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REMOVING BARRIERS: YORK REGION'S 2006 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends that:

- 1. The presentation by Don Gordon, General Manager, Transit, Transportation and Works Department, Wilf Morley Chair, Accessibility Advisory Committee and Lisa Gonsalves, Senior Program Manager, ODA, Community Services and Housing Department regarding 'Removing Barriers: York Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan' be received.**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report, February 28, 2006, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services be adopted.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. *Removing Barriers: York Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan* be approved as included in *Attachment 1*.
2. The summary chart of the Accessibility Advisory Committee's questions and feedback and York Region staff recommendations and responses regarding the 2006 Departmental Accessibility Plans be approved as included in *Attachment 2*.
3. The release strategy to make the 2006 Accessibility Plan publicly available be approved.
4. The report and the final printed version of *Removing Barriers* be shared with the area municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees, members of the Municipal Staff Reference Group, the Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC) and the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to meet the legislated annual reporting requirements of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)* by presenting the final version of *Removing Barriers: York Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan* (see *Attachment 1*), including the advice and feedback received from the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), (see *Attachment 2*). As well, this report and the 2006 Plan highlight the results of the implementation of the Region's 2005 Accessibility Plan. Finally, this report also presents the release strategy for making the 2006 Accessibility Plan available to the public.

3. BACKGROUND

The *ODA* includes specific requirements for all municipalities, including York Region. One requirement is the development of an annual accessibility plan. Under the *ODA*, the annual accessibility plan must address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities in municipal by-laws, policies, practices, programs, services and facilities. The *ODA* also requires that the accessibility plan is developed in consultation with persons with disabilities and made available to the public. The Region's accessibility planning process, which was adopted by Regional Council in February 2003, is an extension of this work and enables the Region to incorporate all of its different accessibility-related initiatives into one central document. The Region has developed and implemented two accessibility plans under the *ODA*.

York Region's First Annual Accessibility Plan: *Understanding Barriers* successfully met and exceeded the requirements and obligations under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* by investigating and addressing existing barriers to facilities, policies, programs and services within the Region. York Region was recognized as a leader in *ODA* implementation for both its "made in York Region" accessibility planning process as well as for the comprehensive scope and content included in this first Accessibility Plan. This first plan laid the foundation for future accessibility plans.

Moving Forward: York Region's Second Annual Accessibility Plan was approved by Regional Council on March 31, 2005. The Plan was widely distributed across the Region and also made available on the Region's website. The second plan included initiatives from all regional departments, including York Regional Police.

Council reviewed and received a mid-year progress report on the initiatives contained in *Moving Forward* on October 19, 2005.

3.1 York Region's Environics Survey

Accessibility for persons with disabilities matters deeply and is a key spending priority for York Region's residents. This interest is reflected in York Region's Environics Survey. In 2005, the survey reported a resounding 97% majority of residents who said they felt it was important for programs, services and facilities in York Region to be fully accessible to residents with disabilities. Also in the 2005 survey, 53% of residents stated that even if it would increase their costs they wanted increased spending on services for persons with disabilities. This was only third to public health (62%) and roads (57%) and came out ahead of increased spending on water quality, public transit, services for seniors, child care, and even police and ambulance services. (Source: Environics Survey, York Region Summary, fall 2005.) Making regional services fully accessible to all, including residents with disabilities, along with the high priority placed on increased spending on services to persons with disabilities was also reflected in the 2004 survey.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

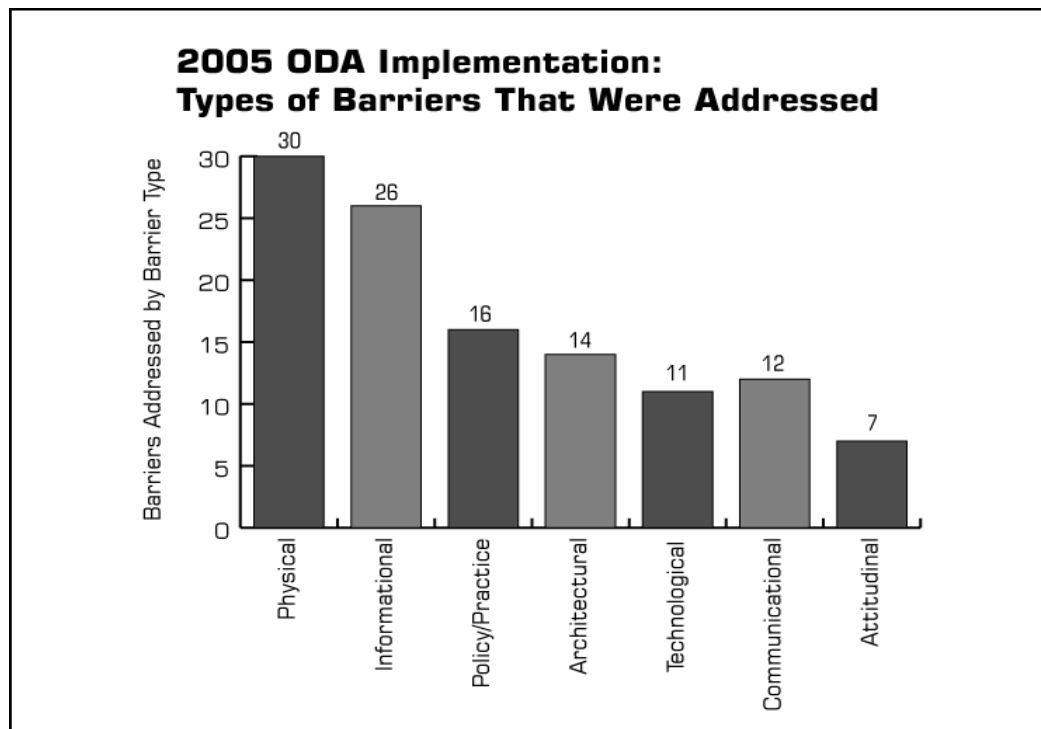
York Region's accessibility plans have been well received by the community and are clearly making a difference for people with disabilities, who use regional programs and services.

4.1 Highlights of Accessibility Achievements Made in the 2005 Plan

The majority of initiatives in the Region's 2005 Plan are completed. Other initiatives are underway and completion is expected in early 2006. Of the 89 initiatives included in the 2005 Accessibility Plan, 63% (56) are complete and 37% (33) are planned or underway.

In 2005, a total of 116 barriers were identified. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the Region continued to make progress in removing both invisible barriers and the more visible, physical barriers.

Figure 1



SOURCE: 2005 Progress Report Moving Forward

Some examples of the barriers removed in 2005 included:

- To help persons with disabilities live independently, the Community Services and Housing Department began construction of an accessible transitional housing unit in a housing project in Sutton.
- In order to make regional services more accessible, Corporate Communications improved and maintained web access for persons with visual impairments and committed to continually reviewing the web to identify any potential barriers.
- Property Services conducted inspections of leased facilities to identify barriers and investigate opportunities for improvements with landlords. A flooring study was completed in the Administrative Centre to allow for safer and easier travel throughout the building.
- Human Resource Services moved the job posting board from inside the Human Resource Services Division to the outer hallway and self-serve bins were made to be wheelchair accessible.
- The Finance Department will make the procurement process available in Braille format upon request.
- In an effort to help seniors live independently, the Health Services Department submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) for funding to provide a Supportive Housing Program for seniors and persons with physical disabilities to reside in a new development project in Vaughan; and in order to make it easier to move around the Region, the drop-off area at Maple Health Centre was improved with designated signage.
- Planning and Development Services Department staff made it easier to participate in regional government by making their website more accessible for persons with visual impairments and made it easier to move around the region by including wheelchair accessibility information in the 2005 Visitor's Guide.
- To make regional services more accessible and to make it easier to move around the Region, Transportation and Works conducted an overall review of transit terminals and all York Region Transit (YRT), GO and Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) terminals were deemed accessible. All new buses purchased since 2004 have one rearward-facing and one forward-facing mobility aid position for those persons with upper body mobility problems. Twenty-nine pedestrian countdown signals were installed at intersections across the region, and 278 street signs were replaced with larger font sizes.

The initiatives in the 2005 plan clearly demonstrate that York Region is committed to enhancing accessibility to its programs and services to support the key areas that impact on the lives of people with disabilities.

4.2 Developing *Removing Barriers: York Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan*

The Region's Accessibility Plans are developed by the ODA Staff Committee. This interdepartmental committee meets formally about once every quarter and works to ensure that their ODA commitments are planned and implemented successfully within the various Divisions of their Departments. Membership includes:

- Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Chair (Community Services and Housing)
- Jeffrey Abrams (Corporate Services)
- Tom Appleby (Finance)
- Lina Bigioni (Regional Chair's Office)
- Diane Bladec-Willett (Health Services)
- Michelle Canale (Community Services and Housing)
- Bev Cassidy-Moffatt (Corporate Services)
- Barry Crowe (Corporate Services)
- Alan Davidson (Finance)
- Lois Davies (Community Services and Housing)
- Brian Drew (Transportation and Works)
- Tony Fernandes (Health Services)
- Marc Gallant (Office of the Chief Administrative Officer)
- Lisa Gonsalves (Community Services and Housing)
- Don Gordon (Transportation and Works)
- Penny Hubbert (Health Services)
- Joy Hulton (Corporate Services)
- John Jacob (Corporate Services)
- Wendy Kirkos (Health Services)
- Irene McNeil (Transportation and Works)
- Leonard Ng (Transportation and Works)
- Sylvia Patterson (Community Services and Housing)
- Craig Piper (Community Services and Housing)
- Val Sequeira (Finance)
- Susan Taylor (Planning and Development Services)
- Darwin Trojan (York Regional Police)
- Gabe Tropea (Community Services and Housing) and
- Sandra Vessel (Health Services)

The development of the Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan, as directed by Regional Council, has been integrated into the Region's 2006 business and planning process. Each regional department, including York Regional Police, developed a departmental accessibility plan in consultation with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), which outlines the initiatives that the department would take in 2006

to identify, remove and prevent barriers in its core businesses. In addition, each department also reported back on initiatives undertaken in 2005 that resulted in enhanced accessibility for people with disabilities.

During 2006, regional departments will continue to find ways to identify, remove and prevent barriers.

4.2.1 Ongoing Participation by the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC)

In keeping with its legislated mandate, the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee continues to play a key role in the development and implementation of the Region's Accessibility Plans. The YRAAC is comprised of nine citizen members and three members of Regional Council, including: Wilf Morley (Chair), Trish Robichaud (Vice-Chair), Regional Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, Regional Councillor Danny Wheeler, Sharon Abrahams, Zahra Brown, Barbara Caiger, Kirsten Hill, Diane Humeniuk, Robert Hunn, Mary Ann Proulx, and Regional Chair Bill Fisch, ex-officio.

Many initiatives in the 2005 Plan required the YRAAC's direct input. For example, the YRAAC:

- Provided tips for the special edition of the "Here to Serve You" customer service newsletter for providing customer service for persons with disabilities.
- Provided advice to the York Regional Police on accessibility to the York Region Community Safety Village.
- Provided regular feedback on York Region Transit's Service Planning initiatives.
- Recommended that Regional Council recognize National Accessibility Awareness Week, which was subsequently endorsed by Regional Council in May 2005.
- The YRAAC Chair represented the YRAAC at the Access Ontario Conference in Burlington in June, 2005.
- Participated in a workshop for all Accessibility Advisory Committees in York Region hosted by the Town of Newmarket Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Participated in a breakfast meeting hosted by East Gwillimbury Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Participated in a community meeting hosted by the Town of Uxbridge Accessibility Advisory Committee.

York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee members have reviewed and endorsed the initiatives planned for 2006 and will continue to be key partners in the implementation of *Removing Barriers: York Region's 2006 Plan*. Regional staff presented department accessibility plans to the YRAAC at two meetings held in November 2005. This gave YRAAC members an opportunity to provide their comments and input into the Region's Plan. The YRAAC's advice on individual initiatives has been incorporated in the final version of the plan. *Attachment 2* to this report includes the feedback and advice of the YRAAC on the 2006 draft plan and corresponding staff recommendations and responses.

4.2.2. Planned Accessibility Advisory Committee Activities for 2006

Throughout 2006, the YRAAC will continue to participate in a number of events and implementation activities related to the 2006 Plan, including:

- Participation in several workshops planned for this year, such as a workshop on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)* and a workshop hosted by the Ontario Historical Society in March 2006.
- Participation in many implementation activities such as participating on a focus group to discuss Accessibility to Private Drinking Well Systems Test and Retrieval Services and the York Region Transit Travel Training Program.

4.2.3 Themes included in *Removing Barriers: York Region's 2006 Annual Accessibility Plan*

The primary purpose of the Region's annual accessibility plan is to present York Region residents with a comprehensive description of the initiatives that will be undertaken by individual regional departments in a coordinated way. As in *Moving Forward: York Region's Second Accessibility Plan*, each departmental initiative to identify, remove and prevent barriers in 2006 has been grouped under five key themes that bring together different aspects of the Region's programs and services into broader areas of action. The themes reflect feedback from the YRAAC and the public on the key regional services and program areas that impact on the lives of people with disabilities.

The themes are:

- Helping People Live Independently
- Making it Easier to Move Around
- Making Regional Services More Accessible
- Making it Easier to Participate in Regional Government
- Changing Attitudes and Raising Awareness

4.2.4 Highlights of the 2006 Plan – Removing Barriers

The 2006 Plan continues to find and remove barriers in all regional programs and services to enhance accessibility and builds on the foundation set in past plans. As the emphasis in the 2005 plan was to focus on taking action and addressing the various types of barriers, this year's plan will continue to remove these barriers.

The 2006 Plan includes a total of 71 accessibility planning initiatives (26 Barriers Identified and 45 Barriers to be Addressed) from across all regional departments, including the York Regional Police. Some initiatives in the 2006 Plan are:

- The Community Services and Housing Department will develop affordable accessible rental housing for persons with disabilities and hearing impairments through the development of 50 new affordable units for non-seniors in the Town of Newmarket and the Social Assistance Division will incorporate recommendations collected from a focus group to address identified barriers in the Ontario Works appeal process.

- Corporate Communications will open a direct channel to York Region information and services to persons with visual impairments by conforming to the internet and intranet World Wide Web (WC3) criteria.
- Corporate Services will redesign the north entrance of the Administrative Centre to make it more accessible for persons with disabilities. Improvements will include curb cuts, replacement of the concrete surface path, new entry doors, and changes to the card reader, power assist button, lighting, and trash bin location.
- The Finance Department will, in consultation with other regional departments, implement where appropriate TTY technology to address accessibility concerns.
- Health Services will complete renovations of shower/bath areas in the client centres of the Alternative Community Living (ACL) program sites to ensure safer personal care and complete renovations of specified units in Hadley Grange to allow seniors and adults with physical disabilities to stay in the community and remain as independent as possible.
- Planning and Development Services will assist heritage sites, museums and historical societies in reducing barriers and increase accessibility by partnering with the Ontario Historical Society to host a workshop in early 2006 called *Making Ontario's Heritage Accessible*.
- Transportation and Works will implement a travel training program for Conventional Transit use for Mobility riders who can and will be able to use conventional services and will adjust the height of pedestrian push buttons on traffic signal poles to the standard height for accessibility. It is anticipated that pedestrian push buttons on all regional roads will be adjusted by 2009.
- York Regional Police will continue to make enhancements to accessibility in the Community Safety Village and further train staff in the use of TTY so that all call takers will have the ability to handle TTY calls.

4.4 Release Strategy for the 2006 Plan

The ODA specifically states that municipal annual accessibility plans must be made available to the public. Upon Council approval of *Removing Barriers: York Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan*, the plan will be posted on the Region's website.

It is recommended that copies of *Removing Barriers* also be sent to individuals, agencies and organizations that represent or provide services to people with disabilities in York Region, the nine area municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees, members of the Municipal Staff Reference Group, Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC) and the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario. The Plan will also be made

available in alternate formats (such as large print or on CD) upon request. The Plan will include contact information to enable people to submit comments throughout the year.

4.5 Parallel Implementation of the ODA and the AODA

Until all standards under the AODA are in place, the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* will remain in effect, and municipalities will continue to have planning obligations in accordance with that legislation, as well as increasing obligations under the AODA as they develop. The Province has indicated that the ODA will remain in effect for at least the next few years.

York Region, like other municipalities, will be impacted in several ways by the new requirements of the AODA and the requirement to implement both the AODA and ODA simultaneously. Regional Council received a report in October 2005 on the implications of this parallel implementation on the municipal sector. The Region's concerns have been shared with the Province, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and other stakeholders.

4.6 Relationship to Vision 2026

Regional Council has taken a strategic approach to accessibility planning that is grounded in Vision 2026. This approach has enabled the Region to focus its efforts in a way that supports and balances the needs of York Region residents.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Ongoing costs to administer and manage ODA implementation were approved as part of the 2006 Business Plan and Budget. Many initiatives included in the 2006 plan have been included as part of the existing base budgets of the various departments. However, several initiatives that are included in *Removing Barriers* are new initiatives that were approved as part of the 2006 Budget. The total estimated cost included for new initiatives is \$11 million. Of this, 90% are linked to the purchase of accessible buses for the conventional bus fleet and service improvements to the York Region Mobility Plus Services and the remaining 10% will be used for renovations and construction of accessible/modified housing units and supportive housing, regional facilities and other programs and services.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The YRAAC and regional staff have established strong relationships with their counterparts in the local municipalities. There have been several opportunities to share information and learn from one another.

This year, the Region is honouring its commitment to host a workshop to provide an opportunity for municipal staff, local Accessibility Advisory Committees, community

agencies and the general public to learn about the AODA standards development process, municipal obligations and the changing role of the AAC under the AODA. Local Accessibility Advisory Committees will also have the opportunity to network and share ideas and information.

7. CONCLUSION

As outlined in this report, the Region's third Accessibility Plan continues to creatively identify and remove barriers to its programs and services for persons with disabilities in York Region by building on past plans and looking forward with new ideas. Departments are creating new initiatives within their programs and services to remove barriers and enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities living in York Region. Attention to accessibility planning is a key component when reviewing, improving and developing regional programs and services. This inclusive method to planning has resulted in an increased level of participation of persons with disabilities in regional activities and decision-making.

When the new standards under the AODA are released, York Region will be well positioned to meet these new challenges through the achievements already made in the past three years under the ODA. Through the development of the first three Accessibility Plans, Regional Council, Regional staff, and members of the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee have acquired invaluable expertise and knowledge on barriers to accessibility and ways to remove them. These partnerships will continue to prove to be an invaluable resource while meeting the new challenges ahead.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments referred to in this Clause are attached to this report.)