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PROGRESS REPORT ON ACCESS-ABILITY: YORK REGION'S 2009 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN AND THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2010 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Community and Health Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated November 26, 2009, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the local municipalities and their local Accessibility Advisory Committees and to the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee for their information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Regional Council with a mid-year update on the implementation of *ACCESS-ability: York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan* as required under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA). This report also provides an update on *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) activities and information on the development framework for York Region's 2010 Accessibility Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

Accessibility planning is a key ODA requirement

Under the ODA, all municipalities in the Province, including York Region, are legislated to prepare an annual accessibility plan. This 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 is made available to the public.

Since the enactment of the ODA, York Region has worked with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) to develop six accessibility plans. The YRAAC is comprised of citizen members from across the Region and four members of Regional Council. As required by the legislation, the majority of members of the YRAAC have a disability.

Regional Council approved 2009 Accessibility Plan in May 2009

On May 21, 2009, Regional Council approved *ACCESS-ability: York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan* through the adoption of Clause No. 6 of Report No. 4 of the Community and Health Services Committee. The Accessibility Plan was prepared under the requirements of the ODA and was integrated with the Region's 2009 Business Plan and Budget process. The plan was widely distributed across the Region and was also made available on the Region's website, in large print and on CD.

The Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan includes initiatives from every Regional department, including York Regional Police, and encompasses every aspect of the Region's businesses, including its programs, services, regional facilities, policies, practices, by-laws and procedures.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Progress report on *ACCESS-ability: York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan*

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 *ACCESS-ability: York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan* since its release in May 2009.

The 2009 Accessibility Plan now includes 85 initiatives aimed at removing and preventing barriers

ACCESS-ability: York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan originally contained a total of 77 accessibility initiatives. Since its approval in May, some departments have begun work on additional accessibility initiatives at the Region, increasing the number of initiatives in 2009 to a new total of 85. These additional initiatives include:

- York Regional Police enhanced 911 reporting for people with hearing disabilities, made improvements to the Community Safety Village to make it more accessible for children with disabilities and enhanced opportunities for employment for people with disabilities.
- Corporate Services Department made YRAAC documents more accessible for YRAAC members with disabilities.
- Community and Health Services Department implemented professional standards to help Emergency Medical Services personnel serve people with mental illness.

The 85 initiatives include 29 related to barrier identification and 56 aimed at removing and preventing barriers from across all Regional departments, including York Regional

Police. Of these, 45 per cent are completed, 48 per cent are underway and 7 per cent are planned.

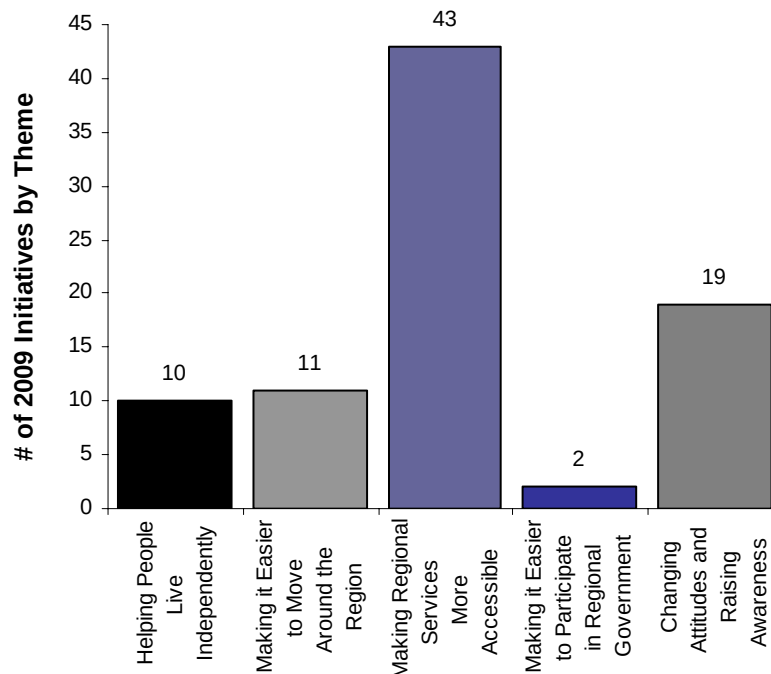
Initiatives are grouped into one of five key themes

As in previous years, each initiative put forward by departments was grouped into one of five key themes. The themes reflect the feedback of the YRAAC and the public consultation of the key areas that impact the lives of the people with disabilities in York Region. Consistently using these themes in the Region's accessibility planning allows us to measure and track over time the Region's progress in identifying and removing barriers. The themes are:

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

Figure 1 provides a breakdown by theme of all 2009 Regional initiatives.

Figure 1
York Region Continues to Make its Programs and Services Accessible in 2009



Themes

Examples of initiatives included in the 2009 Accessibility Plan that support these five key themes include:

- In support of the theme *helping people live independently*, the **Planning and Development Services Department** will include accessibility planning in new community developments so that everyone has reasonable access to places and services in their community.
- The **Transportation Services Department** is making it *easier for people with disabilities to move around the region* by introducing accessible buses on community bus routes that are specifically designed to accommodate more passengers with mobility devices to ride at the same time.
- To make *regional services more accessible for persons with disabilities*, the **Community and Health Services Department** designed Leeder Place Emergency Family Shelter to accommodate people with disabilities.
- The **Environmental Services Department** is *making it easier to participate in Regional Government* by increasing access to public consultations facilities using the Region's Accessible Meeting and Multiple Format guidelines to identify barriers.
- **All Departments** are *changing attitudes and raising awareness* by ensuring that internal policies, practices and procedures align with the AODA Accessibility Standards for Customer Service core principles of independence, integration and equal opportunity.

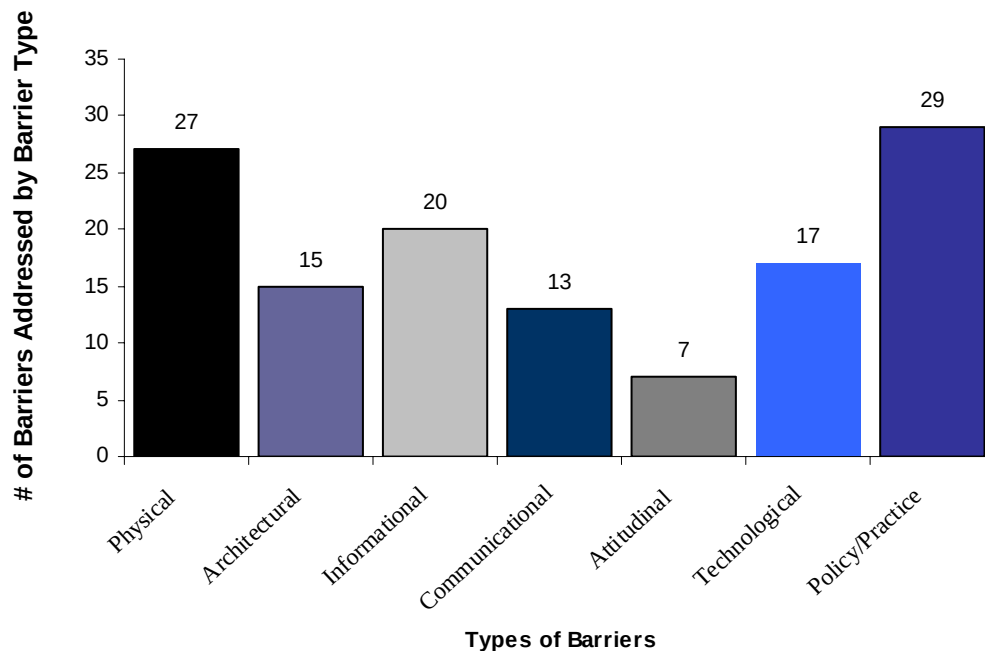
York Region continues to find ways to remove invisible barriers

One of the key goals of the ODA is to encourage people and organizations to go beyond addressing physical barriers to finding ways to remove invisible barriers that also impact on the lives of people with different disabilities. Invisible barriers can be communicational, attitudinal, informational or technological, as well as barriers contained within an organization's policies or practices.

In 2009, a total of 128 barriers to accessibility were identified and actions were taken to remove these barriers. Of these, 86 of the barriers identified were invisible barriers.

Figure 2 provides a breakdown by type of barrier addressed for all 2009 York Region initiatives.

Figure 2
York Region Continues to Address All Types of Barriers
Faced by Persons with Disabilities



Types of Barriers
Source: 2009 Progress Report Access-ability

Types of Barriers

Examples of how departments are addressing these different types of barriers in 2009 include:

- **Transportation Services Department** addressed *physical* barriers by increasing the number of accessible bus stops through the installation of new and replacement concrete pads.
- **Corporate Services Department** addressed *architectural* barriers by redesigning the ramp at the ceremonial entrance of the Administrative Centre for easier access for people with physical disabilities.
- **Transportation Services Department** addressed *informational* barriers by replacing 1,400 bus stop signs with signs that have increased readability features.
- **Planning and Development Services Department** addressed *communicational* barriers by creating more accessible community forums through partnering with the

Canadian Hearing Society to provide sign language interpreters (if needed), sound amplification and accessible print materials.

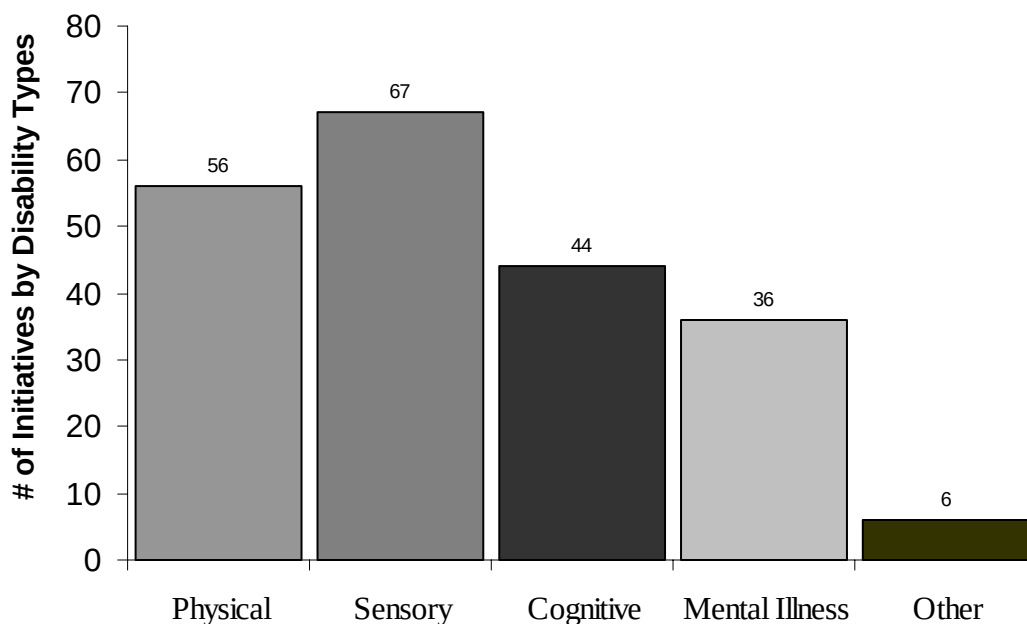
- **York Regional Police** addressed *attitudinal* barriers through employment opportunities for people with cognitive disabilities.
- The **Finance Department** addressed *technological* barriers, working towards the conversion of the existing Call Centre TTY hearing assistive device system to new selected technology.
- **Community and Health Services Department** addressed *policy and practice* barriers by providing opportunities for children with physical or cognitive disabilities to attend sports and recreational activities.

The Region's initiatives continue to address all disability types

Under the ODA, accessibility plans must address a broad range of accessibility issues considering the full definition under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, which includes physical, sensory, cognitive disabilities and mental illness. As illustrated below, in 2009, the Region continues to be successful in addressing the needs of people with a range of disabilities.

The following graph provides a breakdown by type of disability addressed for all 2009 York Region initiatives.

Figure 3
2009 Accessibility Plan Addresses All Disabilities



Examples of how departments are addressing the different types of disabilities in 2009 include:

- The **Corporate Services Department** addressed *physical* disabilities with plans to redesign the parking lot at 22 Prospect Street to include a ramp and designated parking spot.
- The **Environmental Services Department** is addressing *sensory* disabilities by upgrading the Water for Tomorrow website with accessibility features such as large font, colour, contrast and plain language use.
- **York Regional Police** addressed *cognitive* disabilities by hosting a workshop to increase knowledge of autism among front-line emergency responders.
- The **Community and Health Services Department** addressed *mental illness* disabilities by implementing professional standards to guide Emergency Medical Services personnel when interacting with individuals with mental illness.
- The **Transportation Services Department** addressed *all* disabilities by designating additional accessible bus routes, thereby providing an additional method of travel for those currently using Mobility Plus.

YRAAC provides valuable input and advice through the accessibility planning process

The YRAAC provides direct input into many of the accessibility initiatives. In 2009, members of the YRAAC:

- Provided advice on the development of *ACCESS-ability: York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan*.
- Recommended that Regional Council recognize National Access Awareness Week, which was endorsed by Council in April 2009.
- Participated in the Rapid Co. accessibility workshop in May 2009.
- Participated in the Province's Accessibility Advisory Committee forum held in June 2009.
- Participated on the York Region Forest Trail Accessibility Sub-Committee.
- Presented at the full day training modules of Accessible Customer Service Training in the Spring 2009.

- Participated in the filming of the Accessible Customer Service training DVD.
- Presented YRAAC activities to the Town of Markham Advisory Committee in October 2009.
- Attended six YRAAC meetings and provided feedback to all regional departments on draft departmental accessibility plans for 2010.

Planning is underway for the development of the Region's seventh accessibility plan

In order to meet the ongoing requirements of the ODA, planning is underway for the development of the Region's seventh accessibility plan. The 2010 accessibility plan will continue to follow the direction set out in the Region's Accessibility Plan Policy Framework, will be integrated with the Region's annual business planning cycle and will be developed along the same five themes.

In 2010, we will continue to seek advice from the YRAAC on all proposed initiatives. We will review best practices from other jurisdictions on ways to improve accessibility and where appropriate apply them to York Region's programs and services. As in past plans, feedback from the public has been solicited through use of a comment form which is available on-line. The comment form asks residents to provide information on barriers and issues faced by people with disabilities in York Region. The information gathered from the feedback received by the YRAAC, as well as the public, provides an excellent opportunity for Regional staff to learn more about the barriers faced by people with disabilities who are accessing York Region's programs and services.

Municipalities continue to have planning obligations under two provincial accessibility acts

The AODA came into effect on June 13, 2005. It provides for the development of province-wide accessibility standards in the areas of Customer Service, Transportation, Built Environment, Employment, and Information and Communications. Both public and private sector organizations will be required to implement these standards in phases.

The AODA will eventually replace the ODA, however, the Province has indicated that the ODA will remain in effect for the foreseeable future while the AODA is phased in. Until the Province repeals the ODA, all public sector organizations, including local municipalities and the Region, must continue to implement both Acts simultaneously. This includes the continued development, implementation and monitoring of annual accessibility plans.

Until the ODA is repealed, the YRAAC will have responsibilities under both Acts. It will continue to advise Regional Council on annual accessibility plans as required under the ODA and will also review and advise Council on the Region's compliance with the new AODA accessibility standards.

Development of proposed accessibility standards under the AODA continues

Under the AODA, Provincial Standard Development Committees were established for each of the five accessibility standards: Customer Service, Transportation, Built Environment, Employment, and Information and Communications.

Each Standard Development Committee is responsible for the development of a proposed accessibility standard to submit to the Minister of Community and Social Services for public review and input. After a specified time of review, the public input is collected and the committee considers changes to the proposed standard before submitting it again to the Minister for consideration to be passed into law. To date, only one of the standards has been passed into regulation and four are in varying stages of development.

This information is the subject of another report on the Community and Health Services Committee December 9, 2009 agenda, entitled *Update on the Initial Proposed Accessible Built Environment Standard and Compliance Reporting Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service Regulation is law

The AODA Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (*Ontario Regulation 429/07*) was Ontario's first accessibility standard to become law. It came into effect on January 1, 2008 with a compliance date of January 1, 2010 for public sector organizations, including York Region.

The Region's implementation activities to meet compliance requirements are well underway. Regulation requirements include the development of a policy to govern the Region's delivery of goods and services to people with disabilities. The Accessible Customer Service Policy was endorsed by Regional Council on November 19, 2009, through the adoption of Clause No. 5 of Report No. 3 of the Community and Health Services Committee, and is now enacted.

The Regulation also requires that York Region staff, volunteers and agents working on our behalf receive training on serving customers with disabilities by January 1, 2010. A York Region specific training module has been developed under the direction of the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer and is currently being rolled out across the corporation. As of November 2009, approximately 2,125 Regional employees have received Accessible Customer Service training with plans in place for the remaining staff to receive training by year end.

Compliance activities with the regulation will be ongoing after January 1, 2010. New staff and agents working on the Region's behalf will need to be trained and departments

will need to incorporate the Accessible Customer Service Policy into their way of doing business.

Provincial reporting requirements will be met through reporting in consultation with the ODA/AODA staff committee, the YRAAC AODA Sub-Committee and the YRAAC. Regional Council will receive a post-submission information report on AODA compliance activities.

Relationship to Vision 2026

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

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Ongoing costs to administer and manage the ODA implementation were approved as part of the 2009 Business Plan and Budget. Costs of the individual initiatives are contained within the budgets of specific departments who are responsible for the initiative. Future costs related to the 2010 Accessibility Plan will be identified by each regional department as part of the 2010 budget process.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

As directed by Regional Council, the Region continues to share information and work with the local municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees on the ODA.

7. CONCLUSION

In 2009, much progress has been made to make York Region more inviting and more inclusive of people with disabilities. Integrating accessibility into business practices and processes is now more commonplace across all departments, creating greater independence for people with disabilities in York Region.

With the release of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Services Regulation and other provincially-set standards, York Region is well prepared to meet these requirements, building on the solid foundation already laid by the accomplishments achieved in our accessibility plans.

For more information about 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.