

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell

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 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 corresponding to the period of the next mandate of the County Council members, i.e. a three-year period (2003-2006) and has been drafted by the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell Accessibility Advisory Committee.

This report outlines the measures taken in the past as well as those to be taken during the subsequent years to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility encountered by persons with disabilities who use the facilities and services of the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell.

The Council stated its commitment to 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 counties state their 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 subsequent years to identify, remove and prevent barriers to persons with disabilities.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee has identified several barriers to the accessibility of persons with disabilities. The initiatives included the assessment of material facilities, service delivery, policies on human resources, technologies, communication and of service to clients. The most important observations were made about the physical accessibility to certain services.

This report outlines the process by which the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell will identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities as follows:

- 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 assessed by the Corporation in 2004;
- Outline measures to be initiated by the Corporation in 2004, to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for persons with disabilities;
- Outline the means to be taken by the Corporation to make the accessibility plan available to the general public.

Description of the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell

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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, and 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, and 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.¹

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.

¹ Data taken from the July 2003 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**.² 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 limitation, a short distance to reception, a railing along the way, larger

² This reflection is taken from the text « 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 10th conference of M.A.I.S. in May 1996..

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 that 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 skill 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

The creation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell dates back to the middle 1700's when colonisation of the region started around the village of L'Original. In the latter 1790's, the County of Prescott as well as the County of Russell in the Upper Canada District were surveyed. Named in honour of Lieutenant-Governor Robert Prescott and Executive Council member Peter Russell respectively, the counties of Prescott and Russell became united in 1820.

The British nature of the counties began to change around the 1820's when French-speaking settlers were drawn by a growing lumber industry. This trend intensified in the 1840's when French-speaking farmers from Lower Canada used to farming methods similar to what took place in the lowlands of the lower St-Lawrence valley region bought land considered unproductive by English settlers. This influx of French-Canadians was greatly promoted by The Roman Catholic Church, which lobbied governments and worked hard at attracting settlers from the network of parishes of Western Quebec. By 1880, most of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell residents were French-speaking.

The United Counties of Prescott and Russell is governed by a two-tier system of municipal government i.e. an upper level (United Counties) and a local level (local municipalities).

The counties spread across an area of some 2,002 square kilometres, bordered west by the regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, east by the Quebec border, north by the Ottawa River and south by the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. Since January 1 1998, there are 8 local municipalities and the total local population as of 1997 was of 73,631 persons. According to their location, residents of Prescott and Russell can travel from home to downtown Ottawa, downtown Montreal or the U. S. border in some thirty minutes to one hour.

Some of the most outstanding features include the Ottawa and South Nation Rivers, the Larose Forest (one of the largest forest plantation in the country), the Voyageur provincial park, the Alfred bog (a wetland of international significance), large areas of privately-owned forest and the presence of Leda clay which can trigger highly destructive retrogressive landslides. The population is mainly concentrated in the eastern and western parts of the United Counties and both centres are joined by 2 main transportation corridors i.e. County Road 17 and Highway 417.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CORPORATION

Taxpayers in Prescott and Russell enjoy a variety of services for their financial contribution. The following is a summary of the municipal services provided across the United Counties.

General administration

The services of a general administration include functions essential to the good operation of the municipal government i.e. a political representation and administrative functions not assigned to any specific service.

Since in the United Counties the chief administrative officer is also the secretary of the council, services related to the record-office also fall under his responsibility. He is also responsible for computer systems and for services related to provincial offences.

Created in 1989, the Department of Computer Systems must ensure effective and trustworthy day-to-day operation of computer equipment owned by the counties and implement computer strategies for the Corporation. It is also responsible for maintaining and regulating databases supporting the application software used by the Counties.

As far as the provincial offences Office is concerned, the counties signed an agreement with the Ministry of the Attorney General on May 1 2000, to become municipal partner and assume responsibility for administrative functions, pursuit and support to the court concerning offences pursuant to the Provincial Offences Act.

Weed Inspection

Two inspectors, one for the Prescott sector and one for the Russell sector work in the summer time to make sure that all harmful weeds are destroyed, pursuant to the *Weed Control Act*.

Health Services

In Prescott and Russell, the upper level of government provides all health services. The service is provided through representation within the Hawkesbury General Hospital Foundation, the Montfort Hospital in Ottawa and at the Board District Health Council of Eastern Ontario. The Council also appoints two representatives to the Eastern Ontario Health Unit and the United counties contributes a significant amount toward the budget of this organisation.

Transportation

In Prescott and Russell, both levels of municipal government provide the road maintenance service. The counties are responsible for some 600 kilometres of road dedicated to high volume and high-speed traffic as well as over 50 bridges. The counties also maintain over 200 culverts and other structures. County roads are links between the provincial highway network and the local road network and are therefore of vital significance to the moving of goods and services across the counties.

Transportation services include maintenance and repair of road surfaces, road shoulders, road edges, bridges, culverts, surface drains and ditches as well as winter maintenance including road salt and sand application as well as snow removal. These services are provided by our 3 garages: the Cassburn garage serving the eastern area of the Counties, the Plantagenet garage serving County Road 17 and the central area, the Embrun garage serving the western area of the Counties.

Ontario Works

With the introduction of the Ontario Works program in 1996, most of the social assistance recipients in Ontario must now take part in some participation plan to be entitled to social assistance. Persons who receive social assistance but who are neither persons with disabilities nor senior citizens or single-parent heads of family must agree to provide services to their community and to perform active job searches for gainful employment.

Child Care Services

The child care services division includes several programs and services amongst which 5 distinct services:

- Glengarry Prescott Russell Early Years Centre
- Home Child Care Licensed Agency
- Integration Services
- Subsidies for Child Care
- LEAP Program

Social Housing

The Social Services Department is responsible for the management of public housing programs and for rent supplement programs. These programs include a portfolio of three hundred eleven (311) units owned by the manager and eighty-two (82) privately owned units.

The Social Services Department is also responsible for overseeing the financing and administration of the centralized waiting list for non-profit and federal programs comprising five hundred (500) and ninety (90) units respectively. In providing this service, the Department's goal is to provide affordable and suitable housing to persons eligible for rent-geared-to-income assistance.

Prescott and Russell Residence

The Prescott and Russell residence is a member of the public network of the Ontario Ministry of Health public institutions and is operated by the United Counties of Prescott and Russell.

The residence can house approximately 145 residents. Its goals are:

- Be a member of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care network of public institutions and to be operated by the United Counties of Prescott and Russell.
- Be for disabled adults, a housing and long-term care non-profit resource providing a safe environment and services in both official languages.
- Promote, awake and maintain residents' aspirations of self-fulfilment within their restrictions, always remaining sensitive to the pace, values, rights and beliefs of everyone.

Care and services to residents are ensured 24 hours a day and 7 days a week by 133 employees. Most of the staff belong to the nursing care department. Others work for the food service, cleaning and maintenance, building maintenance, activities and last of all, the administration. The supervision and the administrative staff are non-unionized. Two unions represent the other workers i.e. the CUPW in most cases and ONA for nurses.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MHLTC) ensures close to 60% of the financing of the residence operations. The remaining portion of operations revenue i.e. 33% is generated by cost of food and shelter charged

to residents. The United Counties assumes responsibility for the remaining portion.

City Planning and Economic Development

City planning services manage land use planning to enhance quality of life through innovative planning of land use that is sensitive to social needs, the economy and the natural environment.

This department includes 4 divisions i.e. City planning services, land division services, economic development services, management of the Larose Forest and the development of a geographic information system.

The city planning is presently implementing its first official plan adopted by the County Council in June 1999. The United Counties of Prescott and Russell is now authorized to approve plans of subdivision, amendments to the official plan and secondary plans. In addition, the department works with local municipalities in the preparation and processing of a wide range of development applications including site development plans, zoning bylaw amendments and minor exemptions. The department contributes to and/or manages the development and implementation of special studies.

The department is also responsible for the development, the maintenance and the networking of a geographic information system (GIS). GIS is a database of maps and tabular information for the counties as a whole and allows all departments to undertake spatial analyses with the degree of sophistication appropriate to their individual needs.

Finally, the department has the responsibility to promote the economic development in Prescott and Russell. Together with the business community and other local partners, the department's goal is to diversify and strengthen the local economy by focusing on our potential in matters of agriculture, manufacturing and industry, retail trade, professional services as well as tourism.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Department's mandate is to provide staff management to effectively and efficiently take advantage of existing human resources within the Corporation.

It is also responsible for provision of management expertise and support in matters of hiring, professional staff training, interpretation and implementation of provincial and federal legislation as well as internal administrative policies. In addition, it is responsible for the promotion of cooperation and positive working relationships between management and unions. The implementation, interpretation and negotiation of collective agreements also fall under the responsibility of the department. It also coordinates the efforts of employees and joint committees to promote health and safety in the workplace.

Finally, this department is responsible for the management of employees' files, payroll, OMERS Retirement Plan and group insurance plans.

Emergency Services

The Emergency Services Department officially began its activities on November 8, 1999. The main responsibilities of the department are:

- planning and coordination of the Emergency Measures Plan for the counties;
- the 9-1-1;
- land ambulance service;
- any other responsibility concerning emergency situations across the counties.

Emergency Measures Plan

The Emergency Measures Plan for the United Counties of Prescott and Russell was adopted in June 2000. The department also supports the local municipalities with the preparation and implementation of their respective plan.

9-1-1

The 9-1-1 system is operational across the counties since November 27, 2002. This service allows rapid communication with police, ambulance and fire departments.

Land Ambulance Service

With the restructuring of local services, the province transferred the financial and operational responsibilities of the land ambulance service to the counties on January 1, 2001. The counties are therefore responsible for providing this service and share its costs with the provincial government.

Automobile extrication

The counties signed an agreement with 4 local municipalities to provide automobile extrication services across the counties. The counties subsidise the program and costs are shared by the local municipalities. The costs for provision of these services are billed to the counties up to a maximum of \$750 per call.

Fire Protection

The counties adopted a bylaw establishing a mutual help system for fire fighting. This department is operated by the county fire coordinator who for provincial purposes is also District Deputy Fire Marshall. The adjacent municipalities of Cumberland and Osgood, (under the leadership of the fire coordinator of RMOC) Finch, Rosborough and Maxville (under the leadership of the fire coordinator of the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry) are also part of the counties program.

STATEMENT OF THE VISION OF THE CORPORATION

The Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell 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.

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. Optimisation of everyone's potential makes winners of us all.

Therefore, the County Council of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell 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 CORPORATION TOWARD ACCESSIBILITY PLANNING

The County Council states its commitment to:

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

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In the spring of 2003, in consultation with County Council members, Mr. Martial Levac, President of the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, gave the mandate to create an Accessibility Advisory Committee.

The mission of the Accessibility Advisory Committee is to advise the Corporation on the elaboration and application of an accessibility plan to meet the needs of the citizens of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, taking into consideration the needs of those with some form of deficiency. The Committee acts as a resource to assist the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell in the application of requirements provided, pursuant to the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*.

Among other items, the mandate of the Accessibility Advisory Committee includes:

- advise on the elaboration, the implementation and the efficiency of the Corporation's Accessibility Plan;
- express advice to the Council on issues related to buildings and services within the counties;
- guide the County Council and its different departments on issues related to policies, practices and programs of the Corporation concerning persons with a functional limitation;
- ensure the defence of the interests of persons with a functional limitation;
- inform the Council on the efficiency of policies and practices of the Corporation concerning persons with a functional limitation;
- monitor the evolution of procedures of elaboration and implementation of policies of the Corporation which affect the life of persons with a functional limitation;
- raise issues and make recommendations concerning policies and programs promoting equal accessibility to services for persons with a functional limitation;
- organize the distribution to persons with disabilities as well as to the general public of information on decisions by the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and

Russell;

- provide to persons with a functional limitation, to the community and to organizations the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns;
- inform the population of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell on aspects affecting persons with a functional limitation.

THE ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE CORPORATION OF THE UNITED COUNTIES OF PRESCOTT AND RUSSELL IS COMPOSED OF 6 PERSONS AMONGST WHICH :

- four persons with a functional limitation from the community sitting in an individual capacity;
- a mayor acting as liaison between the Council and the Committee;
- an employee of the Corporation.

MEMBERS OF THE ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Alain Lacelle,	President - Employee of the Corporation
Judith Parisien,	Resource Person and Member of the community
Francine Gougeon,	Member of the community
Trudy Stevens,	Member of the community
Guy St-Amour,	Member of the County Council
René P. Berthiaume,	County Council Member

COORDINATION

The Council appointed Ms. Anne Alain Lacelle responsible for liaison between the counties and the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

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 Phénix, a community development organization for persons with disabilities in the United Counties of Prescott and Russell.

The organization assists the counties 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;
- review of complaints (officially deposited or not) concerning barriers and consultation of groups of persons with disabilities;
- consultation of work teams from various departments;
- undertaking of assessment of environmental barriers in various sectors;
- compilation of a list of barriers to accessibility of persons with disabilities in county services, facilities, programs, policies, etc.;
- according to gathered data, the targeting of barriers on which the counties wish to work;
- identification of means and objectives to be implemented to remove or prevent each of the targeted barrier;
- setting of specific and verifiable performance evaluation criteria;
- identification of improvements achieved in matters of removal and prevention of barriers.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TAKING PART IN THE PLAN

Other organizations working with persons with disabilities such as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, services concerning children and adults of Prescott and Russell as well as Group Action took part in the public consultation.

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 Phénix and Accessibility Advisory Committee members assessed the accessibility of all facilities and services of the Corporation.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION GATHERED THROUGH PUBLIC CONSULTATION

During the different consultations with the United Counties of Prescott and Russell citizens, the following barriers were identified:

- urgency of ensuring eligibility of adapted housing subsidised by the province to persons with disabilities;
- need to review housing corporations' policies concerning waiting lists;
- importance of changing eligibility criteria for persons with disabilities;
- urgency of studying housing needs of persons according to their functional limitation and of developing new adapted units;
- absence of specific statements on special needs of persons with disabilities within the Corporation's different policies and regulations;
- importance for the Corporation to take into consideration the needs of persons with disabilities and to ensure equity in the delivery of its services;
- inaccessibility of some of the corporation's buildings;
- inaccessibility of some of its services;

- lack of awareness on the part of municipal leaders and staff of the Corporation concerning the needs of persons with disabilities;
- need for the Corporation to undertake initiatives or studies to better know its citizens living with limitations;
- importance of informing and making its citizens more aware;
- importance of having an information centre on services and programs available to persons with disabilities;
- establishment of a day centre where all citizens could socialize and undertake various activities;
- importance of working with local municipalities toward the establishment of a paratransit service;
- urgency of opening doors and adapting the workplace for persons with disabilities.

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

In 1995, the XIX century administrative building, which then held a jail and a courthouse, was renovated in accordance with construction and fire prevention standards. This renovation was necessary to ensure better management of the counties as well as to facilitate accessibility to the building. Staircase exits, a network of automatic water fire extinguishers, an emergency generator as well as new doors and windows were installed. The electrical and technical installations have been modified to ensure high energy efficiency, which required the replacement of the heating and plumbing system, the rewiring of the lighting facilities as well as the installation of new fire alarm devices and two elevators. This renovation has made the administrative building entirely accessible to persons with disabilities.

This 1.5 million-dollar project was realized under the Canada/Ontario Infrastructure Program, each administration level (federal, provincial, municipal) contributing one-third of the total cost.

ACTION PLAN

Throughout its three-year plan starting in the fall of 2003, the Council of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell shall study the following recommendations prepared by Le Phoénix 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 three-year period. **Appendix 1.**
- B. Apply the Building Code accessibility standards and implement measures to ensure accessibility to all buildings.
- C. Adopt a policy setting accessibility criteria to buildings property of or rented by the counties and ensure security of persons with disabilities through implementation of facilities answering to their needs, such as synchronizing audible and visual signals on emergency alarms. Adopt the regulations needed to manage this policy.
- D. Undertake a consultation of the Corporation staff during the year 2004 to identify barriers to accessibility of persons with disabilities.
- E. Consider to undertake an environmental study to find out the percentage of the population living with a functional limitation in the United Counties of Prescott and Russell, the specific needs brought by each functional limitation, the rate of participation of this sector of the population and the socio-economic impact of its full participation in the counties.
- F. Implement facilities to include the person with disabilities in the development plans of the community to promote full participation.
- G. Study the feasibility of adaptation of county services to answer the needs of persons with functional limitations i.e. travel to meet the person.
- H. 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.
- I. Develop a policy to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the planning of all future county projects.

- J. Introduce a policy to ensure all web sites of the different departments and projects of the Corporation be totally accessible to various special equipment used by citizens with a perceptual limitation.
- K. Ensure all public meetings and consultations be accessible.
- L. Develop a human resource 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 is 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.
 - 4) make sure Corporation employees working in management or supervision become aware of the Human Resource 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 Corporation 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 Advisory Committee of the Corporation of the United Counties of Prescott and Russell shall meet occasionally to review progress. Upon meeting, the Committee shall remind its members of their role in the implementation of the plan.

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

The Corporation 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 Corporation and from every municipal library across the United Counties of Prescott and Russell. The Accessibility plan shall also be available on our web site: www.prescott-russell.on.ca