

ACCESSIBILITY FOR DISABLED PERSONS Customer Service Standards

By
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Chair, YBB Government Affairs Committee

The two major issues facing our community are accessibility for disabled persons and property taxation. In this issue I will focus on accessibility and leave property taxation to the next issue of *Bloor-Yorkville News* at which time the Ontario Ombudsman will have released his report on the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation and Current Value Assessment.

The purpose of the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is to achieve broader accessibility for people with disabilities. This will be done by developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards concerning goods, services, accommodation, facilities, buildings and employment. Improvements will be phased in, in stages of five years or less, moving towards a totally accessible Ontario in 20 years. The customer service standards will be phased in over the first five years.

Standards will address the full range of disabilities both visible and non-visible, including, physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning; set out the measures, policies, practices and other steps needed to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities; be mandatory for both private and public sectors; and include time periods for implementing accessibility requirements in stages of five years or less.

Standards could cover such areas as accessible buses; safe pedestrians' routes into buildings; automatic doors at entrances; lower counter heights at cash registers; large-print menus; accessible washroom facilities; staff training in serving customers with learning disabilities; and adaptive technology in the workplace.

The government has established two standards development committees to develop proposed new accessibility standards in the areas of transportation and customer service.

As the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas' (TABIA) representative on the Customer Service Standards Development Committee established by Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello under the authority of the Act, I have attended the first two meeting of the Committee.

With the support of the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), the Committee will arrive at a set of regulatory standards this summer for the Minister Pupatello's review prior to a 45-day public consultation period as required by the Act.

The 26-member committee is chaired by Dr. Judith Sandys, Associate Academic Vice President at Ryerson University, and is comprised of five Ontario government ministries; three municipal organizations (including the City of Toronto); two trade associations (including the Ontario Federation of Labour); seven community organizations (Community Living Ontario, Canadian Council of the Blind, Ontario Federation of Community Mental and Addiction Programs, Ontario March of Dimes, Adult Learning Disabilities Resource Centre, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association Ontario Chapter, and Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centres); and six business organizations including TABIA (Canadian Bankers Association, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Motion Picture Association of Ontario, Retail Council of Canada, and the Greater Toronto Hotel Association).

Importantly, the Committee has been structured in such a way as to include major organizations that have an interest in and are prepared to develop reasonable and effective customer service standards. Further the Committee is assisted by the Canadian Standards Association which is able to advise the members on the proper method of developing standards, and in the process, keep the Committee on schedule to meet the Minister's deadline.

In that regard the CSA has distributed a draft standard to the Committee as a reference, and that will certainly change significantly as work proceeds. At this point, the Committee has made no decisions and has arrived at no conclusions regarding customer service standards for Ontario.

I welcome your comments and I encourage you to contact me either by phone at 415-515-1588 or by email at: djure@jureinc.com.