THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

REPORT NO. 1
OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONER OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND HOUSING

For Consideration by
The Council of The Regional Municipality of York
on February 20, 2003

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YORK REGION ACCESSIBILITY PLAN POLICY FRAMEWORK

1. RECOMMENDATIONS
It is recommended that:
1. The Interim Accessibility Advisory Committee (IAAC) and Regional Council endorse the Policy Framework for the York Region Accessibility Plan, including the 12 recommendations contained within the Framework (see Attachment 1).

2. The 2003 workplan for the development of the York Region Accessibility Plan be approved.

3. The Accessibility Plan Policy Framework be presented to the newly appointed York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee as part of their orientation in March 2003.

4. This report be circulated to the nine area municipalities for their information.

2. PURPOSE
The purpose of this report is to present a Policy Framework to be used in implementing the requirements of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA), as outlined in Attachment 1. This report presents the components and recommendations included in the Framework.

A workplan for establishing the Region’s first Accessibility Plan in 2003 is included, which includes the reporting process for presenting the draft Plan to the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee through to the final approvals of the Plan by the
Community Services and Housing Committee and Regional Council. As required by the ODA, the first Plan is due no later than September 30, 2003.

3. **BACKGROUND**

On February 4, 2003, the Interim Accessibility Advisory Committee directed staff to include a reference in this report and in the Policy Framework that clarifies that York Region Transit is being examined as part of the Accessibility Plan.

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)* was proclaimed on September 30, 2002. Its intent is to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities through the identification, removal and prevention of physical and other barriers. On September 19, 2002, Regional Council established an Interim Accessibility Advisory Committee of three members of Council to develop a Terms of Reference and recruitment strategy for the permanent York Region AAC.

On December 19, 2002, Regional Council approved the final Terms of Reference for the permanent York Region AAC and a recruitment/outreach strategy to establish the York Region AAC by early 2003. Recruitment activities got underway in January 2003 and included the placement of ads in the Metroland York Region community newspapers on January 2 and 9, 2003. Application packages were made available on the Region’s web site, at the information kiosks and distributed to organizations in York Region that represent or provide services to persons with disabilities, local hospitals, health groups, school boards, Housing York properties, area municipalities, interfaith groups and service clubs. On January 7, 2003, the Interim AAC Chair, Regional Councillor Humeniuk, made a well-received appearance on the local Roger’s program *Insights* to promote the Region’s recruitment efforts.

Following the completion of the recruitment process, the Interim AAC will be making recommendations for final appointments to the permanent York Region AAC to Regional Council in March 2003.

Community Services and Housing staff, supported by the ODA Staff Committee, have proceeded with the development of an Accessibility Plan Policy Framework.

4. **ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

The Province’s deadline for all municipalities to have their first Council approved, publicly available Accessibility Plan is September 30, 2003. Clearly the collaboration of all York Region Departments is crucial. Equally important is ensuring that a common vision and direction for accessibility planning which meets the requirements of the ODA and Council’s expectations exists.

The proposed Accessibility Plan Policy Framework was created to:
• outline how York Region will continue to promote and enhance accessibility through the development of its annual accessibility plans and;
• propose a clear policy direction for individual Department contributions to the Region’s accessibility planning process.

4.1 Environmental Scan
All nine area municipalities have established their Accessibility Advisory Committees and some have had their initial meetings. The Ministry of Citizenship has attended some of these meetings to provide an overview of the ODA requirements. In terms of their approaches for developing their Accessibility Plans, many of the area municipalities are in the preliminary stages and have not yet developed their planning frameworks. Some are taking this time to orient their AACs to local facilities.

In the neighbouring Regions of Durham and Halton, AACs have been established and orientation meetings have been held. Both are intending to hire consultants to assist them with the development of their Plans. Peel Region is currently recruiting for their AAC and aiming to develop their Accessibility Plan between March and July 2003, with final Council approval of their Plan in August 2003.

The City of Toronto’s AAC is well established and the City has made a commitment to become barrier-free by 2008. The City’s AAC has provided advice on several initiatives.

As a result of the work done by York Regional Council through the IAAC to implement the ODA in the Region and the work already underway to implement Vision 2026, this Region is well positioned to meet the requirements of the ODA.

4.2 Accessibility Plan Policy Framework Components
The Region has already begun to eliminate barriers in different ways. Vision 2026 recognizes the importance of building accessible communities. Many of the Region’s large corporate initiatives reiterate this commitment. Through accessibility planning, the Region will have the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at its by-laws, services, policies, procedures, practices and programs to enhance accessibility.

The proposed Accessibility Plan Policy Framework builds on York Region’s policy response to the ODA so far, as well as Council’s general directions in this area. By outlining a policy direction and providing practical tools that operationalize the Policy Framework, the Region is positioned to move strategically to identify, remove and prevent barriers that may exist in its programs and services.

Each of the recommendations and the rationale included in the Policy Framework are outlined below.
4.2.1 Overall Policy Direction

Recommendation #1:
It is recommended that all York Region Accessibility Plans strive to reflect a balance of stakeholder priorities and the Region’s ability to achieve changes over time, within Regional priorities and budgeted resources.

Rationale:
The Province did not provide municipalities with funds to implement the ODA. Achieving change over time enables the Region to act within existing Regional priorities and budgets. By adopting this phased-in approach, the Region can also manage the identification, removal and prevention of barriers in a consistent manner that is aligned with the ongoing work of achieving the objectives within Vision 2026 and the Region’s Official Plan. This is also consistent with the direction from the Province that while no new barriers are to be created, existing barriers can be removed over time.

4.2.2 Approach and Content of the 2003 Accessibility Plan

Recommendation #2:
It is recommended that the first Accessibility Plan developed by the Region in 2003 provide a baseline to establish where the Region is in the accessibility process. Specifically, the first Plan could include:
- achievements to date in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers,
- a description of what barriers have been identified and how they were identified, and
- a description of barriers to be removed and/or prevented.

Recommendation #3:
It is recommended that in the first year of accessibility planning, Departments focus primarily on establishing barrier identification processes. These processes would then be used by Departments to identify barriers to accessibility that may exist within their core businesses. Given the wide range of bylaws, services, policies, procedures, practices and programs that exist within Departments, the process for barrier identification should be flexible enough to meet the unique needs of each Department.

Rationale:
This approach means that the Region’s first Plan may identify and assess specific barriers within the Region’s bylaws, services, policies, procedures, practices and programs, as well as identify any existing gaps. The result is that the Region may strategically plan the ways and approaches to be taken to address these barriers in successive plans.

4.2.3 Content of the Accessibility Plan
York Region’s Plan must address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to all types of disabilities in its programs and services including York Region Transit. In order to achieve this, the following recommendations are made.
**Recommendation #4:**
- That the content of all Plans be comprehensive and reflect a range of projects and initiatives from across the Region that may address barriers affecting different types of disabilities.

**Recommendation #5:**
- That each item brought forward for inclusion in all Plans falls under one or more of the following categories: identification, removal and/or prevention of barriers.

**Recommendation #6:**
- That in the first Plan, the Region’s procurement practices, as outlined under the ODA, be examined as part of the Plan with a focus on procurement processes and evaluation.

**Recommendation #7:**
- That in the first Plan, the Region’s building requirements, as outlined in the ODA, be examined as part of the Plan.

**Rationale:**
This approach provides for a comprehensive and strategic plan for York Region to enhance accessibility in a variety of areas.

### 4.2.4. Integration of Accessibility Planning with the Business Planning Cycle

**Recommendation #8:**
It is recommended that the first Plan cover the time period from October 2003 until December 31, 2004 and outline all of the measures being taken by the Region during this 15-month period.

**Rationale:**
This enables the first Plan to:
- include the strategic planning necessary to establish the accessibility planning process;
- be expanded to be forward-looking in order to be able to recommend the next steps to be taken;
- enable the beginning of an annual cycle of accessibility planning in York Region that will be aligned with the Region’s business planning cycle;
- assist in establishing performance measures to determine the extent to which barriers have been removed or prevented for each of the items in the Accessibility Plan.

**Recommendation #9:**
It is recommended that the Region’s second Accessibility Plan (for implementation in 2005) be developed in coordination with the business planning cycle for 2005.
Rationale:
This would complete the integration of accessibility planning with the Region’s business planning cycle. This more logical manner of operating allows for more realistic planning. As well, the Province has stated that alignment of the Plan with normal municipal business practices is encouraged. However, the mandated timelines do not allow for this. The second Plan would be presented to Council before December 31, 2004 and be valid from January 1, 2005 until December 31, 2005. Implementation of activities with financial implications would be subject to approval of the Region’s 2005 budget.

Recommendation #10:
It is recommended that staff be directed to communicate with the Province regarding recommendations 8 and 9 to ensure compliance with the requirements under the ODA. Direction from the Province has not been clear beyond the initial requirement to have the first Plan made public by September 30, 2003.

4.2.5 Regional Tools for Plan Development

Recommendation 11:
It is recommended that Corporate and Departmental tools (included as appendices in Attachment 1) be included as part of this Framework.

Rationale:
These tools are intended to support the uniform implementation of York Region’s policy direction. The tools will also assist each Department in developing an Accessibility Plan that is strategic, realistic, addresses specific business and fiscal planning practices, and connects accessibility planning to other activities within the Region.

4.2.6 Evaluation and Review

Recommendation 12:
It is recommended that the first year of accessibility planning include development of appropriate evaluation methodology for the Region’s Accessibility Plan, which could be incorporated into the Vision 2026 Annual Report.

4.3 Reporting Process and Consultation on the Accessibility Plan
Each Regional Department, supported by their ODA Staff Committee representative(s), will be responsible for the preparation of Departmental accessibility plans, which will be combined to form the region-wide Accessibility Plan. The Region’s Plan will be presented to the York Region AAC, the Community Services and Housing Committee and Regional Council. The ODA requires that the York Region AAC provide their advice on the Plan prior to final approval by Committee and Regional Council.

The proposed Framework includes a detailed description of the roles of the many groups and individuals involved in the development of the Plan. Also included is a process for presenting drafts of the Region’s Accessibility Plan to the York Region AAC in order to obtain their feedback in advance of the Plan’s review by the Community Services and Housing Committee and Regional Council.
The proposed 2003 Workplan also outlines the key milestones that would be involved in this process. In addition to the feedback received by the York Region AAC, last year Council directed that the Region host a public forum in the Spring to solicit further input from disability organizations, other key stakeholders and the general public.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Prior to the enactment of the ODA, the Region through Vision 2026 and through a number of corporate initiatives had already made a commitment to build more accessible communities. Also, many of the Region’s programs, services and policies have explicitly included components to enhance the availability of programs and services to residents. By making Regional services and programs more accessible and available to York Region residents, the Region will realize many of the goals and actions of Vision 2026.

A Regional Accessibility Plan will help focus York Region’s efforts in an even more strategic manner. The Framework was built on Vision 2026, which provides the broader framework from which the Region’s Accessibility Plan will be developed.

4.5 Next Steps

Review and approval of the Accessibility Policy Framework by Interim AAC  
February 4, 2003

Council approval of Accessibility Policy Framework  
February 20, 2003

Development of Draft York Region Accessibility Plan  
February 2003 – April 2003

Council appointment of York Region AAC Members  
March 27, 2003

Presentation of Draft York Region Accessibility Plan to the York Region AAC  
April 10, 2003

Presentation of Minutes from AAC meeting; Draft Plan and Proposed Public Consultation to Community Services and Housing Committee and Regional Council  
May, 2003

Public Consultations on Draft Plan  
June 2003

Draft Final Plan  
July 2003

Presentation of Final Plan to AAC  
August 2003

Review and approval of Final Plan by Community Services and Housing Committee and Regional Council  
September 2003
5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
All costs associated with the implementation of the ODA and the preparation of the 2003 York Region Accessibility Plan are included in the 2003 proposed Budget.

Alignment of the 2003 Plan with the Region’s business planning and budget process will mean that all implementation activities which have a budgetary impact will be subject to Council approval of the 2004 budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT
All nine area municipalities have established their local AACs and are now at the plan preparation stage. This provides an opportunity for Regional staff to meet with area municipal staff to discuss accessibility planning approaches. Regional staff will be inviting staff representatives from the area municipalities, school boards and hospitals to a meeting in February 2003 to exchange information and discuss the feasibility of establishing a staff level reference group. It is anticipated that this initial meeting will focus on the Accessibility Advisory Committees and on accessibility plan preparations.

7. CONCLUSION
The York Region Accessibility Plan Policy Framework provides the Region with a clear vision and policy direction for the development of the Region’s Accessibility Plans. This phased-in approach also enables the York Region AAC and other members of the community through public consultation to take an active part in this process. As a result, the Region’s Plans will be based on a strategic and balanced approach to identifying, removing and preventing barriers over time.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachment referred to in the foregoing is included with this report and is also on file in the Office of the Regional Clerk.)

Respectfully submitted,

February 20, 2003
Newmarket, Ontario

Joann Simmons
Commissioner of Community Services

(Report No. 1 of the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting on February 20, 2003.)