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PROGRESS REPORT ON TOWARDS ACCESSIBILITY: YORK REGION'S 2007 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN AND THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2008 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, October 23, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be circulated by the Regional Clerk to the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee, the area municipalities and their Accessibility Advisory Committees.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Regional Council with a mid-year update on the implementation of *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan* as required under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA)*.

The report also provides information on the development framework for York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Planning is a key ODA requirement

The ODA, proclaimed in 2001, includes specific requirements for all municipalities, including York Region. One key requirement is the annual development of an accessibility plan. Under the ODA, 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 four accessibility plans.

In March 2007, Council appointed the 2007-2010 YRAAC, which is comprised of nine citizen members from across the Region and four members of Regional Council. As required by legislation, the majority of the YRAAC members have a disability.

On April 19, 2007, Regional Council approved *Towards Accessibility: York Region's Fourth Annual Accessibility Plan*. The Plan was prepared under the requirements of the ODA and was integrated with the Region's 2007 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, by-laws and procedures.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Progress Report on *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan*

The Accessibility Plan describes how individual departments are working together to identify, remove and prevent barriers in their core businesses. *Towards Accessibility* contains a total of 85 initiatives including 28 that relate to barrier identification and 57 initiatives that are aimed at removing and preventing barriers within the Region's programs and services.

4.1.1 Progress summary

The following provides a progress summary of the initiatives included in *Towards Accessibility* since its release in April 2007.

In total, there were 85 accessibility initiatives included in the 2007 Accessibility Plan. Of these, 29% are completed, 52% are underway and 19% are planned.

4.1.2 York Region continues to meet the needs of people with disabilities

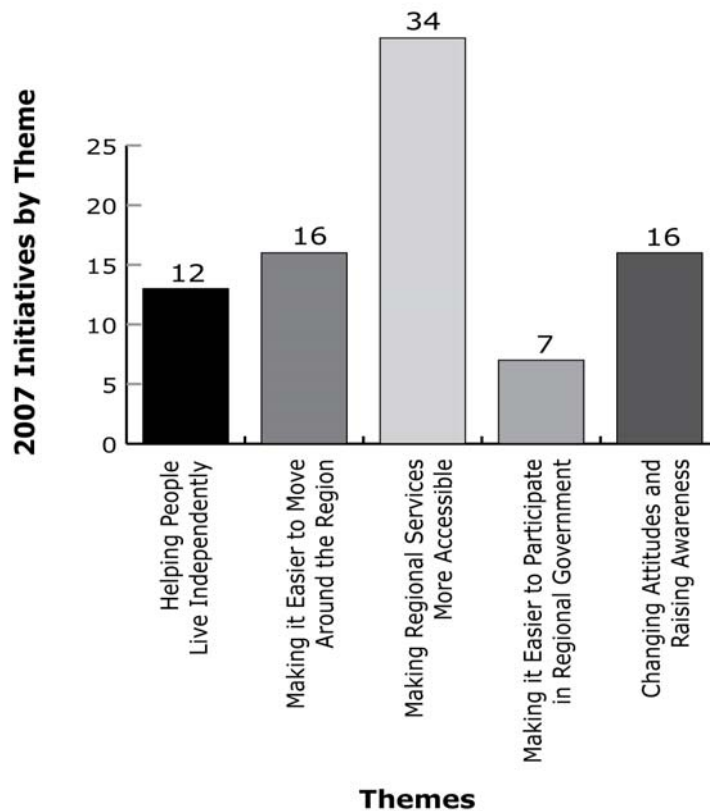
Again this year, each initiative put forward by the departments was grouped into one of five key themes. The themes reflect the feedback of the YRAAC and the public consultation of the key areas that impact the lives of the people with disabilities in York Region. Consistently using these themes in the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

The 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.

The following graph provides a breakdown by theme of all 2007 regional initiatives.

Figure 1
York Region Continues to Make its Programs and Services Accessible in 2007



The initiatives included in the 2007 Plan support the Region's commitment and dedication to enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to its programs and services, while supporting 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*, Health Services will be renovating six units in Hadley Grange, a Housing York Inc. building for seniors to include accessible features in the units such as lighting, flooring, kitchens and bathrooms.
- Transportation and Works has made it *easier for people with disabilities to move around the region* by meeting with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind to discuss technical guidelines for transit facilities stops, including design and specification of way-finding and patterned concrete strips to assist persons who have low vision. Installation of these strips is planned for the fall of 2007.
- To make *regional services more accessible for persons with disabilities*, Corporate Services completed a total redesign and construction of the north parking lot at the Administrative Centre, improving the number, size and proximity of accessible parking spaces. The reconstruction included a safer crosswalk and an entrance way into the building which features heated sub-surface coils to prevent ice build up in the winter.

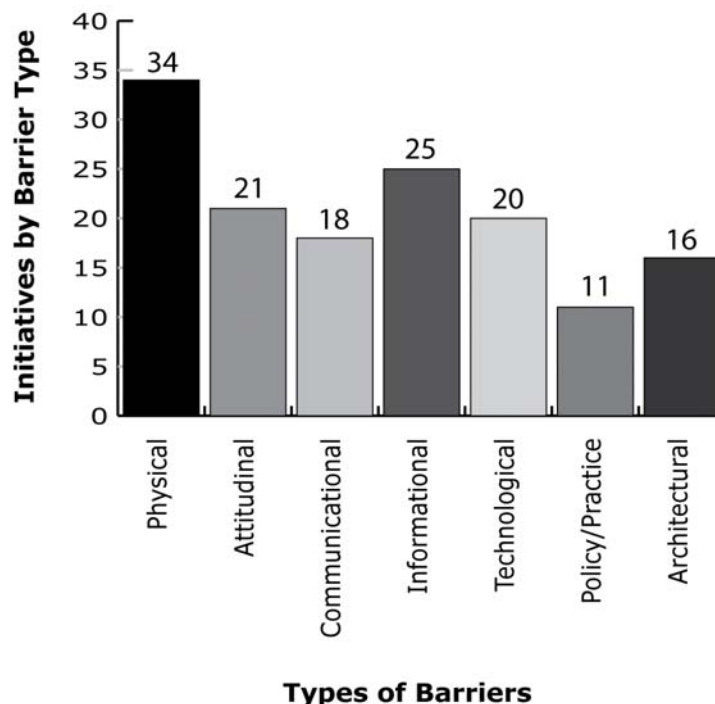
- The York Regional Police's partnership initiatives with the Canadian Hearing Society are *making it easier* for persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing to *participate in regional government*. They have invited a York Regional Police member who is deaf, deafened or hard of hearing to sit on the York Regional Police Equity Advisory Committee. They are also preparing a media marketing campaign to promote relations between police and citizens who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- All departments across York Region are *changing attitudes and raising awareness* through continued staff participation in sensitivity and inclusivity training. In 2007, 59 staff have already attended Just Ask Training and it is estimated that another 41 will complete the training by year end.

4.1.3 York Region addresses both visible and invisible barriers to access

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 the graph below, in 2007 a total of 145 barriers to accessibility were identified and actions were taken to remove these barriers. Of these, 95 of the barriers identified were invisible barriers.

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



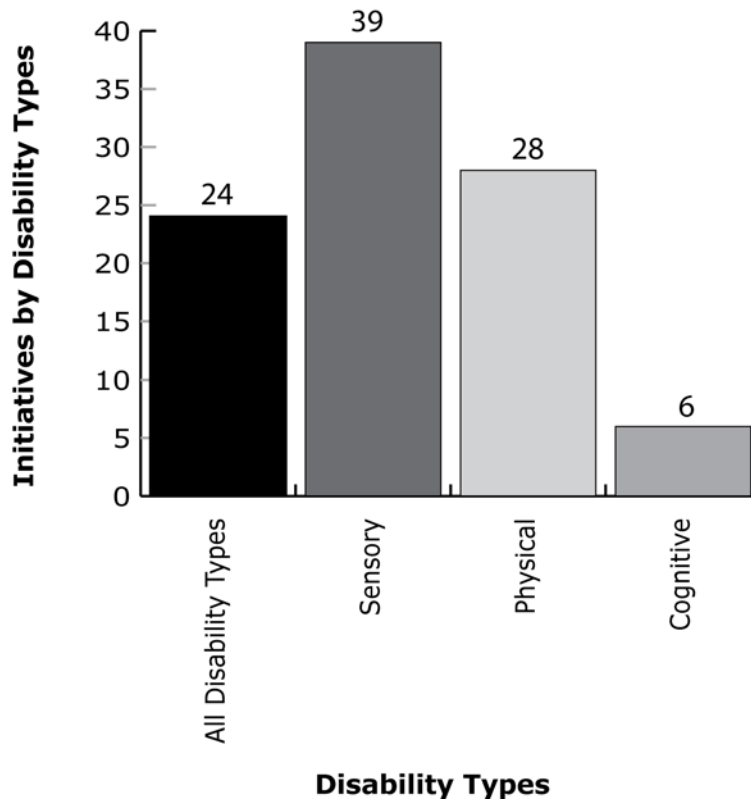
A few examples of how departments are addressing different types of barriers in 2007 include:

- Community Services and Housing addressed *architectural* barriers by installing hand railings in two of their senior's apartments to provide greater movement opportunities for tenants with ambulatory and balance constraints. To raise staff awareness of customers with disabilities and how best to serve them, the department also implemented activities to promote National Access Awareness Week at the Region.
- With the support of the Information and Technology Services Branch, Corporate Communications addressed *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 has developed an internal newsletter to educate and increase awareness of staff on ODA initiatives and activities.
- Planning and Development Services is addressing *informational*, *architectural* and *physical* barriers by conducting accessibility audits of proposed public consultation centres to ensure that people with disabilities are able to participate in public consultations.
- Corporate Services will address *physical* and *architectural* barriers by renovating the washrooms at the South Service Centre to include no touch faucets, automatic flush toilets, better lighting and clearer signage.
- 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.
- York Regional Police will address *policy and practice* barriers by developing 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.

4.1.4 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 of disability under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, which includes physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. As illustrated below, in 2007 the Region continues to be successful in addressing the needs of people with a range of disabilities.

Figure 3
2007 Accessibility Plan Addresses All Disabilities



Below are some accessibility initiatives that demonstrate how the Region meets the needs of people with a broad range of disabilities in the 2007 plan, including:

- Community Services and Housing addressed the needs of people with *all* types of disabilities by engaging a consultant to prepare a detailed inventory of the support service providers with housing provider referral agreements which when complete, will provide access to special needs units for people with a range of disabilities with support services.
- Corporate Communications addressed the needs of peoples with *sensory* disabilities by establishing a centralized phone service to give full support to persons with disabilities using the web.
- Information Technology Services addressed the needs of people with *sensory* disabilities by researching the corporate applicability of TextNet technology in consultation with the Canadian Hearing Society to possibly replace TTY systems at the Region. TextNet is a new technology that enables personal computers to function like TTYs.
- Health Services addressed the needs of people with *physical*, *sensory* and *cognitive* disabilities by starting renovations at the Newmarket Health Centre, which will

- include updates to the existing signage system and installing a power assist door operator in the common washroom.
- Planning and Development Services addressed the needs of people with *physical* disabilities by gathering information on accessible tourist attractions in York Region and including where appropriate, wheelchair accessible icons in the 2007 Visitors Guide.
 - Corporate Services met the needs of people with *physical*, *sensory* and *cognitive* disabilities by installing power door operators on the Regional Council Chamber doors, and plans to install a more legible building directory and common signage at the Administrative Centre.
 - Transportation and Works addressed the needs of people with *sensory* disabilities by installing a new computer screen and wireless mouse and keyboard at the reception desk in the Transportation and Works Department at the Administrative centre, which will assist in improving communication with persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
 - York Regional Police addressed the needs of people with *sensory* disabilities by having the Canadian Hearing Society participate in the Diversity Speakers component of prequalification and communications training, raising officers' awareness and improving police interactions with persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

4.2 Development framework for York Region's 2008 Accessibility Plan

In order to meet the ongoing requirements of the ODA, planning is also underway for the development of the Region's fifth accessibility plan. The 2008 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 2008, we will continue to seek advice from the YRAAC on all proposed initiatives. We will also 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 will ask residents to provide information on barriers and issues faced by people with disabilities in York Region. This input, along with the ongoing advice received from the YRAAC, will provide an excellent opportunity for regional staff to learn more about the barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing York Region's programs and services.

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

In keeping with its legislated mandate under the ODA, the YRAAC continues to provide direct input into the implementation activities of the 2007 Plan. For example, in 2007 members of the YRAAC:

- Participated in an orientation/training session for the newly appointed YRAAC.
- Recommended that Regional Council once again recognize National Access Awareness Week, which was subsequently endorsed by Council in May 2007.
- Participated in related activities by attending Know York Sessions and submitting contributions for the National Access Awareness Week newsletter.
- Attended Just Ask inclusivity training offered here at the Region.
- Participated in York Region's Travel Training focus group.

In the fall and winter months, the YRAAC will continue to provide advice on the implementation of the 2007 Plan and in the development of the 2008 Plan.

4.3 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 Standard was released as Regulation in July 2007 and will come into effect on 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.

The proposed Transportation Standard was released for public review in July 2007 with a closing date for comments of September 28, 2007. It was the subject of another report to Council in October 2007 entitled, "York Region Transit Update – Proposed Transportation Standard *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)*". The standards for Built Environment, Information and Communication and Employment are currently under development.

The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee will continue to advise the Region on its accessibility plans as required under the ODA, and will be required also to monitor the Region's compliance with the new AODA regulations, beginning in 2008.

4.4 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 2007 Business Plan and Budget. Costs of the individual initiatives are contained within the budgets of the specified departments who are responsible for the initiative. Each department will include any costs required to implement the 2008 accessibility planning initiatives within their 2008 departmental budgets.

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 ODA implementation.

7. CONCLUSION

In 2007, departments across the Region continued to examine their programs and services using their acquired expertise and knowledge to identify and remove barriers for persons with disabilities in York Region. The commitment and momentum Regional Council, regional staff and the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee have demonstrated in making York Region accessible for persons with disabilities has remained evident.

As the new standards under the AODA are released, York Region will be well positioned to meet these standards using the solid foundation already laid by the accomplishments achieved in our accessibility plans.

For more information about this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Director, Policy and Program Support Services in the Community and Health Services Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.