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TOWARDS ACCESSIBILITY: YORK REGION'S 2007 ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, March 28, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan* as included in *Attachment 1*, subject to Council approval of the 2007 Business Plan and Budget.
2. The summary chart of the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee's questions and feedback and York Region staff recommendations and responses regarding the 2007 Departmental Accessibility Plans be approved as included in *Attachment 2*.
3. The release strategy to make the 2007 Accessibility Plan available to the public be approved as outlined in Section 4.3 of this report.
4. The report and the final printed version of *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan* 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 present and seek Council approval of the final version of *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan* (see *Attachment 1*); the advice and feedback received from the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) (see *Attachment 2*); and the release strategy for making the 2007 Accessibility Plan available to the public. This report also highlights the results of the implementation of the Region's 2006 Accessibility Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

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 made available to the public.

Since the proclamation of the ODA, York Region has planned and executed three and with the release of this plan, four accessibility plans which involved the development and implementation of over 333 accessibility planning initiatives.

3.1 Parallel Implementation of the ODA and the AODA

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. Standard development committees related to the AODA have been struck in the areas of Customer Service, Transportation, and Information and Communications. It is anticipated that the first set of standards for Customer Service will be released for implementation this summer.

3.2 York Region's Environics Survey

Accessibility for persons with disabilities both matters deeply, and is seen as a key spending priority for York Region's residents. In 2006, the survey reported a resounding 96% residents felt it was important for programs, services and facilities in York Region to be fully accessible to residents with disabilities. Also, in the 2006 survey, over 50% of residents stated that even if it would increase their costs they wanted increased spending on services for persons with disabilities. This was only slightly behind increased spending on hospital and health care services (62%) and roads (58%) 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 2006*.) Making regional services fully accessible to all, including residents with disabilities, along with a high priority placed on increased spending on services to persons with disabilities was also reflected in the 2004 and the 2005 Environics surveys.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

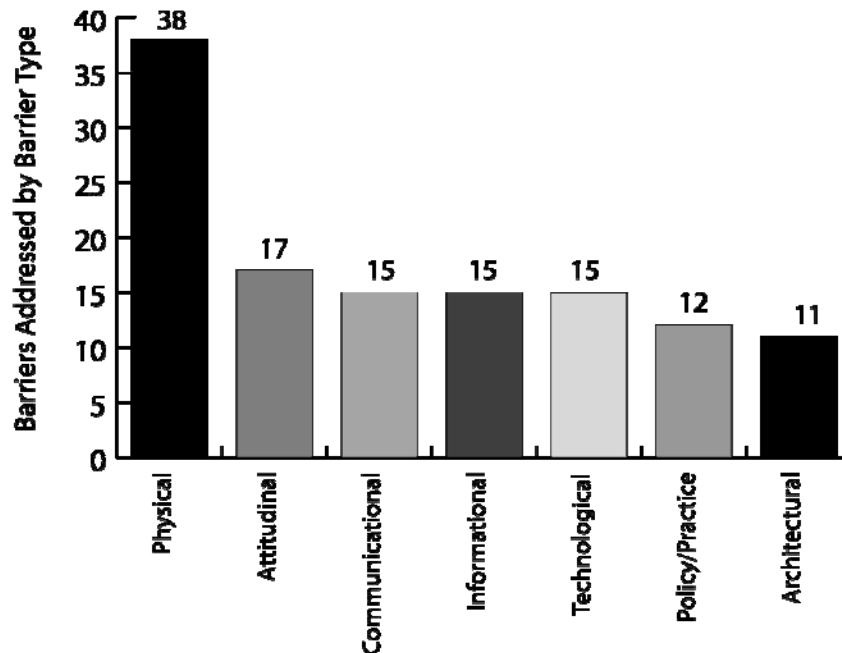
York Region's accessibility plans have been well received by the community and are clearly making a difference for people with disabilities who use regional programs and services.

4.1 Highlights of Accessibility Achievements Made in the 2006 Plan

The majority of initiatives in the Region's 2006 Plan are completed. Of the 71 initiatives included in the 2006 Accessibility Plan, 61% (43) are complete and 39% (28) are planned or underway with completion expected early in 2007.

In 2006, a total of 123 barriers were identified. As illustrated below, the Region continued to make progress in removing both invisible barriers and more visible, physical barriers.

Figure 1
Types of Barriers Addressed in 2006



Some examples of the barriers removed in 2006 included:

- The Transportation and Works Department addressed *Technological* and *Physical* barriers by installing audible traffic control signals and by installing new and replacement pads at bus stops.
- The Planning and Development Services Department addressed *Physical*, *Architectural* and *Communicational* barriers by co-hosting a workshop with the Ontario Historical Society to assist heritage sites, museums and historical societies in reducing barriers and increasing accessibility.
- Corporate Communications addressed *Informational* and *Technological* barriers by using Humanist 970 font to print business cards and stationary, making it easier for persons with low vision to be able to identify and access regional staff communications and information.
- Corporate Services addressed *Physical* and *Architectural* barriers by installing new sliding hardware and handles on accessible washroom stall doors.

- The Community Services and Housing Department reviewed recommendations and took appropriate action to address *Policy/Practice* barriers in the Ontario Works appeal process making the process easier to understand and more effective for persons with disabilities.
- Finance addressed *Technological* barriers by implementing eight TTY machines at eight call centres to assist persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- Health Services addressed *Communicational* barriers in their Alternative Community Living brochures, pamphlets and service agreements by reviewing and revising them to ensure readability and improve communication between service providers, clients and caregivers.
- The York Regional Police continued to address *Physical* barriers in their Safety Village by making enhancements to accessibility at the site.

The initiatives in the 2006 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 Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan

The Region's Accessibility Plans are developed by the ODA Staff Committee. This interdepartmental committee meets regularly and works to ensure that their department's ODA commitments are planned and implemented successfully. Membership includes:

- Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Chair (Community Services and Housing)
- Jeffrey Abrams (Corporate Services)
- Tom Appleby (Finance)
- Lina Bigioni (Regional Chair's Office)
- Bev Cassidy-Moffatt (Corporate Services)
- Barry Crowe (Corporate Services)
- Alan Davidson (Finance)
- Lois Davies (Community Services and Housing)
- Marc Gallant (Office of the Chief Administrative Officer)
- Lisa Gonsalves (Community Services and Housing)
- Don Gordon (Transportation and Works)
- Eric Gupta (Planning and Development Services)
- Joy Hulton (Corporate Services)
- Robert Hunn (Transportation and Works)
- John Jacob (Corporate Services)
- Martha McBurnie (Community Services and Housing)
- Irene McNeil (Transportation and Works)

- Sylvia Patterson (Community Services and Housing)
- Val Sequeira (Finance)
- Lizuarte Simas (Transportation and Works)
- Darwin Trojan (York Regional Police)
- Gabe Tropea (Community Services and Housing) and
- Marilyn Woolhead (Health Services)

The development of the Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan, as directed by Regional Council, has been integrated into the Region's 2007 business and planning process. Each regional department, including the York Regional Police, developed a departmental accessibility plan in consultation with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC), which outlines the initiatives that the department would take in 2007 to identify, remove and prevent barriers in its core businesses.

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

In keeping with its legislated mandate, the YRAAC (2003-2006) played a key role in the development and implementation of the Region's accessibility plans. The term of this YRAAC ended in November 2006 (concurrent with the term of Regional Council). The Committee was 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 included in the 2006 Plan required the YRAAC's direct input. In 2006, the YRAAC:

- Participated in the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) workshop hosted by The Regional Municipality of York.
- Participated in a "Making Ontario's Heritage Accessible Workshop" hosted jointly by the Ontario Historical Society and The Regional Municipality of York.
- Recommended that Regional Council recognize National Accessibility Awareness Week, which was subsequently endorsed by Regional Council in May 2006.
- Participated in a breakfast meeting hosted by Stouffville's Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- The YRAAC Chair and one committee member were interviewed about accessibility issues on the local cable TV network.
- Provided feedback on the Region's new accessible meeting and multiple format guidelines.
- Provided feedback on York Region's Mobility Plus revised application form.

YRAAC members have reviewed and endorsed the initiatives that are included in *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan*. Regional staff presented the department accessibility plans to the YRAAC at two meetings held in November

2006. 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 2007 draft plan and corresponding staff recommendations and responses.

Council recently appointed a new YRAAC (2007-2010), and throughout 2007 this new committee will participate in a number of events and implementation activities related to the 2007 Plan.

4.2.2 Themes included in *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Annual Accessibility Plan*

As in previous plans, each departmental initiative to identify, remove and prevent barriers in 2007 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 the Region.
- Making Regional Services More Accessible.
- Making it Easier to Participate in Regional Government.
- Changing Attitudes and Raising Awareness.

4.2.3 Highlights of the 2007 Plan – *Towards Accessibility*

The 2007 Plan continues to find and remove barriers in all regional programs and services to enhance accessibility and build on the foundation set in past plans. As the emphasis in the 2006 Plan was to continue to remove barriers, this year's plan will move the Region further towards accessibility.

The 2007 Plan includes a total of 83 accessibility planning initiatives (28 Barriers Identified and 55 Barriers to be Addressed) from across all regional departments, including the York Regional Police. Some initiatives included in the 2007 Plan are:

- The **Community Services and Housing`Department**, through Housing York Inc., will build seven dedicated units at Tom Taylor Place for households with members who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing enhancing their ability to better integrate into their community. The use of cheque inserts as a communication tool to Ontario Works clients will be reviewed and changes to increase accessibility will be made based on the findings of a review completed in 2006.
- **Corporate Communications** will create a plan to address accessibility issues on the Region's web pages which will include the use of a centralized telephone service to assist those having difficulty with accessing information on the Region's web site.

- The **Finance Department** will support Corporate Communications to investigate new technologies to make the Region's web site more accessible.
- **Corporate Services** will redesign the building directory in the Great Hall of the Administrative Centre to be mobile and more clearly legible; and install power operators on the Council Chamber doors. The accessible washrooms located in the South Service Centre will be renovated to include no touch faucets, automatic flush toilets, better lighting and clearer signage.
- **Health Services** will renovate the Newmarket Health Centre to update the exiting signage system and will install a power door operator in the common washroom. To include persons with disabilities in the Health Services Department's emergency planning process, the department will consult with both the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and the Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) on emergency planning.
- **Planning and Development Services** will continue to improve accessibility to Geomatic maps and products by creating the maps in Adobe Acrobat 6.0 to be compatible with the use of navigation, text-to-speech and mouse-less keyboards.
- **Transportation and Works**, YRT Mobility Plus Service will increase accessibility by introducing a 24-hour advance day-trip booking process. York Region Transit will launch the pilot of its newly developed Travel Training Program targeted at seniors and persons with disabilities to develop the skills and confidence to use conventional transit. Pedestrian push buttons on traffic signal poles are being relocated to make them more accessible for persons who use a wheelchair or scooter and audible pedestrian signals for use by persons who are blind or have low vision are being installed at some crossings throughout the Region.
- **York Regional Police** will partner with the Canadian Hearing Society to raise awareness among officers and staff of issues that affect persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. An in-house DVD will be developed, along with a media marketing campaign to promote relations between police and citizens who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing and a York Regional Police member who is deaf, deafened or hard of hearing will be appointed to the York Regional Police Equity Advisory Committee.

4.3 Release Strategy for the 2007 Plan

The ODA specifically states that municipal annual accessibility plans must be made available to the public. Upon Council approval of *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan*, the plan will be posted on the Region's website.

It is recommended that copies of *Towards Accessibility: York Region's 2007 Accessibility Plan* 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 a survey which can be mailed in or completed online to enable people to submit comments throughout the year.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Regional Council has taken a strategic approach to accessibility planning that is grounded in Vision 2026. The Region's accessibility planning achievements have supported the Region's vision and principle of providing programs, services and facilities that are accessible to York Region's residents.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Despite the many accessibility initiatives planned, there are no new costs associated directly with accessibility planning. Many initiatives included in the 2007 Accessibility Plan 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. Two prime examples are the purchase of buses for the conventional bus fleet, which like most modern buses have excellent accessibility features, and service improvements to the York Region Mobility Plus Services. These previously planned transit improvements along with other improvements to roads and renovations to long-term care facilities form part of the normal course doing business and represent approximately 87% of the total \$27.2 million in costs attributed to accessibility planning initiatives in the 2007 Accessibility Plan. The remaining 13% of costs will be funded by the Province of Ontario for transit and health care initiatives. The costs for initiatives have been included in the proposed 2007 Departmental Budgets.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The YRAAC and regional staff have established 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

As outlined in this report, The Regional Municipality of York continues to move towards accessibility through the creation and implementation of its annual accessibility plans. While responding to the needs of our residents in a planned and thoughtful way, we have gained much experience in the area of accessibility. The Region integrates its accessibility plans into its business practices and processes and into the everyday delivery

of its services. This type of planning supports York Region's aim to build strong, caring and safe communities that reflect the kind of communities our residents want.

As the Region enters its fourth year of accessibility planning, with a new Accessibility Advisory Committee and the expected release of standards of accessibility under the AODA, we will continue to achieve even greater accessibility in our programs, services and facilities.

For more information on this report contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Director of the Policy and Program Support Services Branch in the Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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