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PROGRESS REPORT ON ACCESSING YORK: YORK REGION'S 2010 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN AND THE APPLICATION OF THE ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated January 27, 2011, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee and The Regional Municipality of York Police Services Board for their information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Regional Council with an update on the implementation of *Accessing York: York Region's 2010 Accessibility Plan* as required under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*. This report also provides an update on the Region's application of the Accessible Customer Service Policy to business operations. The policy is a requirement of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region must implement the requirements of two provincial accessibility statutes

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) requires municipalities, including York Region, to prepare annual accessibility plans that address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities in their municipal bylaws, policies, practices, programs, services and facilities. The ODA also requires that the accessibility plan be developed in consultation with people with disabilities and made available to the public. York Region complies with this regulation by instituting and working through the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC). The ODA applies only to the Ontario Public Service and the broader public sector, including municipalities.

York Region has worked with the YRAAC to develop and implement seven accessibility plans.

The YRAAC advises Regional Council and York Regional Police how to make it easier for people with disabilities to use the Region's programs and services. The YRAAC is comprised of citizen members from across the Region, three members of Regional Council and the Regional Chairman as an ex-officio member. As required by the legislation, the majority of members on the YRAAC are people with disabilities.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) came into effect on June 13, 2005, with the goal to make Ontario fully accessible by 2025. This goal will be achieved through the development, implementation and enforcement of provincially set accessibility standards relating to customer service, transportation, information and communications, employment and the built environment. Both public and private sector organizations will be required to implement these standards in phases.

The AODA will eventually replace the ODA; however, until the Province repeals the ODA, all public sector organizations, including York Region, must continue to implement both Acts simultaneously.

Accessibility Standard for Customer Service Regulation was the first to become law under the AODA

The following table outlines the status of the development of the accessibility regulations under the AODA:

Table 1
Status of the Accessibility Standards under the AODA

AODA Standard	Purpose	Status
Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation (429/07)	This was the first AODA standard to become law and came into effect January 1, 2008. Its purpose is to make the customer service operations of organizations accessible for people with disabilities.	York Region achieved compliance by January 1, 2010, as required by law. An Accessibility Report was submitted to the Province by March 31, 2010.
Proposed Integrated Accessibility Regulation	In May 2010, the Province announced that the Information and Communications, Employment and Transportation Standards would be integrated into one regulation.	Currently with the Minister of Community and Social Services for consideration as law.

AODA Standard	Purpose	Status
	These standards will make the ways information is sent and received, and employment and transportation services more accessible to people with disabilities.	
Proposed Accessible Built Environment Standard	The purpose of this standard is to prevent and remove barriers in the built environment.	Currently with the Minister of Community and Social Services for consideration as law.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Progress report on *Accessing York: York Region's 2010 Accessibility Plan*

On May 20, 2010, Regional Council approved *Accessing York: York Region's 2010 Accessibility Plan* through the adoption of Clause No. 1 of Report No. 4 of the Community and Health Services Committee.

The Accessibility Plan describes how individual departments are working together to identify, remove and prevent barriers in their core businesses. The following provides a progress summary of the initiatives included in *Accessing York: York Region's 2010 Accessibility Plan* since its release in May 2010.

The 2010 Accessibility Plan now includes 94 initiatives aimed at removing and preventing barriers

Accessing York: York Region's 2010 Accessibility Plan originally contained a total of 71 accessibility initiatives. Since its approval in May 2010, some departments have identified and addressed 23 additional accessibility initiatives, increasing the number of initiatives in 2010 to a new total of 94.

Of the 94 initiatives included in the plan, 23 are related to barrier identification and 71 are aimed at removing and preventing barriers to Regional programs and services, including York Regional Police. Of these, 54 percent are completed, 14 per cent are underway and 32 per cent are planned.

Since the approval of the Plan in May 2010, York Region has accomplished and achieved some important milestones. For example:

- The Region received a 'Celebrating Accessibility Champion Award' from the Canadian Hearing Society for its work with the society to eliminate barriers for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- In September 2010, the first accessible trail in York Region was launched in the Hollidge Tract in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, increasing the accessibility of the forest trail for people with all disability types.

Some of the new initiatives now in the 2010 Plan include:

- Accessibility was enhanced at York Region's social housing building located at 325 Elm Road in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville by conducting bathroom upgrades such as raised toilets, grab bars and improved lighting.
- Public Health will be including a TTY number in all outgoing correspondence and promotional information regarding infectious diseases, immunization and sexual health.
- York Region Transit added a closed captioned and descriptive video component to the travel training video, enhancing accessibility for people with all disability types.

The York Regional Police (YRP) has also embarked on a number of new initiatives including:

- Researching the possibility of having portable TTY devices available for use at district locations by people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- Putting plans in place to install an elevator at YRP's headquarters with brighter lighting, a hands free phone and Elevoice, a voice activated floor announcement system.
- Expanding their online electronic resource library to include materials on physical disabilities, mental illness and learning disabilities.
- Inviting the Canadian Hearing Society, the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region and York Support Services Network to assist in the development of accessibility related goals and initiatives in their business planning process.

YRAAC provides valuable input and advice through the accessibility planning process

The YRAAC is an important part of the Region's process for removing barriers for people with disabilities. The term for the 2006-2010 YRAAC ended in November 2010 concurrent with the term of Regional Council.

Recruitment for the 2011-2014 York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee is underway. The YRAAC must consist of seven to fifteen members from across the Region, with the majority of members being persons with disabilities, up to three members of Regional Council, and the Regional Chair as ex-officio.

In 2010, the YRAAC continued to be very involved in our accessibility planning activities and provided valuable feedback and input at various focus groups. The YRAAC:

- Provided advice on the development of *Accessing York: York Region's 2010 Accessibility Plan*.
- Recommended that Regional Council recognize National Access Awareness Week, which was endorsed by Council in April 2010. Presented at a corporate Know York Session during that week.
- Participated in YRP's "Community Support and Victim's Assistance" Roundtable Session, providing valuable feedback on the importance of developing and implementing accessible safety mechanisms for people with disabilities who require assistance resulting from a crime.
- Participated in PRESTO's Accessibility Focus group, presenting feedback on the accessibility challenges of the smartcard fare payment machine. Their feedback was forwarded to Metrolinx and the Transportation Services Committee.
- Participated on the York Region Forest Trail Accessibility Sub-Committee and the subsequent launch of the trail.

Region also conducts an accessible customer service progress report

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation under the AODA requires that organizations have policies, practices and procedures that govern service to people with disabilities. York Region's Accessible Customer Service Policy was approved through the adoption of Clause No. 5 of Report No. 3 of the Community and Health Services Committee at the Regional Council meeting of November 19, 2009.

At that time, Regional Council, through the YRAAC AODA Subcommittee, requested a progress report on the application of the Accessible Customer Service Policy to departmental operations. Though not a legislated requirement of the AODA, this internal review ensures that the policy remains active and promotes ongoing compliance with the regulation and high standards of accessible customer service.

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation prescribes what the policy must encompass. As legislated, the policy includes corporate direction on:

- The use of assistive devices, service animals and support people by people with disabilities when accessing Regional programs and services.
- Procedures to notify the public of temporary disruptions to services or facilities.
- The process for receiving and responding to feedback about services to people with disabilities.
- The provision of accessible customer service training.
- The availability of documents related to the Region's customer service regulatory activities in alternate formats (e.g. copies of the policy or training materials.)

In October 2010, each department completed a survey indicating their progress in incorporating the requirements of the policy into their distinctive business operations.

Progress report indicates opportunity to build on existing successful accessible customer service practices

The Region is committed to offering excellent accessible customer service and has achieved compliance with the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation. All departments confirmed that they are meeting or exceeding the requirements of the policy. Some program areas identified opportunities to further build on the success of practices and procedures already in operation.

Opportunities identified by specific departments include:

- Documenting the process for customers with disabilities to have safe and easy access to Region-owned assistive devices (such as a wheelchair) in specific offices and facilities.
- Confirming the process to provide prompt notice when particular facilities or services used by customers with disabilities are temporarily disrupted.
- Documenting an existing departmental procedure to determine when a support person is required to accompany a person with a disability to protect everyone's health and safety.
- Standardizing the process for a specific department to collect and respond to feedback from the public about the department's service to people with disabilities.
- Confirming a particular department's procedure to identify and track the training of volunteers in accessible customer service.

These opportunities to enhance the Region's already-high standards of accessible customer service will be developed in 2011 in an effort to continue to meet the requirements of the policy and the regulation.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no provincial funding to support the implementation of the ODA and AODA

There are no financial implications associated with this report. Ongoing costs to administer the ODA and AODA implementation were approved as part of the 2010 Business Plan and Budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region continues to share information and work with the local municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees on the ODA and the AODA.

7. CONCLUSION

In 2010, much progress has been made to make York Region more inviting and more inclusive of people with disabilities. Integration of accessibility into business practices and processes is now more common place across all departments.

The Region continues to implement both the ODA and AODA simultaneously; plans have begun for the 2011/12 Accessibility Plan and we continue to monitor the AODA standards that are soon to be released.

Building on the solid foundation already laid by the accomplishments achieved in our accessibility plans, and compliance with the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation, York Region will be in a good position to meet the requirements of the other standards under the AODA, although funding from the Province still remains a concern for the municipal sector.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch at Extension 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.