

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
April 16, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

York Region's 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan

1. Recommendations

1. Council approve the York Region 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (Attachment 1).
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee, York Regional Police Services Board and local municipalities for their information.

2. Summary

This report recommends Council approve Attachment 1, the 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (Plan) for York Region and York Regional Police. Under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (the Act), York Region must review and update its multi-year accessibility plan at least once every five years.

Key Points:

- York Region and York Regional Police prepare one combined multi-year accessibility plan and work together to implement and report compliance with the Province's accessibility legislation. Council approves the Plan on behalf of both organizations
- A multi-year accessibility plan outlines strategies and actions to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities in programs, services and facilities offered and run by York Region and York Regional Police
- The most recent multi-year accessibility plan for York Region and York Regional Police was approved by Council in [November 2015](#)
- The proposed 2020 to 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan (Attachment 1) updates and replaces the Plan approved by Council in 2015

3. Background

Ontario's law requires accessibility planning

The Province's vision is to make Ontario accessible by 2025. To support achievement of this objective, the Act is in place to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities. The Act sets out accessibility standards for private and public organizations in the areas of Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation, Design of Public Spaces and Customer Service which are combined to form the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* (Regulation). The [Act and its Regulation](#) also include compliance and reporting requirements.

The Regulation requires designated public sector organizations (including municipalities) and other large organizations with 50 or more employees to:

- Establish, implement, maintain and document a multi-year accessibility plan which outlines the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities in its programs, services and facilities and meet requirements under the legislation
- Develop it in consultation with an accessibility advisory committee and people with disabilities
- Make it available to the public
- Prepare and post annual status reports
- Review and update it at least once every five years

Accessibility planning supports the Region's vision of strong, caring and safe communities

York Region is home to nearly 1.2 million people of all backgrounds. According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disabilities, approximately one in five York Region residents aged 15 and over (or 18%) has at least one type of disability. Accessibility means giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate in everyday life.

Creating a community that is welcoming, inclusive and accessible for everyone aligns with the goals set out in Regional strategies and policies including *Vision 2051*, *Regional Official Plan, 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan - From Vision to Results*, and the Inclusion Charter for York Region.

York Region met legislated accessibility requirements in partnership with York Regional Police and with advice from the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee

York Region and York Regional Police have jointly developed plans and implemented actions to achieve legislative compliance with the Act since 2010 when the first requirements under the Act became law. York Region is the compliance lead for both organizations, and so Council approves the Plan on behalf of both York Region and York Regional Police.

Since 2010, over 100 accessibility requirements have been implemented across all departments. Accessibility planning in both organizations is currently guided by the multi-year accessibility plan approved by Council in November 2015. This proposed 2020 Plan updates and replaces the 2015 Plan. This 2020 Plan includes actions over the next three years; the end date coincides with the term of York Region's current Strategic Plan. It will be updated in 2023 to align with the new term of Council. Annual status reports highlight accomplishments by York Region and York Regional Police in delivering on the Plan; they can be accessed at york.ca/accessibility.

Accessibility planning and implementation at York Region and York Regional Police are guided and supported by a Council-appointed accessibility advisory committee, as required under the Act. Members of York Region's accessibility advisory committee come from different backgrounds, represent all nine local municipalities, and are [appointed](#) for a term concurrent with Council.

4. Analysis

The Plan sets out actions to meet legislated requirements

The proposed Plan organizes objectives and actions under the five standards and the set of general requirements in the Regulation. These objectives and most actions were approved in the last Council approved Plan, and the proposed Plan builds on, and adds to, these actions. The following provides a description of each standard and the general requirements, with examples of actions:

- **Information and Communication** – Create, provide and receive information and communications in ways that are accessible to people with disabilities. Examples include providing accessible formats and communication supports upon request and ensuring feedback processes are accessible
- **Employment** – Incorporate accessibility practices across all stages of employment. Examples include providing accommodations during the recruitment, assessment and the selection processes and supporting employees with disabilities in the workplace
- **Transportation** – Make it easier to move around the Region by considering the accessibility needs of people with disabilities. Examples include providing safe storage and handling of mobility aids and automated electronic pre-boarding and on-board announcements for passengers on public transportation. These requirements are not applicable to York Regional Police who do not provide public transportation services
- **Design of Public Spaces** – Make regional public spaces more accessible. Examples include providing forest trails that are accessible to all users and accessible pedestrian signals for safer crossing at intersections
- **Customer Service** – Provide accessible customer service to people with disabilities. Examples include mandatory accessible customer service training for all employees and providing notice of temporary service disruptions

- **General Requirements** – Implement actions to enhance accessibility across the organization. Examples include using the corporate Accessibility Policy to guide the Region’s work, providing employee training on the Regulation and including accessibility criteria in purchases

Most actions in the Plan are already in effect and part of regular business practices.

The Plan includes strategy to comply with new requirements for websites and web content

The Regulation requires compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines is an international standard for making websites and web content accessible to a broader range of users with disabilities. Levels set under the guidelines denote technical checkpoints in making websites progressively more accessible. New and significantly refreshed websites must currently conform to Level A, which includes:

- Text descriptions of images so users with vision disabilities can understand what the image represents
- Web content that can be changed into large print so a user can read the content with ease

Both York Region and York Regional Police are compliant with this requirement.

By January 1, 2021, York Region and York Regional Police are required to ensure all websites and web content conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA which builds on the checkpoints of Level A, including:

- Headings and labels that help users navigate and find content with minimal barriers
- Colour-contrast of 3:1 on navigational graphics to help users with vision disabilities

The proposed Plan includes a strategy to achieve Level AA by January 1, 2021. York Region and York Regional Police have already assessed multiple websites and work plans have been developed to meet and maintain compliance. Progress will be reported in annual status reports.

Continuous quality improvement actions are included in the Plan to ensure programs, services and facilities continue to be accessible to everyone

While not legally required to include continuous quality improvement in the Plan, York Region and York Regional Police have traditionally included related actions. The Plan includes reviewing compliance processes for requirements of the Act which have been implemented in the past to identify improvements in practices and processes and ensure our approach remains current. For example, York Region’s Accessible Customer Service Guidelines were recently reviewed and updated to help employees best serve customers with disabilities and the mandatory “Creating an Accessible York Region” training module was refreshed. Reviews of processes for procurement and emergency response plans for employees are currently underway.

Under the Plan, York Region and York Regional Police will continue to systematically review compliance processes and conduct accessibility reviews of facilities in consultation with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee. The review will identify alignments with Regional strategies, such as the Seniors Strategy which strives to help our aging population age in place. Updates on continuous quality improvement initiatives will be included in the annual status reports.

The Plan was developed in consultation with people with disabilities and members of the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Act requires that the multi-year accessibility plan be developed, reviewed and updated in consultation with people with disabilities and an accessibility advisory committee. Development of the proposed Plan was informed by consultation with these groups through three public consultations, website posting (over 180 visits), social media (over 8500 interactions), an online survey and consultation with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Accessibility legislation and standards are in a constant state of review and resulting amendments may require updates to the Plan

Standards under the Act must be reviewed by the Province of Ontario five years after coming into force. Review of the Customer Service Standards was completed by the Province in 2016. The proposed Plan addresses this update.

Reviews for three other standards (Employment, Transportation, and Information and Communications) have also been completed, however amendments are pending. The mandated review of the Design of Public Spaces is anticipated in the near future.

The Act itself must be independently reviewed every three years. The most recent review was completed in 2019 by the Honourable David C. Onley. His report to the Minister of Accessibility and Seniors may result in changes to the Act and its Regulation in the future. In addition, two new regulatory standards are under development - Health Care and Education.

York Region and York Regional Police will monitor, review and respond to any amendments and will bring forward any required amendments to the Plan.

5. Financial

Accessibility planning is integrated with the Region's business planning and budget process and actions are completed using existing staff resources and approved operating budgets.

6. Local Impact

This proposed Plan supports creating inclusive communities, a common goal shared with all organizations that have endorsed the Inclusion Charter for York Region, including all of the Region's nine local municipalities. Under the Act, each local municipality is also required to

develop a multi-year accessibility plan outlining activities it will undertake to prevent and remove barriers to accessibility for its own programs, services and facilities.

As part of the implementation of the Plan, staff will continue to work together with local municipal counterparts to share information, best practices and resources. Collaborative efforts with and through local municipal accessibility advisory committees and the Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group (comprised of local municipalities, York Regional Police, school boards, hospitals, local organizations and agencies) will also be undertaken.

7. Conclusion

The Plan meets York Region's legislated requirements for accessibility planning and affirms the Region's commitment to meet the accessibility needs of people with disabilities so that all people may have access to Regional programs, goods, services and facilities in a way that respects their dignity and independence. The Plan will be updated in 2023 to align with the next term of Council and meet the legislated requirement to be reviewed and updated at least every five years. Annual status reports outlining the progress of actions will also be prepared and posted.

For more information on this report, please contact Joseph Silva, Director, Strategies and Partnerships, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 74182. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Katherine Chislett**
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**
Chief Administrative Officer

March 19, 2020
Attachment (1)
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