

To: Toronto Public Library Board – January 27, 2003

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Barrier-Free Access to Toronto Public Library Buildings**

Purpose:

To provide the Toronto Public Library Board with a report on the status of barrier-free access to Toronto Public Library (TPL) buildings.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

The Library's Barrier-Free Access program is one of continuous improvements funded through a combination of operating and capital budgets. Minor access improvements are funded from the operating budget, as funds are available. Major access improvements are made when capital budget approval is received for a specific facility.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board receive *the Barrier-Free Access to Toronto Public Library Buildings* report for information.

Background:

One of the objectives of Toronto Public Library's strategic plan is to "improve the accessibility of all our branches through barrier-free design." This report defines accessibility to Library buildings within the context of legislative and regulatory requirements, City of Toronto guidelines and needs which are specific to Library users and staff. It provides an overview of the current status of accessibility at each branch of the Library and describes measures currently underway to improve access with the ultimate goal of providing truly barrier-free access to all TPL buildings.

For the purpose of this report, "access" refers to physical access to Library buildings and the use of furniture and equipment.

This report is not intended to address any reporting requirements which may occur, in future, pertaining to the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

Comments:

The basic level of accessibility for public buildings in Ontario is established by the *Building Code Act, 1992*. In this act, barrier-free “means that a building and its facilities can be approached, entered, and used by persons with physical or sensory disabilities.” Section 3.8 of the *Ontario Building Code* (OBC) provides guidelines for barrier-free design of facilities. These guidelines were written primarily to accommodate persons in wheelchairs and make limited provisions for individuals with visual or hearing impairment. The OBC guidelines provide for the installation of accessible ramps, doors, washrooms, etc., and 95 of our 101 buildings are in compliance with OBC barrier-free design requirements as indicated by the accessibility symbol in the Library’s *Hours and Locations* brochure.

TPL’s Strategic Plan objective “to improve the accessibility of all our branches through barrier-free design” assumes a higher level of accessibility than OBC compliance. The City of Toronto is in the process of developing standards for barrier-free accessibility which also aim for a more comprehensive approach. The Library’s Facilities Managers have employed the final draft of *Toronto Accessibility Guidelines*, developed under the auspices of the Disability Issues Committee, to evaluate TPL buildings. A document published by the National Library of Canada¹ has been used to address design issues specific to libraries, such as aisle widths between book stacks.

The Library envisages a “barrier-free” environment as one which enables participation and accessibility for all individuals - whether they are vision impaired, using a wheelchair, hearing impaired, families with young children, temporarily using mobility aids (such as crutches), frail, elderly individuals or anyone who would otherwise be restricted in their use of the Library.

A staff review of TPL facilities indicates that we have made many strides forward in this area. Of 101 TPL facilities, 46 are now fully compliant with the more comprehensive guidelines. Thirty-eight (38) of these facilities either complied with the new guidelines prior to amalgamation or required some modifications. Since amalgamation, major barriers have been removed at eight branches through reconstruction, renovation or leasehold improvements.

Of the remaining 55 TPL facilities, it is anticipated that required barrier-free modifications for 28 facilities will be accommodated in the 2003 capital and operating budgets. In some instances, due to the age and layout of some of our facilities, total barrier-free access cannot be provided without an overall retrofit or reconstruction. The remaining 27 TPL facilities which have major barriers to access will need to be accommodated in future capital programs.

Minor adjustments to facilitate barrier-free access have been accomplished mainly through the operating budget. These include signage; washroom grab-bars, fixtures and coat-hooks; parking lot and pavement markings; and stair-tread edgings. The operating budget may also be used to install strobe lights on our fire alarm systems and ramps of proper gradient, street curb cuts, automatic door openers and elevator telephones.

¹ Scott, Wendy, *The Accessible Canadian Library II: A Resource Tool for Libraries Serving Persons with Disabilities*. National Library of Canada, 1996.

In the 1980s, many buildings throughout North America, including TPL's had minor retrofits to accommodate barrier-free design. Many of these retrofits do not meet today's standard for barrier-free design. Through the capital budget program, the Library will be able to achieve a much higher level of barrier-free design, reflecting current standards, at libraries such as Maria Shchuka, Runnymede and Beaches.

Attachment 1 shows the barrier-free status of each TPL facility and the action required to make it fully accessible.

Conclusion:

TPL will continue in its endeavour to provide total barrier-free access to all its buildings for customers and staff, using state of the art technology, equipment and current building methods, as capital and operating budgets permit.

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Barrier-Free Accessibility Status of TPL Buildings