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PROGRESS REPORT ON OPENING DOORS: YORK REGION'S 2008 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN AND THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2009 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, November 27, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

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

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the implementation of *Opening Doors: York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan* as required under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA). This report also provides information on the development framework for York Region's 2009 Accessibility Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

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 made available to the public. Since the enactment of the ODA, the Region has worked with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) to develop five accessibility plans.

In March 2007, Council appointed the 2007 to 2010 YRAAC, comprised of citizen members from across the Region and four members of Regional Council. As required by the legislation, most members of the YRAAC have a disability.

Regional Council, at its meeting on May 15, 2008, adopted Clause No. 5 of Report No. 4 of the Community Services and Housing Committee, entitled *Opening Doors: York*

Region's Fifth Annual Accessibility Plan. The Plan was prepared under the requirements of the ODA and was integrated with the Region's 2008 Business Planning 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 Accessibility Plans include 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, bylaws and procedures.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

PROGRESS REPORT ON OPENING DOORS: YORK REGION'S 2008 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 *Opening Doors* since its release in May 2008.

***Opening Doors* contains 95 initiatives aimed at removing and preventing barriers**

Opening Doors contains a total of 95 initiatives including 34 that relate to barrier identification and 61 initiatives that are aimed at removing and preventing barriers within. Of these, 42% are completed, 44% are underway and 14% are planned.

Each initiative is grouped into one of five key themes

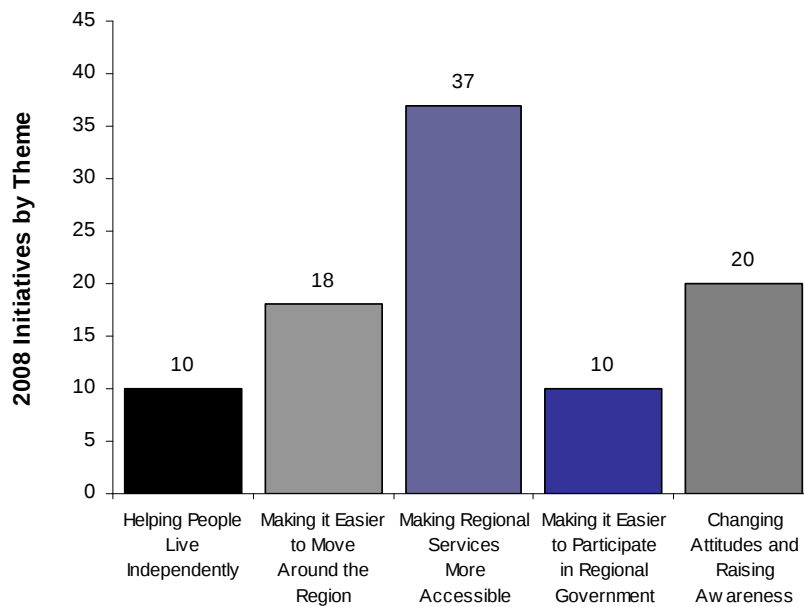
As done in previous years, each initiative put forward by the departments was grouped into one of five key themes. The themes reflect the feedback of the YRAAC and the public consultation of the key areas that impact the lives of the people with disabilities in York Region. Consistently using these themes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

The five key themes are:

1. Helping People Live Independently
2. Making it Easier to Move Around the Region
3. Making Regional Services More Accessible
4. Making it Easier to Participate in Regional Government
5. Changing Attitudes and Raising Awareness

Figure 1 provides a breakdown, by theme, of all 2008 regional initiatives.

Figure 1
York Region Continues to Make its Programs and Services
Accessible in 2008



Themes

The initiatives included in the 2008 Accessibility Plan support the key areas that impact the lives of people with disabilities in York Region. For example:

- In support of the theme *helping people live independently*, the **Planning and Development Services Department** will include accessibility and mobility measures with respect to public transit and regional streets in the development of new community design criteria in collaboration with local municipalities so that everyone has reasonable access to all places and services.

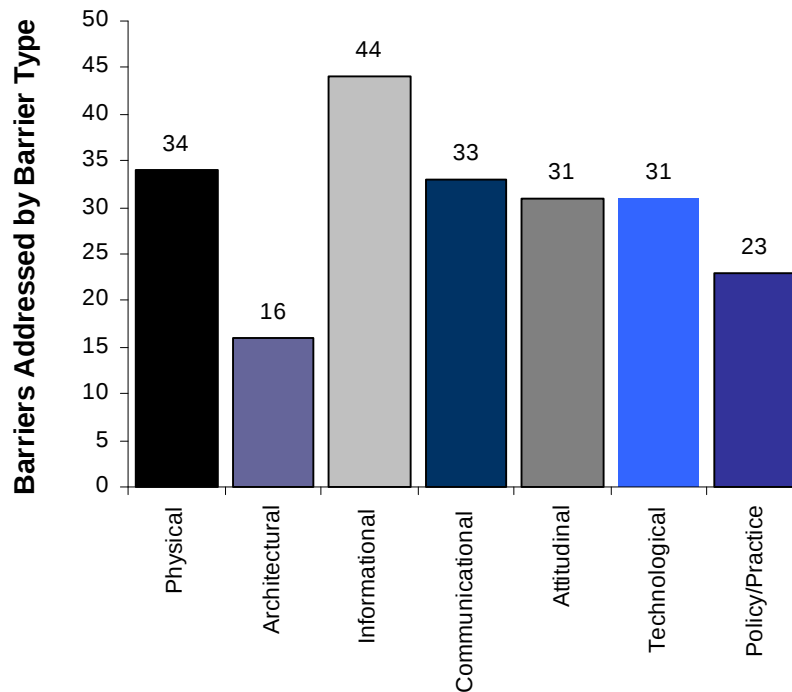
- The **Transportation Services Department** is making it *easier for people with disabilities to move around the region* by launching a Travel Training Pilot project targeted at seniors and persons with disabilities who use mobility plus to develop the skills and confidence to ride conventional public transit and Viva buses. York Region Transit (YRT) facilities continue to improve access at bus stops by installing new and replacement concrete pads each year.
- To make *regional services more accessible for persons with disabilities*, the **Environmental Services Department** incorporated feedback from the YRAAC to include accessibility measures in the architectural plans for the proposed Community Environmental Centre in the City of Vaughan. The **Corporate Services Department** installed brighter lighting and added smaller handrails in the elevators at the administrative centre.
- **York Regional Police** made it *easier to participate in Regional Government* by continuing to invite representatives from the Canadian Hearing Society to become members of the York Regional Police Recruitment Community Insights Program.
- **All departments** across York Region are *changing attitudes and raising awareness* through continued staff participation in sensitivity and inclusivity training. In 2008, over 100 staff have attended Just Ask Training.

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.

As illustrated in Figure 2, in 2008 a total of 212 barriers to accessibility were identified and actions were taken to remove these barriers. Of these, 162 of the barriers identified were invisible barriers.

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



Source: 2008 Progress Report *Opening Doors*

Departments across the Region are addressing a variety of barriers

A few examples of how departments are addressing different types of barriers in 2008 include:

- The **Corporate Communications Branch** addressed *technological* barriers by implementing the Google search function to enable all persons with disabilities to retrieve information quickly without having to navigate the entire website.
- As a department, **Community and Health Services** addressed *sensory* barriers by installing a new elevator at Elmwood Gardens that includes improved lighting, black lit/large buttons, and a large digital floor display for persons with visual and hearing disabilities. In addition, the department completed seven dedicated units at Tom Taylor Place for persons who are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. Branches in the Community and Health Services Department have addressed a number of barriers; for instance, addressing *informational* and *technological* barriers by increasing access to

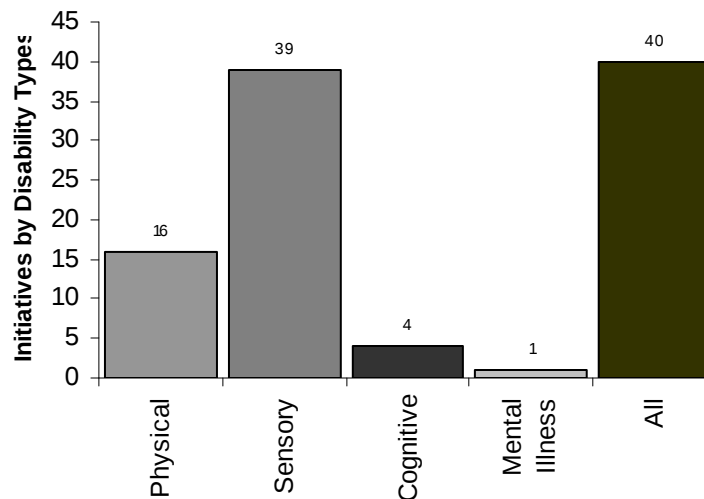
Community Services web information, making it more accessible and incorporating technology to assist people with disabilities to navigate the website. Branches have also addressed *all* barrier types by conducting an accessibility audit of meeting locations using the Region's Accessible Meeting Guidelines.

- **Corporate Services Department** addressed *informational* barriers by developing a question for inclusion on the Employee Satisfaction Survey to measure employee's satisfaction with workplace modification or accommodation supports. To address *physical* barriers, the department installed power door operators on the door to the Corporate Learning Centre at the South Service Centre.
- **Environmental Services Department** addressed *informational* and *technological* barriers by reviewing and editing Waste Management web pages to identify any barriers to accessibility.
- To address *technological* barriers, the **Finance Services Department** is planning to study and document how municipalities across Ontario are using technology solutions to overcome various accessibility barriers.
- **Planning and Development Services Department** addressed *physical*, *architectural* and *informational* barriers by conducting a review of all presentations and public consultation centres.
- **Transportation Services Department, YRT Mobility Plus** addressed *attitudinal* barriers by improving the information and communication exchange between social/health agencies and stakeholders regarding transportation service needs through conducting bi-annual formal meetings. **Roads** is addressing *physical* barriers by increasing accessibility to some Regional Trails by identifying step grades at Hollidge Tract for persons with disabilities.
- To address *communicational* barriers **York Regional Police** is acquiring communication tip cards from the Canadian Hearing Society for officers to use when communicating with persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. York Regional Police also addressed *policy/practice* barriers by establishing a sign language service protocol allowing for appropriate and timely access to sign language interpreter services.

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 in Figure 3, in 2008 the Region continues to be successful in addressing the needs of people with a range of disabilities.

Figure 3
2008 Accessibility Plan Address All Disabilities



Source: 2008 Progress Report *Opening Doors*

Disability Types

Below are some accessibility initiatives that demonstrate how the Region meets the needs of people with a broad range of disabilities in the 2008 Accessibility Plan, including:

- As a department, **Community and Health Services** addressed the needs of people with *physical, sensory, cognitive* and *mental illness* by installing an emergency power generator that will keep elevators operating, and the hallways and community room lit during a power outage at Maplewood Place. **Community and Health Services Department** is also addressing the needs of persons with *all* disability types by increasing staff education and knowledge of community resources for persons with disabilities through the “Community Partner’s Open House” bringing together community agencies to educate staff on their interactions with persons with disabilities. Branches in Community and Health Services Department have a number of initiatives; for instance, they have addressed the needs of persons with *sensory* and *cognitive* disability types by increasing accessibility to printed materials for Dental and Nutritional services by ensuring that language, font, style and contrast are accessible using the Region’s Multiple Format Guidelines. Other Branch initiatives have addressed the needs of people with *all* disability types by increasing awareness about the Ontario Works Employment Centres through a one-on-one orientation session in the Vaughan Ontario Works Employment Resource Centre, as part of a pilot project.

- The **Corporate Communications Branch** continues to address the needs of persons with *sensory* disabilities by monitoring and upgrading the accessibility of the Region's website.
- The **Corporate Services Department** is addressing the needs of persons with *mental illness* disabilities by launching the "Mental Health Works" program offered by the Canadian Mental Health Association to increase awareness of employers to the needs of employees experiencing mental illness disabilities in the workplace. The department is addressing the needs of persons with *physical* disabilities by consulting an architect and an ODA consultant to review the salad bar in the cafeteria and the ramp at the ceremonial entrance of the administrative centre to identify barriers to accessibility.
- The **Environmental Services Department** is addressing the needs of persons with *cognitive* disabilities by reviewing their communication materials for plain language use.
- The **Finance Services Department** plans to address *sensory* disabilities by migrating the existing Business Call Centres from TTY devices to a networked solution called TEXTNET.
- The **Planning and Development Services Department** will address the needs of persons with *sensory* disabilities by making Geomatic products more accessible using large fonts, contrasting colours, text-to-speech functionality and other accessibility features.
- **Transportation Services Department, YRT Service Planning** addressed the needs of people with *all* disability types by consulting with YRT operations/facilities, contractors, marketing, and customer service to determine criteria for accessible routes. **YRT Fleet** is addressing the needs of people with *physical* disabilities by increasing the percentage of fleet accessibility by purchasing accessible buses.
- **York Regional Police** addressed the needs of persons with *physical* disabilities by relocating three accessible parking spots to the front entrance of 2 District.

Planning is underway for the development of the Region's sixth Accessibility Plan

In order to meet the ongoing requirements of the ODA, planning is underway for the development of the Region's sixth Accessibility Plan. The 2009 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 2009, we will continue to seek advice from the YRAAC and the public 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 online. 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 for 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.

Ongoing participation by the YRAAC

In keeping with its legislated mandate under the ODA, the YRAAC continues to provide direct input into the implementation activities of the 2008 Plan. For example, in 2008 members of the YRAAC:

- Provided advice on the 2008 Plan and the development of the 2009 accessibility plan.
- Recommended that Regional Council once again recognize National Awareness Week, which was subsequently endorsed by Council in May 2008.
- Participated in the Province's Customer Service Regulation Training workshops held in February and March 2008.
- Participated in "Exercise Maple Migration" a joint emergency exercise with York Region and the City of Vaughan in September 2008.
- Participated in an Accessible Customer Service Regulation focus group conducted by the Region of York.
- Participated on the Metrolinx Accessibility Advisory Working Group to provide advice on issues related to regional accessibility as part of their preparation for the Regional Transportation Plan.

Status of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA), which was passed in June 2005, 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. The AODA provides for the development of province-wide accessibility standards in the areas of Customer Service, Transportation, Built Environment, Employment, and Information and Communication.

The Customer Service Regulation came into effect January 1, 2008. It has specific requirements for providers of goods and services pertaining to the use of assistive devices, communication with a person who has a disability, access of service animals and support persons, appropriate notice of temporary disruptions of services, disability awareness training for employees and third parties, and the establishment of a customer feedback process. Public sector organizations must comply with the regulation by January 1, 2010. The Region has already begun activities to prepare for compliance.

Regional Council at its meeting on November 20, 2008 adopted, without amendment Clause No. 5 of Report No. 7 of the Community Services and Housing Committee which provides more information about the status of the standards under the AODA.

The YRAAC will continue to advise the Region on its accessibility plans as required under the ODA, and will also monitor the Region's compliance with the AODA regulations.

Relationship to Vision 2026

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 its residents.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Accessibility initiatives are integrated into everyday business practices – there are many initiatives but no new cost associated with accessibility planning

Although the number of initiatives included in our accessibility plans increase each year, there are no new costs associated directly with accessibility planning. The majority of initiatives included in the accessibility plans are part of the existing base budgets of the various departments. The Region has also been very successful in using previously planned work to meet accessibility requirements. In total, approximately \$69,634,690 has been spent by this Corporation on accessibility initiatives since 2003. Of this amount, \$66,538,310 was directed towards transit, roads and solid waste initiatives; \$2,635,302 was spent on capital; and \$461,078 on other types of initiatives such as programs and services.

Ongoing costs to administer and manage the ODA implementation were approved as part of the 2008 Business Plan and Budget. Costs of the individual initiatives are contained within the budgets of the specified departments who are responsible for the initiative. Future costs related to the 2009 Accessibility Plan will be identified by each department as part of the 2009 budget process.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

As directed by Council, the Region continues to share information and work with the local municipalities and their accessibility advisory committees on ODA.

7. CONCLUSION

In 2008, 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 Customer Service Regulation (AODA) and other provincially-set standards expected in 2009, 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.