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### **OPENING DOORS: YORK REGION'S 2008 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN**

**The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, April 24, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:**

#### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve *Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan* as included in *Council Attachment 1*.
2. The summary chart of the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee's questions, comments and suggestions and York Region staff recommendations and responses regarding the 2008 Departmental Accessibility Plans be approved as included in *Council Attachment 2*.
3. The release strategy to make the 2008 Accessibility Plan available to the public be approved as outlined in Section 4 of this report.
4. The report and the final printed version of *Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan* be shared with the local municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees, members of the Municipal Staff Reference Group, the Human Services Planning Coalition and the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario.

#### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to present and seek Regional Council approval of the final version of *Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan* (see *Council Attachment 1*); the advice and feedback received from the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) (see *Council Attachment 2*); and the release strategy for making the 2008 Accessibility Plan available to the public. This report also highlights the results of the implementation of the Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

**Planning is a key *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* requirement**

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (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 is made available to the public.

Since the proclamation of the ODA, York Region has planned and executed four, and with the release of this plan, five accessibility plans which involved the development and implementation of approximately 424 accessibility planning initiatives.

***Municipalities have planning obligations under both the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005****

Until all standards under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) are in place, the ODA will remain in effect, and municipalities will continue to have planning obligations under both Acts. The Province has indicated that the ODA will remain in effect for at least the next few years while the AODA is phased in, at which point the AODA will replace the ODA.

***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005***

The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07) was released July 31, 2007. This is the first standard to be released under the AODA. The regulation came into force on January 1, 2008 with compliance dates of January 1, 2010 for Public Sector Organizations and January 1, 2012 for other Providers of Goods and Services.

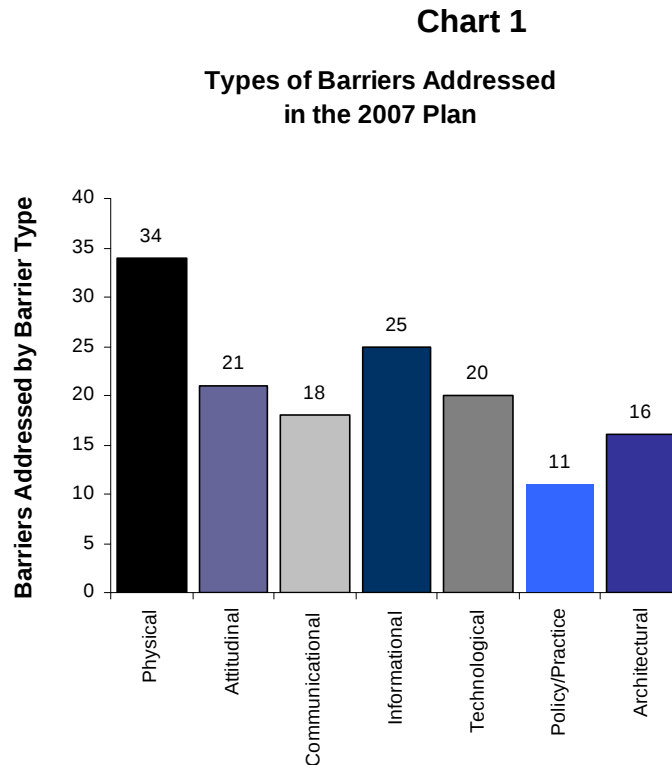
The Transportation Standard is currently under Ministerial review and is expected to be finalized into regulation sometime in 2008. Standard Development Committees related to the Built Environment, Employment and Information and Communications are meeting to develop the remaining standards. In January 2008, the Ministry of Community and Social Services announced that membership of the Accessibility Standards Development Committees have been adjusted to ensure that half the members of each committee are representatives of the disability community.

#### **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

**Highlights of accessibility achievements made in the 2007 Plan**

The majority of initiatives in the Region's 2007 Plan are completed. Of the 85 initiatives included in the 2007 Accessibility Plan, 66% (56) are complete and 34% (29) are planned or underway with completion expected early in 2008.

In 2007, a total of 145 barriers to accessibility were identified. As illustrated below, the Region continued to move towards accessibility by removing both invisible barriers and more visible, physical barriers.



Some examples of the barriers removed in 2007 that enhanced accessibility in York Region included:

- Community Services and Housing addressed *Architectural* and *Physical* barriers by installing hand railings in two of its senior's apartments to provide greater movement opportunities for tenants with ambulatory and balance constraints and by modernizing elevators to include accessibility features in two Housing York Incorporated communities.
- With the support of the Finance Department (Information and Technology Services Branch), Corporate Communications addressed *Technological* and *Communicational* barriers by continuing to make improvements that make information about the Region and services more accessible on the website.
- To address *Attitudinal* barriers, Health Services developed an internal newsletter to educate and increase staff awareness of ODA initiatives and activities.
- Planning and Development Services addressed *Informational*, *Architectural* and *Physical* barriers by conducting accessibility audits of proposed public consultation

centres to ensure that people with disabilities were able to participate in public consultations.

- Corporate Services addressed *Physical* and *Architectural* barriers by incorporating the YRAAC's feedback into the reconstruction of the entire north parking lot at the Administrative Centre improving the number, size and proximity of accessible parking spaces and providing a safer crosswalk and entrance-way. The Department also installed common signage throughout the Administrative Centre to allow for easier way-finding.
- York Region Transit Mobility Plus addressed *Policy and Practice* barriers by introducing 24-hour advance notice day trip bookings for their Mobility Plus Service in response to customer satisfaction surveys. York Region Transit/Viva continued purchasing low-floor wheel-chair accessible buses and installing other accessibility features at stops and shelters to improve access – addressing *Physical* and *Technological* barriers. To make crossing at intersections safer and easier for persons who are blind or have low vision, Transportation Services installed Audible Pedestrian Signals at identified crossings.
- York Regional Police addressed *Policy and Practice* barriers by beginning work in 2007 to develop a Canadian Hearing Society sign language protocol which will enable timely access to Sign Language Interpreter Services for persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

In 2007, York Region's commitment to enhancing accessibility across its departments remained evident. Initiatives included in this plan have enhanced accessibility programs and services while supporting the key areas that impact the lives of people with disabilities.

### **Developing Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan**

The Region's Accessibility Plans are developed by the ODA Staff Committee. This interdepartmental committee has representatives from every Department, as well as the York Regional Police and works to ensure that their department's ODA commitments are planned and implemented successfully.

The development of the Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan, as directed by Regional Council, has been integrated into the Region's 2008 business and planning process. Each regional department, including the York Regional Police, developed a departmental accessibility plan in consultation with the YRAAC, outlining the initiatives that the department would take in 2008 to identify, remove, and prevent barriers in its core businesses.

**The ongoing participation of the YRAAC plays a key role in the development and implementation of York Region's annual accessibility plans**

In keeping with its legislated mandate, the YRAAC plays a key role in the development and implementation of the Region's accessibility plans. Many initiatives included in the 2007 Plan required the YRAAC's direct input.

In 2007, members of the YRAAC:

- Participated in the Orientation Session for the newly appointed YRAAC in March 2007.
- Recommended that Regional Council recognize National Access Awareness Week, which was subsequently endorsed by Regional Council in May 2007.
- Provided staff with valuable feedback and suggestions concerning the reconstruction of the Administrative Centre's north parking lot.
- Participated in a breakfast meeting for members of all local municipal Accessibility Advisory committees hosted by Aurora's Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Participated and presented at the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario's "An Integrated Approach to Accessibility Planning" workshop in November 2007.
- Participated in "Just Ask" inclusivity training offered corporately at the Region.
- Conducted research and reported back to the YRAAC regarding British Columbia's 2010 Legacy Now accessibility funding.
- Provided advice on the implementation activities included in the 2007 Plan and the development of the 2008 Plan.

YRAAC members have reviewed and endorsed the initiatives that are included in *Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan*. Regional staff presented the department accessibility plans to the YRAAC at two meetings held in November 2007 giving YRAAC members the opportunity to provide their comments and input into the Region's plan. The YRAAC's advice on individual initiatives has been incorporated into the final version of the plan. *Council Attachment 2* to this report includes the questions, comments and suggestions of the YRAAC on the 2008 draft plan and corresponding staff recommendations and responses.

**Each departmental initiative has been grouped under five key themes that impact the lives of people with disabilities**

As in previous plans, each departmental initiative to identify, remove and prevent barriers in 2008 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 the lives of people with disabilities.

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.

### **Highlights of the 2008 Plan – *Opening Doors***

The 2008 Plan continues to build on the foundation set in the previous plans enhancing accessibility by finding and removing barriers in all regional programs and services. As the emphasis in the 2007 Plan was to move the Region further towards accessibility, the 2008 Plan will open doors to accessibility in the Region's programs, services and facilities.

The 2008 Plan includes a total of 91 accessibility planning initiatives (34 Barriers Identified and 57 Barriers to be Addressed) from across all regional departments, including the York Regional Police. Some initiatives included in the 2008 Plan are:

- The **Community and Health Services Department** will increase the safety and independence of persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing by adding visual alarm features to the fire alarm systems in the public areas of the Maple and Newmarket Health Centres. To improve understanding of their tenants, Housing Services will research the self-declared disabilities of tenants reported in last year's Housing York Incorporated tenant survey. Printed materials in Family and Children's Services, Policy and Program Support Services and Public Health Branches will be reviewed to identify barriers and find solutions or possible alternate formats, and Employment and Financial Services will create a staff resource library in each Ontario Works office with materials focused on Mental Illness, Learning Disabilities and Chronic Diseases to raise staff awareness.
- **Corporate Communications** will test the Content Management System against WC3 criteria to determine if the software will handle a single layer layout while addressing accessibility concerns and will implement the Google search function to enable all, including people with disabilities, to retrieve information quickly without having to navigate the entire website.
- **Corporate Services** will study and redesign the ceremonial ramp at the Administrative Centre's Ceremonial entrance and install a power door operator on the door to the Corporate Learning Centre at the South Services Centre. Human Resources will launch the "Mental Health Works" program offered by the Canadian Mental Health Association to increase awareness of Mental Illness issues in the workplace among Human Resource staff.
- **The Environmental Services Department** will review and incorporate accessibility measures into the architectural plans for the proposed Community Environmental Centre in Vaughan. The Department will also review the promotional and educational

materials in their Waste Management and Water and Wastewater Branches to ensure use of plain language, legible fonts and colour contrast and conduct accessibility audits of their public consultation and seminar locations.

- The **Finance Department** will conduct a study of the use of technology solutions in other municipalities across Ontario and migrate the existing Business Call Centres from TTY devices to a networked solution called TextNet.
- **Planning and Development Services** will incorporate accessibility and mobility in the development of the new communities design criteria.
- **Transportation Services** – York Region Transit Mobility Plus will develop and implement an interactive voice response software and interface to improve customer service levels by providing book tripping services 24 hours per day, seven days a week. York Region Transit will continue to increase the percentage of fleet accessibility through the purchase of accessible buses so that by year-end 89% of the fleet will be accessible. Transportation Services will relocate pedestrian push buttons on traffic signal poles to make the push buttons easier for all to access. A plan is in place cooperatively with the Oak Ridges Trail Association to make some Regional Forest Trails accessible for use by persons with disabilities.
- **York Regional Police** will continue the initiatives in last year's plan in partnership with the Canadian Hearing Society to: develop aids to raise awareness and assist officers in communicating with citizens who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing; invite representatives from the Canadian Hearing Society to become members of the YRP Recruitment Community Insights Program; appoint a police member who is deaf, deafened or hard of hearing to the York Regional Equity Advisory Committee; and develop Sign Language Interpreter Services Protocol.

#### **Annual accessibility plans must be made available to the public – Release Strategy for the 2008 plan**

The ODA specifically states that municipal annual accessibility plans must be made available to the public. Upon Regional Council approval of *Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan*, the plan will be posted on the Region's website.

It is recommended that copies of *Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan* also be sent to individuals, agencies and organizations that represent or provide services to people with disabilities in York Region, the nine local municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees, members of the Municipal Staff Reference Group, Human Services Planning Coalition 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 a survey which can be mailed in or completed online to allow people to submit comments throughout the year.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Accessibility planning is now the integrated way of doing business**

Although the number of initiatives included in our accessibility plans increase each year, there are no new costs associated directly with accessibility planning. Accessibility planning has been integrated with the Region's service and business planning practices, therefore, the majority of initiatives included in the accessibility plans are part of the existing base budgets of the various departments.

In the 2008 Accessibility Plan, the Region continues to be successful at integrating accessibility planning into its way of doing business. For example, as part of York Region Transit's (YRT) fleet replacement and expansion plan, buses will be purchased that include accessibility features. Mobility Plus will continue with its work to improve access to online trip booking and further accessibility enhancements will be made to YRT bus stops. The 2008 capital budget includes new funding for buses and facilities which totals \$28.6M. The Province of Ontario provides subsidies on replacement buses under the Ontario Bus Replacement Program, which offsets the total cost by \$2.7M.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

All York Region residents including those with disabilities benefit from barrier-free Regional practices, procedures and services. As well, the YRAAC and regional staff have established and maintained strong relationships and valuable networks with their counterparts in the local municipalities. Opportunities to share information and learn from one another will continue.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The Region's fifth annual accessibility plan is a comprehensive plan of actions that will be taken to identify, remove and prevent the barriers that present everyday challenges for people with disabilities. It addresses all aspects of regional government including programs and services, policies and procedures, and all facilities.

Much progress has been made to date 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. This will stand the Region in good stead in future as standards under the AODA are released.

For more information on this report, contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Director of the Policy and Program Support Services Branch at Extension 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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