10.8 to 11.2 feet) are associated with 33% higher impact speeds and higher crash rates.
- The overall capacity of narrower lanes (10 feet to 10.5 feet) is higher.
- For large vehicles, no difference on safety and carrying capacity is observed between narrower and wider lanes.
- Pedestrian volumes decline as lanes widen.
- Intersections with narrower lanes provide the highest capacity for bicycles.

The study finds that the street environment impacts driver behavior, and narrower lanes in urban areas result in less aggressive driving and more ability to slow or stop a vehicle over a short distance to avoid collision.

Identified on the map below, traffic volumes on Niagara Street is low and the road / pavement is 36’ wide west of the school area and 42’ wide from the school area heading east to Hyde Park Blvd (including the school area). This offers options to reimagine the space and develop projects that will encourage vehicles to travel at the posted speed limit.
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Niagara Falls, NY

Project Area: Niagara Falls’ Average Daily Traffic Count
2015 NYSDOT / GBNRTC Data

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Count

- 0 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 15,000
- 15,001 - 20,000
- 20,001 - 25,000
- 25,001 - 30,000
- 30,001 - 36,524

2015 NYSDOT / GBNRTC Data
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Niagara Falls, NY

Conceptual Designs: Niagara Street

Niagara Street (curb to curb – 42')

Niagara Street (curb to curb – 36')
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Niagara St. / 25th St.

Niagara Falls Elementary School
Next Steps

Based upon feedback generated from the workshop participants, the following actions were identified to begin the process of implementing complete streets in the Village of Dundee.

Immediate Actions

• Identify a complete street catalyst project (tree planting, crosswalk striping, bike racks or other low cost, easy to implement solutions). GObike has up to $1,000 available to support this effort.
• Develop and pass a complete streets policy.
• Establish a Complete Streets Advisory Board to oversee the implementation of the communities Complete Streets Policy. The advisory board should include members of the Village (board members, planning board, school board, highway department), county (economic development, planning department and highway department), the NYS Department of Transportation, the police department as well as representatives from bicycling, pedestrian, disabled, youth and elderly communities or any other organizations as deemed relevant. This advisory board will meet quarterly and provide a written report to the town board evaluating progress and advising on implementation.
• Write to the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to engage representatives in the advisory board functions and to identify NYSDOT maintenance schedule for identified short-term street improvements.

Mid-Term Actions

• Revise Existing Plans and Policies to incorporate complete street principles into the comprehensive plan, zoning code and other plans and manual, rules, regulations and programs.
• The Complete Streets committee should work with the town to adapt, develop and adopt departmental policies, design criteria, standards and guidelines based upon recognized best practices in street design, construction and operations.
• The Complete Streets committee should continuously evaluate to identify successes and review opportunities for improvement. Sample performance measures may include:
  o Increase in the share of bicycles, pedestrians and transit users;
  o Crash data;
  o Use of new projects by mode;
  o Compliments and complaints;
  o Linear feet of pedestrian accommodations built;
  o Number of ADA accommodations built;
  o Miles of bike lanes/trails built or striped;
  o Number of transit accessibility accommodations built;
  o Number of street trees planted;
  o Number of building permits issued along new complete street.
• Inventory: The Village will maintain a comprehensive inventory of the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and will prioritize projects to eliminate gaps in the sidewalk and bikeway networks.
Capital Improvement and Maintenance Project Prioritization: The will reevaluate capital improvement and maintenance project prioritization annually to encourage implementation of pedestrian and bicycle improvements.

Research and prepare grant applications for project implementation.

Long-Term

- Implement prioritized opportunities identified for establishing pedestrian and bicycle connections
- Secure grant funding and implement long term vision

Funding

There are many mechanisms for a municipality to generate resources for public infrastructure maintenance and construction. Provided below is a sampling of current fund development strategies.

**Municipal Best Practices**

**Voter Approved Transportation Spending**

There are a number of communities across the country that have approved short-term local tax initiatives to fund bicycle, pedestrian and other transportation projects. One of the best examples of this comes from the City of Tucson and the surrounding Pima County. During a one-time vote in May of 2006, voters approved a sales tax to fund the implementation of the 20-year transportation plan.

**Transportation Utility Fee**

Some municipalities have used transportation utility fees to fund improvements that aid active transportation. A transportation utility fee, also known as a transportation maintenance fee, street maintenance fee, or street utility fee, is a monthly user fee paid by city residents, businesses, government agencies, schools, etc. based on their use of the transportation system. Fees are usually included on the city’s utility bill. Revenue from this fee can only be used to maintain transportation infrastructure. Residential fees typically range from approximately $1 to $12 per month. Other land uses often pay much higher fees based on their predicted traffic generation. Compared to a tax, a fee faces fewer legal hurdles and public opposition.

**Metered Parking Revenue**

Charging market prices for curb parking and returning the meter revenue for public improvements has helped pave the way for a renaissance of a number of communities around the US. The meter revenue has paid to improve the
streetscape and to convert alleys into pleasant walkways with shops and restaurants. The additional public spending makes the area safer, cleaner, and more attractive for both customers and businesses. These public improvements have increased private investment, property values, and sales tax revenues.

Sidewalk Tax District

This community-based initiative is similar to the metered parking revenue in that it looks to generate funds within the community where the money will eventually be spent. In this case, each building owner would pay an extra $100 in taxes for the next 10 years to levy additional funds from the city. These funds could be used for matching grants or the like and they also demonstrate to the city a strong investment on the part of the local businesses.

Private Advertising in the Public Right-of-Way

Another method is to use funds from private advertising in the public right-of-way for active living infrastructure. Possible advertising locations include transit shelters and vehicles, existing bicycle parking infrastructure, street furniture, and utility poles.

Development Impact Fee or Development Excise Tax

Some municipalities utilize a development impact fee—a one-time fee collected from a new development to pay for its fair share of future capital improvements necessitated by growth. The impact fee can be used only for capital improvements, not maintenance or operating costs. Usually, a specific portion of this fee is earmarked for transportation infrastructure improvements.

Similar to a development impact fee, a development excise tax is a one-time tax collected on new development to fund new infrastructure. The excise tax can be rolled into the municipality’s general funds. Unlike a development impact fee, however, an excise tax does not have to be specifically earmarked to benefit new growth. Taxes can be calculated as a percentage of construction cost, a flat fee per acre, or a flat fee by building type.

Federal Programs

Specific application for these programs should be reviewed within the region through the county planning office or other specific public agency identified.

• **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ):**
  CMAQ is a federal reimbursement program for surface transportation and other related projects that contribute to air-quality improvements and reduced congestion. Program funds may be used to construct bicycle and pedestrian facilities intended to reduce automobile travel and/or emissions in areas that have failed to meet air-quality standards for ozone, carbon monoxide and small particulate.
• **Highway Safety Improvement Programs (HSIP):**
The overall purpose of this program is to achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads through the implementation of infrastructure-related highway safety improvements.

• **Transportation and Community System Preservation (TCSP):**
The Transportation, Community, and System Preservation (TCSP) Program is a comprehensive initiative of research and grants to investigate the relationships between transportation, community, and system preservation plans and practices and identify private sector-based initiatives to improve such relationships. States, metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, and tribal governments are eligible for discretionary grants to carry out eligible projects to integrate transportation, community, and system preservation plans and practices that:
  - Improve the efficiency of the transportation system of the United States.
  - Reduce environmental impacts of transportation.
  - Reduce the need for costly future public infrastructure investments.
  - Ensure efficient access to jobs, services, and centers of trade.
  - Examine community development patterns and identify strategies to encourage private sector development patterns and investments that support these goals.

• **Hazard Elimination Program:**
At least ten percent of each state’s Surface Transportation Program (STP) must be set aside for Hazard Elimination programs. This program’s purpose is to identify and improve locations that have a documented history of numerous crashes. Funds may be used for safety improvement projects on any public road, any public surface transportation facility, or any publicly owned bicycle or pedestrian pathway or trail.

• **Transportation Alternatives Program:**
The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a legislative program that was authorized in 2012 by federal transportation legislation, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). With certain exceptions, projects that met eligibility criteria for the Safe Routes to School Program, Transportation Enhancements, and/or the Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities Program will be eligible TAP projects.

• **Tiger Grants:**
TIGER grants are awarded to transportation projects that have a significant national or regional impact. Projects are chosen for their ability to contribute to the long-term economic competitiveness of the nation, improve the condition of existing transportation facilities and systems, increase energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions,
improve the safety of U.S. transportation facilities and enhance the quality of living and working environments of communities through increased transportation choices and connections. The Department also gives priority to projects that are expected to create and preserve jobs quickly and stimulate increases in economic activity.

**State Programs**

Specific application for these programs should be reviewed with the county planning office or specific public agency identified.

- **New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA)**, a public benefit corporation offering objective information and analysis, innovative programs, technical expertise and funding to help New Yorkers increase energy efficiency, save money, use renewable energy, and reduce their reliance on fossil fuels. (http://www.nyserda.ny.gov)

- **New York Main Street Program**, the Office of Community Renewal administers the New York Main Street program. New York Main Street provides financial resources and technical assistance to communities to strengthen the economic vitality of the State's traditional Main Streets and neighborhoods. The New York Main Street grant program provides funds from the New York State Housing Trust Fund Corporation (HTFC) to units of local government, business improvement districts, and other not-for-profit organizations that are committed to revitalizing historic downtowns, mixed-use neighborhood commercial districts, and village centers. (http://www.nyshcr.org/AboutUs/Offices/CommunityRenewal/)

- **The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP)**, administered through the Housing Finance Agency (HFA), provides financing for municipalities and developers to acquire and redevelop foreclosed, abandoned, and vacant properties. Once renovated or newly constructed, units are sold or rented to low-, moderate-, and middle-income households, with mandated long-term affordability. NSP also funds local land banking initiatives focused on foreclosed residential properties, and select demolition programs of blighted properties in targeted neighborhoods. The program, funded with Federal and State funds, targets communities most severely affected by the foreclosure and subprime crisis. (http://www.nyshcr.org/AboutUs/Offices/CommunityRenewal/)

- **The Rural Area Revitalization Project (RARP)** program provides financial/technical resources to New York communities for the restoration and improvement of housing, commercial areas and public/community facilities in rural communities. This program will provide grants to not-for-profit community based organizations and charitable organizations
that have a direct interest in improving the health, safety and economic viability of a rural area or other aspects of the area environment that are related to community preservation or renewal activities. (http://www.nyshcr.org/AboutUs/Offices/CommunityRenewal/)

- **New York State Consolidated Funding Application (CFA)** is part of Governor Cuomo’s plan to improve the state’s economic development model; the CFA created a streamlined and grant application process. Utilize the CFA as a single entry point for access to economic development funding in New York State. Applicants have access to multiple state agency funding opportunities. (https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/)

**Private Funding**

**National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town grant program**

The National Endowment for the Arts provides a limited number of grants, ranging from $25,000 to $150,000, for creative placemaking projects that contribute toward the livability of communities and help transform them into lively, beautiful, and sustainable places with the arts at their core. Our Town invests in creative and innovative projects in which communities, together with their arts and design organizations and artists, seek to:

- Improve their quality of life.
- Encourage creative activity.
- Create community identity and a sense of place.
- Revitalize local economies.

**Preservation League of New York State**

The Preservation League of New York State offers grants to support projects that preserve New York State's cultural and historic resources. The grants support professional services of architects, engineers, and other design professionals working with non-profit groups and municipalities.

**Zoning Code Amendments**

Zoning codes have a big influence on how pedestrian friendly or bike-friendly a community is and can encourage private investment. Not only do zoning codes create rules about the size, location, and use of buildings within a zoning district, but they also govern the surrounding public spaces. For example, zoning codes set standards for the width of sidewalks and streets, the location and frequency of crosswalks, the placement of pedestrian medians, the installment of bicycle lanes, or the inclusion of traffic-calming devices such as speed bumps. Zoning codes can also create mixed-use districts where structures can be used for both commercial and residential purposes, allowing more commerce to happen where people live and reducing the need for motor vehicles.
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Model Complete Streets Policy

Draft Model Ordinance

The National Complete Streets Coalition promotes a comprehensive policy that addresses ten main elements for communities to adopt. These elements include an identified vision, specific direction and commitment, interpret clearly the community’s desire, and establish flexibility in planning and implementation to ensure real results through good process. Provided is a description of each section and sample language for consideration.

A strong **vision** can inspire a community to follow through on its policy. Every community has its own set of challenges and desires, which has encouraged them to develop Complete Streets as an effective policy to combat them. At its core, complete streets identifies that all users upon the roadways should be safely accommodated into the planning, design, construction and operation of the transportation system.

- **Whereas;** Establish the City of Niagara Falls as a safe and accessible community by improving bicycle and pedestrian friendliness through consistent public realm design standards to a revitalized mixed-use downtown district.

Clarity in the **intent** of the policy makes it easy for those who are tasked with its implementation and follow through. All involved understands this new goal and can determine what changes in the current process need to occur.

- **Whereas;** The City of Niagara Falls shall plan for, design, construct, operate and maintain appropriate facilities for all transportation users in all new construction, retrofit and reconstruction projects.

Complete Street policies come with an understanding that **all users and modes** shall be accommodated upon the roadway. This recognizes that our streets are for more then moving vehicles through them. Streets should also be places for those who travel by foot and bicycle for they too are deserving of safe facilities to travel upon.

- **Whereas;** streets that integrate multiple transportation choices for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit, with special consideration for children, the elderly and people with disabilities, contribute to the public life of a community, sustainable economic development and efficient movement of people and goods.

The complete street policy should apply to all street **projects and phases.** Whether it is new construction, reconstruction, maintenance or operations all...
transportation improvements should be viewed as an opportunity to create safer, more accessible streets for all users.

- **Whereas;** the City of Niagara Falls shall, to the maximum extent practical, scope, plan, design, construct, operate and maintain all streets to provide a comprehensive and integrated network of facilities for all users of all abilities.

There are some **exceptions** that should be in place to ensure the policy is not too onerous. However, a process to handle exceptions is needed and should not weaken the overall policy. The Federal Highway Administrations guidance on accommodating bicycle and pedestrian travel identifies when accommodations may not be necessary on corridors where specific users are prohibited, such as interstate freeways or pedestrian malls; the cost of accommodation is excessively disproportioned to the need or probable use; there is a documented absence of current or future need.

- **Whereas;** Any exception to applying this Complete Streets Policy to a specific roadway project must be approved by the City of Niagara Falls Council with documentation of the reason for the exception. Exceptions may be made when the project involves a roadway on which non-motorized use is prohibited by law. In this case, an effort shall be made to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists elsewhere.

Streets must be organized in an integrated **network.** Residents have many potential destinations in their daily travel. A complete street provides an interconnected network that meets this demand.

- **Whereas;** This policy will create a comprehensive, integrated, connected transportation network for the City of Niagara Falls that balances access, mobility, health and safety needs for all residents. Planning, funding, designing, constructing, managing and maintaining a complete multi-modal network, ensures this.

Implementing a complete street network can become difficult with multiple agencies having **jurisdiction** over the planning, design and construction of different roads. In the City of Niagara Falls, the state and county also have jurisdiction over some of the roadways. Additionally, new developments may be built in the city and new roadways established by private developers.

- **Whereas;** It is the intent of this policy to foster partnerships with the state, county, school district, citizens, businesses, interest groups and neighborhoods to implement complete streets.

Communities should **design** their streets using the best and latest design standards available.

All communities are different and it is important that each maintain their character and sense of place when designing complete streets. A Context sensitive approach does this by adapting roads to fit the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

• Whereas; the implementation of this policy shall reflect the context and character of the surrounding built and natural environments while enhancing the appearance of such. In doing so, the City of Niagara Falls shall consider methods of providing development flexibility within safe design parameters such as context-sensitive design solutions and shall attempt to employ all solutions consistent with and sensitive to the context of the project.

Performance Measures help communities measure their success. The evaluation of complete streets projects can help identify this success by determining improvements in safety, economic development and changes in mode share. These can include the total number of bike lanes added, increase in building permits issued to the increase in activity levels of residents because they are now walking or biking more often.

• Whereas; Complete Streets should be continuously evaluated for success and opportunities for improvement sought. This policy encourages the regular evaluation and reporting of implementing complete streets through the following performance measures:
  o Increase in the share of bicycles, pedestrians and transit users;
  o Crash data;
  o Use of new projects by mode;
  o Compliments and complaints;
  o Linear feet of pedestrian accommodations built;
  o Number of ADA accommodations built;
  o Miles of bike lanes/trails built or striped;
  o Number of transit accessibility accommodations built;
  o Number of street trees planted;
  o Number of building permits issued along new complete street;
Once a policy is passed, the work is not done. There are a number of steps that a community can take to ensure the implementation of complete streets. There are five key steps to follow in order to be successful, these include:

1. Restructure or revise related procedures, plans, regulations and other processes to accommodate all users.

2. Develop new design policies and guides or revise existing ones to reflect current best practices in transportation design.

3. Ensure that staff responsible for implementing the policy, as well as community leaders and the general public has opportunities to attend workshops or other training opportunities so that everyone understands how to implement the policy effectively.

4. Identify ways to evaluate and measure the performance of your new complete streets by collecting data and sharing with the general public how well the streets are serving them.

• Whereas; The City of Niagara Falls shall implement the following steps to ensure successful implementation of complete streets:

  o Advisory Board: the city will establish an interdepartmental advisory board to oversee the implementation of this policy. The committee will include members of the city council members, planning board, school board, community development, public works), county (planning department and highway department), the NYS Department of Transportation, the police department as well as representatives from bicycling, pedestrian, disabled, youth and elderly communities or any other organizations as deemed relevant. This committee will meet quarterly and provide a written report to the city council evaluating progress and advising on implementation.

  o Inventory: The city will maintain a comprehensive inventory of the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and will prioritize projects to eliminate gaps in the sidewalk and bikeway networks.

  o Capital Improvement and Maintenance Project Prioritization: The city will reevaluate capital improvement and maintenance project prioritization annually to encourage implementation of pedestrian and bicycle improvements.

  o Revisions to Existing Plans and Policies: The city will incorporate complete street principles into the comprehensive plan, zoning code and other plans and manuals, rules, regulations and programs.

  o Other Plans: The city will prepare, implement and maintain a Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan, a Safe Routes to School Plan, an Americans with Disabilities Act Transition Plan, and a Street Tree and Landscape Plan.

  o Storm Water Management: The city will prepare and implement a plan to transition to sustainable storm water management techniques along our streets.
o **Staff Training:** The city will train all pertinent staff on the content of the complete streets principles and best practices for implementing the policy.

o **Coordination:** The city will utilize inter-departmental project coordination to promote the most responsible and efficient use of fiscal resources for activities that occur within the public right of way.

o **Street Manual:** The city will create and adopt a Complete Streets Design Manual to support implementation of this policy.

o **Funding:** The city will actively seek sources of appropriate funding to implement complete streets.