



City of Norwich

Physical Accessibility to Programs and Services

S9-24-35 | February 2025

Contents

- Report Highlights 1**

- Physical Accessibility to Programs and Services 2**
 - Steps Identified to Potentially Increase Physical Accessibility to Programs and Services at Selected City Facilities 2
 - What Do We Recommend? 3

- Appendix A – Response From City Officials 4**

- Appendix B – Potential Physical Accessibility Improvements 5**

- Appendix C – Audit Methodology and Standards 7**

- Appendix D – Resources and Services 8**

Report Highlights

City of Norwich

Audit Objective

Assess whether the City of Norwich (City) officials could take additional steps to increase physical accessibility to programs and services provided at selected City facilities.

Key Findings

Of the 317 applicable physical accessibility components (components) we reviewed, we identified 30 components (9 percent) where City officials could consider taking additional steps to increase physical accessibility at selected City facilities. Specifically:

- 14 components at City Hall, such as accessible handles on interior office doors.
- Nine components at the City Court, such as grab bars in the restroom at the proper length and height.
- Four components at the Fire Station, such as a portion of the Code Enforcement service counter and call buttons at an accessible height.
- Three components at the Police Station, such as accessible parking spaces in the parking lot.

Recommendation

City officials should assess the feasibility of taking additional steps to increase physical accessibility for the 30 components identified in this report. City officials agreed with our findings and indicated they plan to initiate corrective action.

Audit Period

January 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

Background

The City is located in Chenango County and is governed by an elected Common Council (Council) composed of the Mayor and six Alderpersons. The Mayor is responsible for the overall administration of the City government.

The City provides programs and services at the City Hall building, such as:

- The City Clerk's Office (various licenses and permits, vital records, meeting minutes, etc.),
- The Finance Office (collection of taxes, water and sewer bills, and related inquiries), and
- Public meetings of the Council and Planning Board, among others.

The Code Enforcement Department, located in the Fire Station, the City Court and Police Station are also accessible to the public.

Quick Facts

	City
Population	7,051
2023 General Fund Expenditures	\$10.7 million
Number of Employees	70

Physical Accessibility to Programs and Services

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one in four adults in the United States have some type of disability and more than one in 10 have a mobility disability with serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.¹ It is important that someone with a disability can participate in their local government's decision-making process and be provided the same services and program opportunities as everyone else.

Title II of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by state and local governments. Generally, under the ADA's implementing regulations, a public entity may not deny the benefits of its programs, activities, and services to individuals with disabilities because its facilities are inaccessible. While not required to make each existing facility accessible, public entities must operate each service, program, or activity so that, when viewed in its entirety, it is readily accessible to and useable by individuals with disabilities.

The 2010 ADA Standard for Accessible Design (Standards) set minimum scoping and technical requirements for newly designed and constructed or altered state and local government facilities, public accommodations, and commercial facilities. For any new construction or alteration that began on or after March 15, 2012, the project must comply with the Standards. An alteration is defined as a change to a building or facility that affects or could affect the usability of the entire building or facility or a portion thereof.

Although the Standards apply to new construction and alterations that began on or after March 15, 2012, we used the Standards as a tool to help identify where City officials could consider taking additional steps to increase physical accessibility to programs and services at selected existing structures within the City, whether built before or after March 2012. The potential improvements to physical accessibility identified in this report, however, are intended for informational purposes only and should not be construed as the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) opining as to the legality of the City's compliance with ADA requirements.

Steps Identified to Potentially Increase Physical Accessibility to Programs and Services at Selected City Facilities

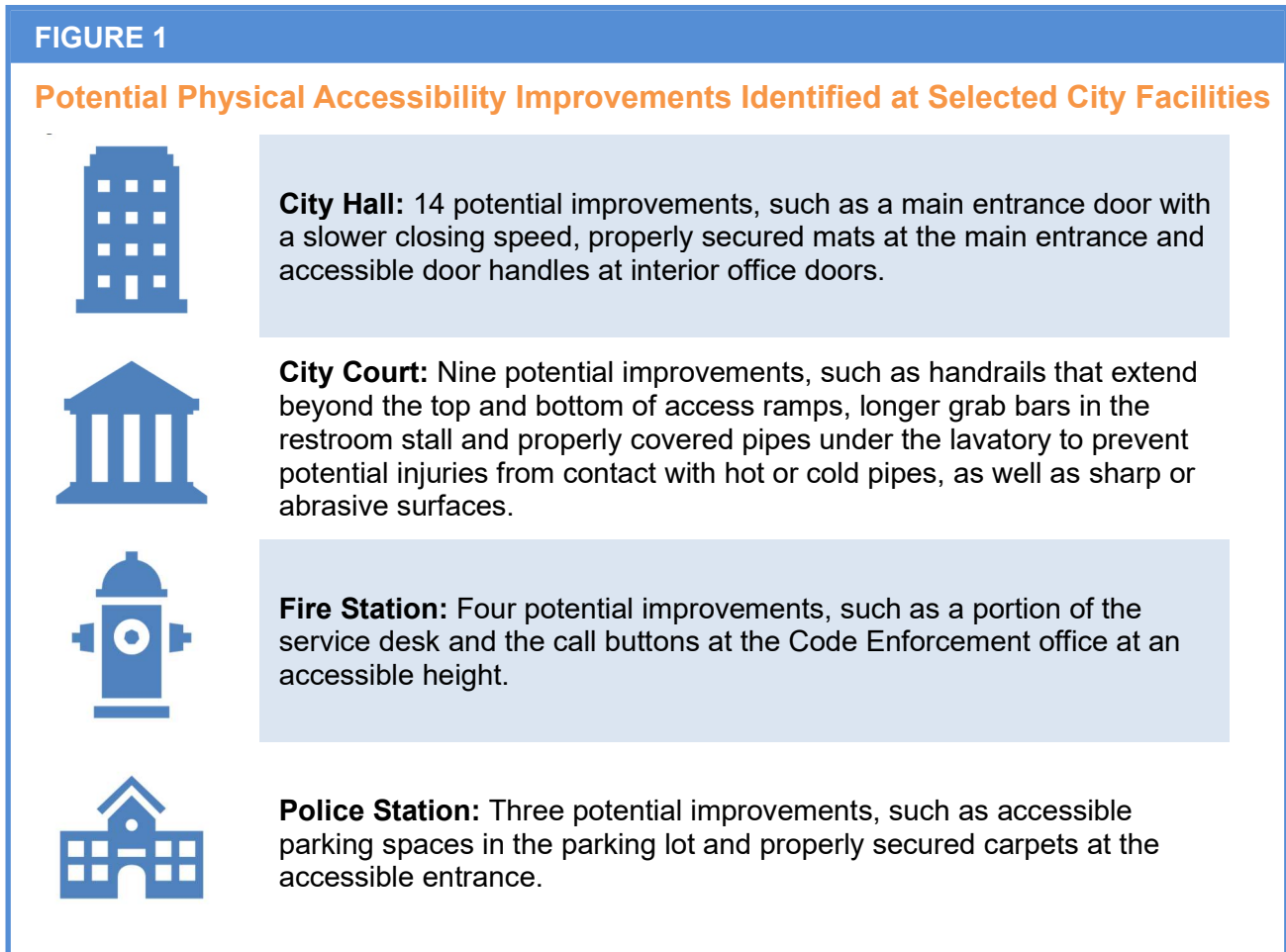
We reviewed physical accessibility to programs and services provided at the City Hall, City Court, Police Station and Fire Station, including access to City department offices, public meetings and restrooms.

We also performed site visits at each of these buildings and their respective parking lots (together "facilities") and used the ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities² (ADA Checklist), which incorporates the Standards, to assess the accessibility of the sampled facilities.

1 https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html

2 Produced by the New England ADA Center, the checklist was created to review existing facilities using the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design: <https://www.adachecklist.org/checklist.html>. Similar to the use of the Standards, the checklist was used as a tool to identify potential improvements to physical accessibility. The use of the checklist, however, is for informational purposes only and should not be construed as OSC opining on the legality of the City's compliance with ADA requirements.

We reviewed 317 applicable physical accessibility components at the selected facilities and identified 30 components (9 percent) where City officials could consider taking additional steps to increase physical accessibility, including 14 components at City Hall, nine components at the City Court, four components at the Fire Station and three components at the Police Station (Figure 1).



Examples of the potential improvements we identified and photographed at the facilities, along with a complete table of potential accessibility improvements, are included in Appendix B.

What Do We Recommend?

1. City officials should assess the feasibility of taking additional steps to increase physical accessibility for the 30 components identified in this report.

Appendix A: Response From City Officials



City of Norwich

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Brian J. Doliver
Mayor

January 22, 2025

██████████
Office of the New York State Comptroller
Division of Local Government
And School Accountability

Re: Report of Examination S9-24-35

Dear ██████████:

The City of Norwich would like to thank the New York State Comptroller's Office for their professionalism and courtesy shown during the City's audit of Physical Accessibility to Programs and Services. We appreciate the assistance and recommendations that were made by you and ██████████ throughout the course of this audit.

In general, the City agrees with the potential physical accessibility improvements identified in the report. The City is always looking to improve our public facilities, and we appreciate the NYS Comptroller's potential improvements to help the City improve our facilities. We will be working on a Corrective Action Plan to identify steps for prospective improvements for the items that have been identified in the report.

It is the City of Norwich's goal to improve the physical accessibility to programs and services in all municipal owned facilities.

Sincerely yours,
City of Norwich

Brian J. Doliver
Mayor

Appendix B: Potential Physical Accessibility Improvements

FIGURE 2

Potential Physical Accessibility Improvement Examples^a



No accessible parking spaces in public parking lot at the Police Station.



Handrails at the City Court's accessible restroom did not extend far enough and were mounted too high.



Conference room door has doorknob, and not an accessible handle such as a latch or lever that can be operated without grasping or twisting.



Service counter and call buttons at the Code Enforcement office (Fire Station) are too high.

a) Photos taken by OSC auditors in October 2024 with permission from local officials.

Figure 3: Potential Physical Accessibility Improvements by Component

Accessibility Checklist Component Category	Applicable Checklist Components Reviewed	Potential Improvements Identified	Percentage With Potential Improvements Identified
Accessible Route	40	0	0%
Controls	4	1	25%
Curb Ramps	6	0	0%
Drinking Fountains	13	0	0%
Elevators	7	0	0%
Entrance	57	8	14%
Interior Doors	49	4	8%
Lavatories	14	1	7%
Parking	22	3	14%
Ramps	21	3	14%
Rooms and Spaces	3	0	0%
Sales and Service Counters	13	2	15%
Seating	7	0	0%
Signs	7	0	0%
Soap Dispensers and Hand Dryers	4	0	0%
Toilet Compartments (Stalls)	17	0	0%
Toilet Rooms (Bathrooms)	11	3	27%
Water Closets (Toilets)	22	5	23%
Totals	317	30	9%

Appendix C: Audit Methodology and Standards

We conducted this audit pursuant to Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article 3 of the New York State General Municipal Law. We obtained an understanding of internal controls that we deemed significant within the context of the audit objective and assessed those controls. Information related to the scope of our work on internal controls, as well as the work performed in our audit procedures to achieve the audit objective and obtain valid audit evidence, included the following:

- We selected the City from a list of all cities, towns and villages (excluding NYC) not currently in OSC's audit process at the time of selection. We divided the list into seven regions and used expenditure data reported in the 2023 fiscal year to judgmentally select cities, towns and villages from these regions for an even representation across the State for this multi-unit audit.
- We reviewed applicable laws and regulations, as well as any policies and procedures the City had regarding accessibility. The potential improvements to physical accessibility identified in the report, however, are intended for informational purposes only and should not be construed as OSC opining as to the legality of the City's compliance with ADA requirements.
- We interviewed City staff and reviewed Council meeting minutes to gain an understanding of accessibility for the City's programs and services.
- We reviewed accessibility to programs and services provided at City facilities, excluding recreational programs and services provided by third parties. We used the ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities, which uses the 2010 ADA Standards, as a tool to review accessibility at the facilities. We reviewed the accessibility components applicable at each sampled facility including accessible parking, approaches to buildings, building entrances, accessibility within buildings including to meeting rooms, offices providing programs and services, restrooms, and water fountains.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

Unless otherwise indicated in this report, samples for testing were selected based on professional judgment, as it was not the intent to project the results onto the entire population. Where applicable, information is presented concerning the value and/or size of the relevant population and the sample selected for examination.

The Council has the responsibility to initiate corrective action. A written corrective action plan (CAP) that addresses the findings and recommendations in this report should be prepared and provided to our office within 90 days, pursuant to Section 35 of General Municipal Law. For more information on preparing and filing your CAP, please refer to our brochure, *Responding to an OSC Audit Report*, which you received with the draft audit report. We encourage the Council to make the CAP available for public review in the City Clerk's office.

Appendix D: Resources and Services

Regional Office Directory

www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/pdf/regional-directory.pdf

Cost-Saving Ideas – Resources, advice and assistance on cost-saving ideas

www.osc.ny.gov/local-government/publications

Fiscal Stress Monitoring – Resources for local government officials experiencing fiscal problems

www.osc.ny.gov/local-government/fiscal-monitoring

Local Government Management Guides – Series of publications that include technical information and suggested practices for local government management

www.osc.ny.gov/local-government/publications

Planning and Budgeting Guides – Resources for developing multiyear financial, capital, strategic and other plans

www.osc.ny.gov/local-government/resources/planning-resources

Protecting Sensitive Data and Other Local Government Assets – A non-technical cybersecurity guide for local government leaders

www.osc.ny.gov/files/local-government/publications/pdf/cyber-security-guide.pdf

Required Reporting – Information and resources for reports and forms that are filed with the Office of the State Comptroller

www.osc.ny.gov/local-government/required-reporting

Research Reports/Publications – Reports on major policy issues facing local governments and State policy-makers

www.osc.ny.gov/local-government/publications

Training – Resources for local government officials on in-person and online training opportunities on a wide range of topics

www.osc.ny.gov/local-government/academy

Contact

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<https://www.osc.ny.gov/local-government>

Local Government and School Accountability Help Line: (866) 321-8503

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