

**ACCESSIBILITY PLAN**  
**CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP**  
**OF EAST HAWKESBURY**

**September 30, 2003**

This plan shall be reviewed on an annual basis to identify, remove and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) is to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers encountered in some areas throughout the Province. To this end, the ODA mandates that each municipality prepare an annual accessibility plan.

This document submits a plan for a two year period (2003-2005), and has been drafted by the Township of East Hawkesbury Accessibility Advisory Committee. The Township states its commitment to the review of this plan on an annual basis, to assess the measures taken during the first year and to identify those to be implemented during the following year to identify, remove and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities.

This report outlines the measures taken in the past as well as those to be taken during the next two years to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility encountered by persons with disabilities who use the facilities and services of the Township of East Hawkesbury. This year, the Council stated its commitment continuing improvement of access to locals, facilities and services to all members of the community. We have sought the participation of persons with disabilities toward the implementation and assessment of the accessibility and service delivery plan.

## THE WILL TO LIVE TOGETHER

Anyone can experience a temporary or permanent reduction in mobility due to disease, accident, pregnancy or age. An accessible environment is beneficial to all and brings more security and comfort to everyone.

Thoughtful greeting and a few accommodation modifications allow the delivery of quality services to most persons with disabilities, amongst whom senior citizens with mobility restriction, hearing loss or visual impairment.

**Inclusion** means **inclusion in all circumstances**.

As public workers, we must not only consider responding to the needs of resident voters within our riding, but also to those of any visitor, volunteer, employee, inspector, consultant, fellow public worker from another level of government who could some day knock on the door.

Data from Statistics Canada in 1991 show that 54% of the 4.2 millions Canadians who stated having a functional limitation had in fact some form of mobility restriction. The same number experienced reduced agility whereas 30% and 14% of them stated having a hearing loss or visual impairment respectively. These people are consumers, workers, students, artists. Let's take full advantage of their involvement in our community. Above all, let us not neglect the integration of the 7% of those who stated having speech impairment as well as the 30% of those having cognitive impairment, learning difficulties or mental health problems. Let's eradicate patronizing attitudes, prejudice, neglect, contempt and incomprehension from our society.<sup>1</sup>

The Employment Equity Act requires not only identical treatment of all persons but also special measures and accommodation suited to the differences. The rights spelled out in the Human Rights code of Ontario provide for the right to equal treatment with regard to services, goods, housing and facilities for persons with disabilities. The Ontario Human Rights Commission rules on complaints concerning refusal to give access to a specific service or facility due to disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Data pulled in July 2003 of the publication of Statistic Canada « Canadians with disabilities (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics profile series) » on the web site <http://www.stat.ca/english/IPS/Data/85F0033MIE2001002.htm>

Protected by legal status, the person with disabilities does not know exclusion but only **one side of the world**.<sup>2</sup> Let's modify this situation by integrating inclusion into our generic skills.

## **Accessibility**

**Accessibility** is not a simple question of equipment; it is most important to show ***our commitment to live together***.

Accessibility in the workplace includes "...the opportunity to use the main door to enter an office and work," Here is a comment from a member of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Condition of Persons with Disabilities, during discussions in 1996 and 1997. Of course, accessibility promotes inclusion of all residents and integration means all the services must be available under the same terms and conditions for everyone within the community. Let's show open-mindedness and comprehension by accommodating all facilities so that, for instance, when someone uses a wheelchair, he may use the main entrance like anyone else.

Let's make sure already existing fully accessible services allow the person with a functional limitation to use them without having to personally take measures to be granted the permission to use them. The disability is always "situational". The person using a wheelchair and living in a fully accessible environment will not be disabled because he will be independent with regards to his activities. If there exists no fully accessible material for a given activity, he finds himself in a situation of disability because he must depend on the good will of others to take part in the said activity.

It also means to be able to go to places where one wishes to go, to get in through the front door, to be greeted with respect, with no patronizing attitude or misconstruction, to have the opportunity to communicate and to benefit from a professional attitude on the part of interested listeners who deliver information and services in an effective way.

Accessibility **is global**. It covers all aspects of life including services, programs, information, documents, communication, employment, recreation, travelling, culture, professional opportunities, education, housing, health and welfare.

Provision must be made for access to a companion animal, adequate facilities for said animal, rest areas for the person having a physical

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<sup>2</sup> This reflection is pulled from the texte « Exclusion et fait de société – La scène de l'ordre moral : du rôle de l'aparté » from Pascal Doriguzzi, Doctor in politic science at the 10<sup>th</sup> conference of M.A.I.S. in May 1996..

limitation, a short distance to reception, a railing along the way, larger openings and hallways, counters, bulletin boards and commodities such as a telephone in a lower position, larger characters on signs.

Seats placed in strategic positions shall be appreciated by many.

Let's think about it when designing different environments and let's remove barriers from those already existing.

What about the emergency procedures of our building? Have we taken into consideration the different means of communication during emergency or evacuation circumstances? The person with a profound hearing loss will not hear the audible alarm whereas the person with a visual impairment may be bumped about because he will not rush while people proceed to an evacuation. On the other hand, the person with restricted mobility will not be able to leave certain buildings with fire exits equipped with stairs. We should make sure these persons have full knowledge of the exact location of the fire exits, fully accessible of course, as well as of safety procedures. It is recommended to advise staff of the presence of any person in need of special warning and/or help in case of evacuation.

*Let's picture ourselves...*

- ❖ *riding a bicycle on a surface covered with soft sand.*
- ❖ *or with the sound of an emergency alarm in our ears, having to get to a board to read instructions but being unable to make them out because of a bright glare directly on the written material.*
- ❖ *In addition, how would we feel seeing a whole gathering of euphoric people rushing toward a common direction and being unable to figure the reason of such precipitated motion because we could not hear the announcement?*

## **WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES?**

They need to be informed on the accessibility of places and equipments they will meet. This information must be clear, precise and trustworthy to allow them to decide whether or not they need help to use a structure or a service.

They know better than anyone else their capacities and their limitations; they will express their needs. If a person with disabilities is accompanied, we must speak directly to him. Some persons have difficulties of communication; this does not mean they have difficulties of understanding.

A disability may be visible (tremors, use of a wheelchair); it may also be invisible (hearing loss, visual impairment, light cognitive impairment, diabetic or cardiac condition). Let's stay tuned; they are for real.

Motor skills troubles may indicate total or partial mobility problems and sometimes communication difficulties. Some people may have difficulty controlling their movements and expressing themselves. Despite these disabilities, their cognitive capacities are in no way altered. Persons with a motor disability may use a wheelchair, a cane, crutches or a walker. The accommodation of the place must provide for ease of movement with angles of rotation compatible with wheelchairs as well as absence of stairs.

Situations where disabilities become apparent for persons with a hearing loss wearing hearing aids are background noises (music, fans, wind), being in a group situation, brouhaha. When speaking to a person with a hearing loss, one must talk to him face to face without raising one's voice but pronouncing slowly, standing where he can be seen clearly (not in front of a window) in a clear spot, without glare.

When one meets a person with a visual impairment, one must introduce himself and warn him when he decides to leave. One must remember to warn him of barriers, including the dimension of height, providing bearings and offering to read written information. If one offers to accompany him, he shall offer to guide him by taking his elbow. If one indicates a seat to him, he must place his hand on the back of the seat. In a stairway, one shall warn the person with a visual impairment upon reaching the first as well as the last step.

Many senior citizens have poor eyesight. Quality lighting as well as visual contrasts will promote their independence.

The person with cognitive impairment experiences difficulties of understanding and has a hard time taking decisions. It is recommended to pay attention, to speak clearly and simply, using affirmations as much as possible, to remain simple and concrete as well as to avoid lengthy explanations. One can also propose to read pertinent information and explain it to him.

## **POINTS OF INTEREST ABOUT THE MUNICIPALITIES**

Situated near the Quebec border, the Township of East Hawkesbury has a lot to offer its residents and visitors. Midway between Ottawa and Montreal, accessible by County Road 17 and Highway 417, it is an agricultural region and a tourist attraction.

Chute-à-Blondeau is a small picturesque village situated on the Ottawa River. It has its own wharf and is bordered west by the Town of Hawkesbury and east by the Voyageur Provincial Park. Situated on the Golf Club Road which is accessible by county road no.17 and county road no.4, the Hawkesbury Golf and Curling club offers many leisure hours to our residents and visitors. If you skirt the river further east, you will reach the village of Pointe Fortune where you will find Carillon dam and the Macdonell-Williamson house classified as a heritage site.

St-Eugene is the heart of the Township. Surrounded by productive farmland, St-Eugene provides all the services of a prosperous village which offers a warm welcome to visitors.

Last but not least, Ste-Anne de Prescott borders the south side of the Township. This village, which is more than a hundred years old, is very beautiful and lets you catch a glimpse of a past era.

## **STATEMENT OF THE VISION OF THE CORPORATION**

The Corporation of the Township of East Hawkesbury supports the right of all persons with disabilities to independent living as much as possible, the principle of equal opportunity and the right to fully participate in all aspects of life.

We are all aware of the importance of the realization of this vision. Persons with disabilities make a significant contribution toward the well-being of their neighbours, their community and their province. Optimisation of everyone's potential makes winners of us all.

Therefore, the Township of East Hawkesbury states its commitment to cooperate with its citizens and to work on a continuing basis to build a region where persons with disabilities shall not have to cope with barriers and where respect and equality shall exist.

## **COMMITMENT OF THE TOWNSHIP OF EAST HAWKESBURY TOWARD ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING**

The Township council gave the mandate to create an Accessibility Advisory Committee as follows:

The Township council states its commitment to:

- improve on a continuing basis accessibility to buildings, facilities and services for persons with a functional limitation;
- ensure quality services to all members of the community with some form of disability.

The Township council authorized Le Phenix in collaboration with the Accessibility Advisory Committee to prepare an action plan which will ensure the Township will respect its commitment towards persons with disabilities.

## **ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

In the spring of 2003, in consultation with Township Council members, Mr. Michel Lalonde, mayor of the Township of East Hawkesbury, gave the mandate to create an Accessibility Advisory Committee. The mission of this committee is to:

- identify the barriers to the accessibility of persons with disabilities who use the facilities, regulations, policies , programs, practices and services within the county.
- produce a list of facilities, rules, policies, programs, methods and services that could or would constitute a barrier for persons with a functional limitation.
- identify, remove and prevent barriers encountered for the next two years.
- advise a means to eliminate or prevent these barriers.
- 
- submit a report on these activities.

## **INITIATIVES CONCERNING THE REMOVAL OF BARRIERS**

To identify adequately barriers to accessibility with which persons with disabilities have to cope, the Council called upon the services of Le Phenix, a community development organization for persons with disabilities in the United Counties of Prescott and Russell.

The organization assists the Municipality in the application of Ontarians with Disabilities Act in relation to the following tasks:

- identification of initiatives undertaken by the Corporation in previous years to remove and prevent barriers;
- consultation of work teams from various departments;
- assessment of environmental barriers in various sectors;
- make out a list of barriers to accessibility of persons with disabilities in county services, facilities, programs, policies, etc.;

## WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY?

Accessibility is the assurance persons with disabilities may travel to physical locations where special measures have been put in place and where accommodations are adapted to differences, of a mobility, auditive, cognitive, intellectual, visual or mental nature.

It is also the possibility to communicate without barriers with municipal services. Special equipment shall ensure this situation.

It is tolerance and understanding as part of a thoughtful greeting.

Moreover, it is the right to equal treatment for everyone.

Upon assessing accessibility of physical locations, the possibility of the presence of employees, visitors, public workers and consultants with a functional limitation must be taken into consideration.

Do we understand adequately all functional limitations with which a person with disabilities may have to cope?

- Mobility restriction is the best adequately identified, maybe the most visible;
- Let's think about persons with reduced agility which means, for instance, having difficulty holding an object in one's hand.
- Let's think about those with a visual impairment. They may travel wherever they wish but are we aware of the difficulties they have to cope with during these travels?
- Persons with a hearing loss will not hear adequately information they require.
- Tolerance and thoughtfulness are appropriate when greeting a person with a cognitive impairment.
- Finally, we must be aware of the needs of persons with invisible impairments. To rest, the person living with fibromyalgia will need a bench placed at a shorter distance than another person while we will have to show tolerance and utilize various methods to present information to a person with an attention deficit. Deference toward a person with mental health problems is most appropriate.

## **METHODOLOGY OF IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS**

The Accessibility Advisory Committee utilized different methods of identification of barriers.

A letter has been sent to some citizens to ask them to submit their concerns on barriers to accessibility of persons with disabilities to facilities and services.

Personal consultations by phone were also made with members of the community.

Through a press release in the local newspaper, the population was asked to identify the barriers encountered by citizens with a functional limitation when they call upon their services and to submit recommendations.

Le Phenix and Accessibility Advisory Committee members assessed the accessibility of all facilities and services of the Municipality.

## **SUMMARY OF INFORMATION GATHERED THROUGH PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

During the different consultations with the Township of Hawkesbury East citizens, the following barriers were identified:

- the lack of respect for reserved parking areas for persons with disabilities;
- the uneven areas on the sidewalks and the lack of ramps for access to public sidewalks
- lack of housing needs of persons according to their functional limitations;
- absence of specific statements on special needs of persons with disabilities within the Township's different policies and regulations, special events, etc.;
- absence of transportation services adapted for needs of persons with disabilities;
- lack of inaccessibility of some private enterprises;
- inaccessibility to some of the municipal services;

- lack of awareness on the part of the personnel to take into consideration the needs of persons with disabilities;

## **SUMMARY OF INFORMATION GATHERED THROUGH PERSONNEL CONSULTATION**

The accessibility of visitors in wheelchairs, or of small stature unable to reach the counter at the Township of East Hawkesbury was pointed out as inadequate.

Following a consultation with employees of the Township of East Hawkesbury, it appears that there is a need to provide employees with training on realities experienced by persons with disabilities in order to provide them with services suitable to their needs, to guarantee a favourable environment such as lowering background noise, ensure equal access to information on the Township web site, variety of ways to relay information such as telephone service to assist deaf people calling for information.

We should consider the possibility of hiring/or the participation of volunteers with disabilities at locations where municipal services are offered. Also, we must not neglect the accessibility of visitors in wheelchairs, or of small stature unable to reach the counter at different municipal offices/services when they visit these outlets to obtain information on matters of interest to them. Even if the garages are not open to the public, we must foresee that they are accessible to a member of the work team, a person from another municipal service or private enterprise who may have a physical disability and whose expertise may be required at that particular site.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON INITIATIVES TO IDENTIFY, REMOVE AND PREVENT BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY**

In the past, the Township of East Hawkesbury undertook initiatives to take into consideration the needs of persons with disabilities such as:

- an accessibility ramp was built a while ago at the entrance of the townhall and council chamber at 5151 County road #14 in St-Eugene;
- parking signs reserved for persons with disabilities were installed at the town hall parking lot at the Centre d'Action in Ste-Anne de Prescott and Recreation Centre in Chute-a-Blondeau, both community centres;
- a request was made to the Trillium Foundation for financial assistance in order to facilitate accessibility to the washrooms for persons with disabilities at the Centre d'Action of Ste-Anne de Prescott;
- the Centre récréatif of Chute-à-Blondeau was built according to the building code accessibility standards for persons with functional limitations;
- when sidewalks were built in the three villages, ramps were built on the sidewalks at street crossings to meet the needs of accessibility for persons with disabilities;

## **ACTION PLAN**

Throughout its two-year plan , the Township of Hawkesbury East shall study the following recommendations prepared by Le Phoenix and the Accessibility Advisory Committee:

- A. Study the accessibility to buildings, accommodations and municipal services assessment chart, to identify the priority of physical barriers to be removed, develop the strategies to remove them and determine their schedule targets on a two-year period. **Appendix 1.**
- B. Apply the Building Code accessibility standards and implement measures to ensure accessibility to all buildings in the municipality is according to the building code and to penalize those who are not.
- C. Adopt a policy setting accessibility criteria to buildings property of or rented by the municipality and also adopt the regulations needed to manage this policy.
- D. Undertake an environmental study to determine the percentage of the population living with a functional limitation in the municipality, their specific needs, the rate of participation of this sector of the population and the socio-economic impact of its full participation in the Township of East Hawkesbury.
- E. Implement facilities to include the person with disabilities in the development plans of the community to promote full participation.
- F. Study the feasibility of adaptation of municipal services to answer the needs of persons with functional limitations i.e. travel to meet the person.
- G. Introduce within the administration practices to ensure adequate greeting and a good level of service to all, such as making staff sensitive to the realities encountered by persons with disabilities and to the utilization of vocabulary appropriate to the condition of persons with disabilities in all verbal or written communications.
- H. Develop a policy to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the planning of all future municipal projects.
- I. Ensure the safety of persons with disabilities in building and public meeting places by implementing the means that answer to the needs of the disabled person such as silent doorbells and visual alerts.

- J. Introduce a policy to ensure all web sites of the different departments and projects of the Corporation are totally accessible to various special equipment used by citizens with a perceptual limitation.
- K. Ensure all municipal meetings and public consultations are accessible.
- L. Develop a municipal policy on road traffic and parking spaces which will:
  - i) authorize the creation and designation of parking spaces on public roads, municipal properties and private properties, for the exclusive use of vehicles in which a Parking Permit for the Disabled is posted, and all conformity with the Ontario Highway Traffic Act and Regulations;
  - ii) establish exemptions for parking restrictions for drivers of vehicles posting a Parking Permit for the Disabled in conformity with the Ontario Highway Traffic Act and Regulations;
  - iii) provide the mechanisms for the prevention of non-authorized use of the designated parking spaces and the application of exemptions;
  - iv) ensure easy access to parking spaces and their planning pursuant to the Highway Traffic Act;
  - v) order signs that conform (as of January 1, 2004, all signs must be replaced with most recent version of the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario and the revised Highway Traffic Act;
  - vi) that the by-law is updated regularly to meet the requirements of the amended laws that regulate Designated Parking for Persons with disabilities, the issuance of permits and their pertinent regulations: The Ontario Highway Traffic Act, the Municipal Act and the Ontario Building Code;
  - vii) refer to the fine-penalty of at least \$300.00 and up to \$5,000.00 on the guilty charge on a contravention pursuant to Section 322.(1) of the Municipal Act amended as per Section 29.(1) of 2001 Ontarians with Disabilities Act which foresees that whoever contravenes the measures undertaken to ensure reserved parking designated for vehicles which have posted the appropriate permits for persons with disabilities is held responsible for such infraction.

M. Develop a human resources policy which:

- 1) Shall ensure equal job access ;
- 2) shall meet the needs of persons with disabilities concerning accessibility, pursuant to the Human Rights Code of Ontario, where said needs relate to their job, provided they do not generate excessive costs or genuine health and safety hazards. The employer may not refuse to adapt the job for reasons of cost without taking into consideration outside sources of financing available, where such exist.
- 3) shall provide the Corporation to take all necessary steps to meet the particular needs of persons with disabilities as far as t where the interviews are to be held and the special accommodations to fill the offered position are concerned.
- 4) make sure municipal employees working in management or supervision become aware of the Human Resources Policy and do their best to abide by its requirements aimed at creating equal opportunity with regard to hiring and job maintenance of persons with disabilities;
- 5) shall include a provision whereby municipal employees must take part in training workshops on the realities encountered by persons with disabilities;
- 6) should the Corporation exclude a person with disabilities from its employment benefits plan, from its pension plan or fund or from a group insurance contract signed with an insurance company because in the opinion of the insurer, the person with disabilities represents a higher risk than the average person, the Corporation must provide payment of an indemnity equal to the contributions the Corporation provides for an employee with no disability, pursuant to the *Human Rights Code* of Ontario.

## **EXAMINATION AND MONITORING PROCEDURE**

The members of the Accessibility Study Group of the Corporation of the Township of Hawkesbury East shall meet occasionally to review progress.

The Municipality shall implement a compilation system to gather new recommendations and receive comments from the general public.

## **COMMUNICATION OF ACCESSIBILITY PLAN**

Copies of the Accessibility Plan shall be available upon request from the offices of the Township of East Hawkesbury. The Accessibility plan shall also be available on our web site.

Head Office address:	5151 County Road 14, P.O.Box 340 St-Eugene, Ontario K0B 1P0
Contact person:	Linda Rozon
Phone:	(613) 674-2170
E-mail address:	<a href="mailto:lrozon@easthawkesbury.ca">lrozon@easthawkesbury.ca</a>
Population :	3 242