

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN



LA CORPORATION DU / THE CORPORATION OF
CANTON DE **CHAMPLAIN** TOWNSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001, S.O. 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 accessibility plan and that it must be reviewed annually.

This plan was developed in 2003 by the Township of Champlain's Work Group for Accessibility in the Township of Champlain. Council is committed to the review of this plan on an annual basis to assess the measures taken and to identify steps to be taken in subsequent years to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could be encountered by persons with disabilities using the facilities and services of the Township of Champlain, whether they be members of the personnel, volunteers, elected or groups and members of the community at large.

CORPORATE VISION

The Corporation of the Township of Champlain supports the right of all persons with disabilities as much as possible, an independent lifestyle, the principle of equal opportunity and the right to fully participate in all aspects of community life.

As council members, 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.

Therefore, the Council of the Township of Champlain states its commitment to work with its citizens on a continuing basis to eliminate existing barriers for persons with disabilities and prevent the erection of any new ones.

COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING

Council is committed to:

- ▶ Improving accessibility to buildings, facilities and services for persons with a functional limitation;
- ▶ Ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities in the development and annual review of this plan;
- ▶ Ensuring quality services to all members of the community who live with disabilities.

Council will, in collaboration with the municipal Working Group for Accessibility, prepare an Action Plan to enable the Township to meet their commitments to persons with disabilities insofar as the planning for improvements or renovations of our buildings and municipal installations.

PROCESS

- ▶ Review past efforts made to remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities;
- ▶ Produce a list of facilities, policies, programs, methods and services to be examined;
- ▶ Outline measures to be initiated by the Township over the next two years to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities;
- ▶ Outline the means to be taken by the Township to make the accessibility plan available to the general public.

LIVING TOGETHER IN OUR COMMUNITY

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

A welcome greeting and a few modifications to facilities will enable the delivery of quality services to most persons with disabilities, such as mobility restriction, hearing loss or visual impairment.

We cannot consider only the needs of resident voters within our community, but also to those of visitors, volunteers, employees, inspectors, consultants, etc. who may visit our facilities. We must eradicate patronizing attitudes, prejudice, neglect, contempt and incomprehension from our approach to serving persons with disabilities.

The Employment Equity Act requires not only identical treatment of all persons but also special measures and accommodation suited to their disabilities. The Human Rights Code of Ontario provides 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.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is global. It is not a simple question of equipment but covers all aspects of life including services, programs, information, documents, communication, employment, recreation, travelling, culture, professional opportunities, education, housing, health and welfare. It is important that we demonstrate our commitment to live and work together.

A member of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Condition of Persons with Disabilities was quoted as saying “**Accessibility in the workplace includes the opportunity to use the main door to enter an office and work.**” Accessibility promotes inclusion of all residents and means all the services must be available under the same terms and conditions for everyone within the community.

Accessibility means:

- ▶ When someone uses a wheelchair or other mobility aid, he/she may use the main entrance like anyone else;
- ▶ Allowing a person with a functional limitation to use our facilities without having to personally take measures to be granted the permission to use them;
- ▶ Not being dependent on the good will of others to take part in the said activity;
- ▶ Being able to go to places where one wishes to go, 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;
- ▶ Access for a companion animal, adequate facilities for said animal;
- ▶ Rest areas for the person having a physical limitation such as seats placed in strategic positions;
- ▶ Railings, larger openings and hallways, counters, bulletin boards and facilities such as a telephone in a lower position, larger characters on signs;
- ▶ Clear indication of emergency exits and notification procedures that meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

EXPECTATIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The disabled person needs to be informed on the accessibility of places and equipment 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 tell you what they require. If a person with disabilities is accompanied by a caregiver, speak directly to the individual and not their caregiver. Some people may have difficulty communicating which does not mean they have difficulties 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). Be aware. These disabilities are real.

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. We must provide for ease of movement with angles of rotation compatible with wheelchairs as well as absence of stairs.

Persons with hearing impairments and wearing hearing aids may experience difficulty with background noises such as music, fans, wind, large group situations and so on. When speaking to a person with a hearing loss, one must look directly into their face and speak clearly, slowly but without raising one's voice and position yourself so that you can be seen clearly (not in front of a window), in a clear spot, without glare.

When greeting a person with a visual impairment, introduce yourself and advise the person before leaving him/her. Warn him/her of obstacles, including height, provide directions and offer to read written information. If you offer to accompany him/her, do so by first asking and then taking his/her elbow. When offering a seat, place his/her hand on the back of the seat. In a stairway, tell the person with a visual impairment when you arrive at the first as well as the last step.

Many senior citizens have poor eyesight. Quality lighting as well as visual contrasts will help them.

The person with cognitive impairment experiences difficulties of understanding and has a hard time making decisions. Pay close attention, speak clearly and simply, using affirmations as much as possible. Keep it simple and concrete and avoid lengthy explanations. Offer to read pertinent information and then explain it to him/her.

ACCESSIBILITY WORKING GROUP

The Township of Champlain's Accessibility Working Group first met in the spring of 2003. Council has mandated the following persons as members of this committee: Mayor Gary Barton, Clerk-Treasurer Robert Lefebvre, every department head and any other party that they may deem necessary to consult with.

Other organizations participating in this plan

Many other organizations working with disabled persons such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Services for Children and Adults of Prescott-Russell, Groupe Action and Le Phénix have in the past collaborated in the public consultation process.

Coordination

The Council of the Township of Champlain named Robert Lefebvre, Clerk-Treasurer, as the Coordinator of the Accessibility Working Group.

ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVES

The working group has taken the following initiatives:

- ▶ Identification of initiatives undertaken by the Corporation in previous years to remove and prevent barriers;
- ▶ Review of complaints, officially deposited or not, concerning barriers;
- ▶ Assessing municipal facilities for barriers to accessibility;
- ▶ Identifying barriers to persons with disabilities in county services, facilities, programs, policies, etc.;
- ▶ Consultation of groups of persons with disabilities;
- ▶ Consultation of work teams from various departments;
- ▶ Set time lines for the implementation of measures to remove identified barriers;
- ▶ Setting of specific and verifiable performance evaluation criteria;
- ▶ Identification of improvements achieved in matters of removal and prevention of barriers.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Township of Champlain has achieved several measurable way-points in its efforts to make the Township's facilities more accessible to persons with disabilities.

- ▶ Since 2003 any road work has included the addition of boots to sidewalks at intersections such as Main Street and High Street in Vankleek Hill.
- ▶ Recent renovations to Town Hall have taken accessibility into account during planning and construction.

PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

- ▶ Addition of a wheelchair ramp at the Champlain Public Library in Vankleek Hill (completion in 2007)
- ▶ Improved accessibility to the Building Department at Longueuil.

BACKGROUND ON INITIATIVES TO IDENTIFY, REMOVE AND PREVENT BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY

Since the creation of the Township of Champlain in January 1998, the Administrative Offices at 948 Pleasant Corner Road East have been renovated to include the reconstruction of a ramp to facilitate access the municipal offices. The addition of an extension to this building in 1999 to accommodate a municipal hall permitted the inclusion of an accessible washroom facility and second ramp as required by the Building Code.

An extension and major renovation of the former Vankleek Hill Town Hall has provided expanded accommodation for the municipal fire department as well as the United Counties of Prescott-Russell Land Ambulance Services. These facilities meet accessibility requirements.

All sidewalks built or repaired since 1998, in the villages of Vankleek Hill and L'Original, have had boots included in the design at all street corners to provide an access to the sidewalks for persons with disabilities.

A requirement for handicapped parking in front of the Chevaliers de Colomb building in L'Original was identified. County approval was obtained in November 2006 and the completion is scheduled for spring 2007.

METHODOLOGY OF IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS

During the initial development of this plan, the Accessibility Working Group utilized several different methods to identify barriers. A survey was sent to citizens asking them for their comments on barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities at the various municipal facilities or to services and activities. Municipal staff was also surveyed on the subject. Le Phénix was consulted by the Accessibility Work Group to evaluate the survey results. The documents, by-laws and policies of Council were reviewed by Le Phénix to assess them vis-à-vis the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC SURVEY RESULTS

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

- ▶ The lack of enforcement of bylaws covering use of parking spaces reserved for persons with disabilities;
- ▶ No fines for violators of these regulations;
- ▶ The uneven areas on the sidewalks and the lack of ramps for access to the public walkways;
- ▶ Lack of housing suitable for persons with disabilities and limited plans for developing new adapted units;
- ▶ Absence of specific statements on special needs of persons with disabilities within the Township's different policies and regulations such as the policies for personnel, special events, etc.;
- ▶ Absence of transportation services adapted for needs of persons with disabilities;
- ▶ Lack of accessibility to private enterprises;
- ▶ Inaccessibility to some of the municipal services;
- ▶ Lack of training for staff who serve persons with disabilities;
- ▶ Citizens also identified the lack of by-laws and the application of certain laws or regulations of the Government of Ontario. To some, it is important that the Government of Ontario review some of their policies and/or regulations in different departments of their ministries.

SUMMARY OF STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

Although staff felt that the buildings were accessible to persons with disabilities, they did identify some areas they felt needed improvement. Generally personnel felt that adequate service was provided to persons with disabilities. However, it was also pointed out that no training had been conducted and that they were not aware of policies on the subject.

There is a wide variety of methods with which to make information available, such as CD/diskettes, large lettering, audio cassettes, diagrams included with written information to ensure that persons with learning disabilities will understand the instructions, including safety instructions. We should plan for a telephone service to assist deaf people calling for information and for members of staff with hearing disabilities that may be answering these requests for assistance. Municipal employees should be informed of Relay-Bell services and learn sign language if need be. Training is also required to sensitize employees for future meetings with clients who may be accompanied by a guide dog. We should consider the possibility of hiring /or the participation of volunteers with disabilities at locations where municipal services are offered. We must not neglect the accessibility of visitors in wheelchairs, or of small stature unable to reach the counter at different municipal offices/services. 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.

It is unlikely that a disabled person will apply for a position with the Municipality if he/she feels that he/she will not be able to readily access the workplace.

ACTION PLAN

On a regular basis, the Council of the Township of Champlain shall review the following recommendations of the Accessibility Study Group:

- A- Study the 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 three-year period.
- B- Apply the Building Code accessibility standards and implement measures to ensure accessibility to all municipal buildings.
- C- Undertake a study to determine the percentage of our population living with a disability, their specific needs and respective functional limitations, the rate of participation of this sector of the population and the socio-economic impact of their full participation in the Township of Champlain. Implement facilities to include the person with disabilities in the development plans of the community to promote full participation.
- D- Adapt municipal service to answer to the needs of a person with functional limitations: ie: travel to meet the person at his residence.
- E- Promote a policy to ensure a proper level of service to all, by conducting training of staff on the realities encountered by persons with disabilities.
- F- Ensure the safety of persons with disabilities in buildings and public meeting places by the use of such devices as silent doorbells and visual alerts.
- G- Introduce a policy to ensure all web sites of the different departments and projects of the Township be totally accessible to various special equipment used by citizens with a perceptual limitation.
- H- Ensure all public meetings and consultations be accessible.
- I- Implement a *Designated Parking and Traffic Control for Persons With Disabilities* by-law:
 - 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, all in conformity with The Ontario Highway Traffic Act and Regulations;
 - ii) Establish exemptions to the 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 1st, 2004, all signs must be replaced with most recent version of the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario and the revised Highway Traffic Act;
 - vi) Revise the by-law on a regular basis 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) Allow for a 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 an infraction.

J- Develop a municipal policy for job equity:

- i) Shall ensure equal job access;
- ii) 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;
- iii) Require the Township to take all necessary steps to meet the particular needs of persons with disabilities as far as the site where the interviews are to be held and the special accommodations to fill the offered position are concerned;
- iv) Ensure municipal employees working in management or supervisory positions are aware of the Human Resource Policy and abide by its requirements aimed at creating equal opportunity with regard to hiring and job maintenance of persons with disabilities;
- v) Include a provision whereby municipal employees must take part in training workshops on the realities encountered by persons with disabilities;
- vi) Should the Municipality 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 Township of Champlain must provide payment of an indemnity equal to the contributions the Township 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 Champlain shall meet occasionally to review progress. Upon meeting, the Group shall remind its members of their role in the implementation of the plan.

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

The Corporation shall establish a system to receive recommendations and 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 Champlain or online at: www.champlain.ca.