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<b>ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY</b>	<b>CLERKS ADMINISTRATION: CA01</b>
<b>DATE OF ISSUE: OCTOBER 2009</b>	<b>REVIEW/REVISE: ANNUALLY</b>
<b>ONTARIO REGULATION 429/07</b>	<b>FORMS: CA01-1, CA01-2, CA01-3, CA01-4, CA01-5, CA01-6, CA01-7</b>

## **POLICY STATEMENT – Providing Goods and Service to People with Disabilities**

### **1. Our mission**

The mission of The Municipality of Trent Hills is to provide a high quality of service in a professional and courteous manner to all of our customers and visitors alike.

### **2. Our commitment**

In fulfilling our mission, The Municipality of Trent Hills strives at all times to provide its goods and services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. We are also committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our goods and services and allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other customers.

#### **2.1 Exclusion**

This Accessible Customer Service Policy shall not apply during any period where the Mayor or the Mayor's designate has declared a "State of Emergency" as defined under the Emergency Management Act.

### **3. Providing goods and service to people with disabilities**

The Municipality of Trent Hills is committed to excellence in serving all customers including people with disabilities and we will carry out our functions and responsibilities in the following areas:

#### **3.1 Communication**

Staff will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take into account their disability.

Training will be provided to staff who communicate with customers on how to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities (refer to Training Program Levels CA01-4).

#### **3.2 Telephone services**

The Municipality of Trent Hills is committed to providing fully accessible telephone service to our customers. We will train staff to communicate with customers over the telephone in clear and plain language and to speak clearly and slowly. Staff will offer to communicate with customers by e-mail, regular mail or TTY service if telephone communication is not suitable to their communication needs or is not available.



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### **3.3 Assistive devices**

The Municipality of Trent Hills is committed to serving people with disabilities who use assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from our goods and services. Staff will be trained and familiar with various assistive devices that may be used by customers with disabilities while accessing our goods or services.

### **3.4 Billing**

The Municipality of Trent Hills is committed to providing accessible invoices to all of our customers. For this reason, invoices will be provided in the following formats upon request: hard copy; large print or e-mail. Staff will answer any questions customers may have about the content of the invoice in person, by telephone or email.

### **4. Use of service animals and support persons**

The Municipality of Trent Hills is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and other third parties. We will also ensure that all staff, volunteers and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal.

The Municipality of Trent Hills is committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a support person. Any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to enter any Municipality of Trent Hills public function with his or her support person. At no time will a person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person be prevented from having access to his or her support person while participating in a Trent Hills function.

Fees will not be charged for support persons for admission to any Trent Hills function. Customers will be informed of this by a notice that will be posted on the Municipal website and at each Trent Hills function where a fee for admission is charged.

### **5. Notice of temporary disruption**

The Municipality of Trent Hills will provide customers with notice in the event of a scheduled or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. This notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated duration, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. The notice will be placed at public entrances and service counters of the affected premises (refer to Scheduled Service Disruption CA01-2 and Unexpected Service Disruption CA01-3).



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## **6. Training for staff**

The Municipality of Trent Hills will provide training to all employees, volunteers and others who deal with the public or other third parties on their behalf, and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of customer service policies, practices and procedures.

Training will include the following:

- The purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the requirements of the customer service standard
- How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities
- How to interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person
- How to use any assistive equipment or devices available on the premises that may help with the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities.
- What to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty in accessing goods and services
- The Municipality of Trent Hills policies, practices and procedures relating to the customer service standard.

Applicable staff will be trained on policies, practices and procedures that affect the way goods and services are provided to people with disabilities. Staff will also be trained on an ongoing basis when changes are made to these policies, practices and procedures (refer to Training Program Levels CA-01-4).

## **7. Feedback process**

The ultimate goal of The Municipality of Trent Hills is to meet and surpass customer expectations while serving customers with disabilities. Comments on our services regarding how well those expectations are being met are welcome and appreciated.

Feedback regarding the way The Municipality of Trent Hills provides goods and services to people with disabilities can be made by regular mail, e-mail, telephone or in person. All feedback will be directed to the Office of the Clerk. Customers can expect to hear back within five working days (refer to Accessible Customer Feedback CA01-1).

## **8. Modifications to this or other policies**

The Municipality of Trent Hills is committed to developing customer service policies that respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Therefore, no changes will be made to this policy before considering the impact on people with disabilities. Any policy of The Municipality of Trent Hills that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be modified or removed.



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## 9. Questions about this policy

This policy exists to achieve service excellence to customers with disabilities. If anyone has a question about the policy, or if the purpose of the policy is not understood, an explanation should be provided by, or referred to, the Office of the Clerk of The Municipality of Trent Hills.

### **POLICY & PROCEDURES**

#### **FEEDBACK**

Feedback from our customers gives the Municipality of Trent Hills opportunities to learn and improve. The Municipality encourages our customers to make a compliment, a complaint, or suggestions on ways to improve our services.

To assist the Municipality of Trent Hills in ensuring that the delivery of goods and services to those with disabilities is provided in an effective and timely manner, the customer is invited to provide their feedback.

The Office of the Clerk will respond either in writing, in person, by e-mail or telephone acknowledging receipt of feedback and will set out the actions to be taken within five working days (refer to Accessible Customer Feedback CA01-1).

Feedback may be provided in writing, in person, by e-mail or telephone, addressed to:

The Office of the Clerk  
Municipality of Trent Hills  
66 Front Street South  
P.O. Box 1030  
Campbellford, Ontario  
K0L 1L0  
Phone: (705) 653-1900 Ext. 248  
Fax: (705) 653-5203  
e-mail: [info@trenthills.ca](mailto:info@trenthills.ca)

#### **SERVICE ANIMALS AND SUPPORT PERSONS**

Service animals, such as guide dogs, offer independence and security to many people with various disabilities. Some laws generally prohibit animals in certain areas such as food preparation areas; however service animals are permitted in most public facilities.

A Support person assists people with disabilities in a variety of ways, by assisting with communication such as an intervener sign language interpreter or as a Personal Support Worker providing physical assistance. A support person may also be a friend or relative that will assist and support the customer.



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- Every employee shall use reasonable efforts to allow persons with disabilities to use their own assistive devices to access our goods and services.
- Every employee shall allow a person with a disability to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal unless the animal is excluded by law. Where an animal is excluded by law from the premises, the reason why the animal is excluded shall be explained to the person with the disability. Other reasonable arrangements to provide goods and services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with the disability.
- In the event a service animal is unruly or disruptive (jumping at people, biting or other potential harmful behavior) an employee may ask the person with a disability to remove the animal from the area or refuse access to goods or services. Other reasonable arrangements to provide goods or services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with the disability.
- Persons with a disability may be accompanied by their support person while accessing goods and/or services provided by the Municipality of Trent Hills.

### **ADMISSION FEES**

Recreation and community living opportunities are critical to the health and quality of life for all residents. Persons with disabilities often require personal assistance in activities of daily living.

- Persons with cognitive, visual or physical disabilities that create a barrier to independent use of municipal facilities, programs and events may submit an application to the Office of the Clerk (refer to Application for Support Person CA01-5). Approved applicants shall be issued a card permitting them and one support person access to any municipal function, program or event according to the policy of "one person – one fare". The fare shall be based on the category of the disabled person, i.e. adult, student, child or senior (refer to Support Person Access Card CA01-6).

### **DISRUPTION OF SERVICE**

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as an entrance way that is under repair, renovations that limit access to an area or that is temporarily unavailable. If a service disruption is planned and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice (refer to Scheduled Service Disruption CA01-2 and Unexpected Service Disruption CA01-3).

- A Notice of Scheduled Disruptions will be provided on the municipal web site, in a local newspaper and on bulletin boards at the appropriate site and at the Municipal Office.
- In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, notice may be provided in a variety of ways and will be done as quickly as possible.



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- In the event of a service disruption, alternative methods of service may be considered and those impacted by the service interruption shall be informed of any alternative methods.

### **TRAINING**

Every person who participates in developing the policy, practices and procedures under Ontario Regulation 429/07 – Accessibility Standards for Customer Service - shall participate in customer service training.

Every person who deals with the public on behalf of the Municipality of Trent Hills shall participate in accessible customer service training (refer to Training Program Levels CA01-4). Level 1 shall participate in training by January 1, 2010 and Level 2 shall participate in training as soon as practical after being assigned.

Ongoing training on changes to policies, procedures and new equipment shall be provided.

The method and amount of training shall be geared to the trainee's role in terms of public service (refer to Training Program Levels CA01-4).

Training records shall be kept, including names of participants, date of training and the level of training provided (refer to Accessible Training Log CA01-7).

### **PROCEDURES – Definitions and Best Practices**

#### **PHYSICAL:**

Physical disabilities include a range of functional limitations from minor difficulties in moving or coordinating one part of the body, through muscle weakness, tremors, and/or paralysis. Physical disabilities can be congenital such as Muscular Dystrophy; or acquired, such as tendonitis. A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:

- Perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key or gripping a door knob
- Move around independently
- Control the speed or coordination of movements
- Reach, pull or manipulate objects
- Have strength or endurance



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### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

- Do not ignore the customer and address only their support person. Speak normally and directly to your customer.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space, don't touch, move or lean on them.
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter.
- If a counter is too high or wide, step around it to provide service.
- Provide seating for those who cannot stand in line.
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you.

### **SPEECH:**

Speech disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Typical disabilities include problems with:

- Pronunciation
- Pitch and loudness
- Hoarseness or breathlessness
- Stuttering or slurring

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

- If possible, communicate in a quiet environment.
- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish their sentences.
- Ask them to repeat as necessary or to write their message.
- Verify your understanding.
- Patience, respect and willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.





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### **HEARING:**

Hearing loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words. A person who is deaf, deafened or hard of hearing may be unable to:

- Use a public telephone
- Understand speech in noisy environments
- Pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout. Speak clearly.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you are understood.
- Face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth.
- Deaf people may use a sign language interpreter to communicate. Always direct your attention to the customer first.
- Any personal matters (e.g. financial) should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information.
- Don't touch service animals – they are working and must pay attention at all times.

### **DEAF-BLINDNESS:**

Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss. The result for a person who is deaf-blind is significant difficulty accessing information and performing daily activities. Deaf-blindness interferes with communication, learning, orientation and mobility. People who are deaf-blind communicate using various language systems such as Braille, telephone devices, communication boards and any combination thereof. Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an Intervener who relays information and facilitates auditory and visual information and acts as a sighted guide.

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener – a professional who helps with communicating.

Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling and may guide and interpret for their client.

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have





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some sight or hearing, while others have neither.

- A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Do not touch or address the service animals – they are working and must pay attention at all times.
- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it is an emergency.
- Understand that communication can take some time. Be patient.
- Direct your attention to the customer.

#### **VISION:**

Vision disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision or a lack of central vision which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Vision loss can result in:

- Difficulty reading or seeing faces
- Difficulty maneuvering in unfamiliar places
- Inability to differentiate colours or distances
- The need for bright light or contrast
- Night blindness

#### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Vision disabilities can restrict your customers' ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

- Verbally identify yourself before making physical contact.
- If the person uses a service animal, do not touch or approach the animal.
- Verbally describe the setting, form or location as necessary.
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull.
- Never touch your customer without asking permission unless it is an emergency.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye.



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### **INTELLECTUAL:**

Intellectual disabilities affect a person's ability to think and reason. It may be caused by genetic factors such as Downs Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma or psychiatric disorders. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

A person with an intellectual disorder may have difficulty with:

- Understanding spoken and written information
- Conceptual information
- Perception of sensory information
- Memory

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Services:**

As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use clear and plain language.
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information.
- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions.
- Be patient and verify your understanding.
- If you can't understand what is being said, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Speak directly to your customer.

### **LEARNING:**

Learning disabilities include a range of disorders that effect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding and processing. People with a learning disability have average or above average intelligence but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways. Learning disabilities are generally invisible and the ability to function varies greatly. Learning disabilities can result in difficulties in the following:

- Problem solving
- Reading
- Time management
- Way finding
- Processing information



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**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

- Respond to any requests for verbal information.
- Assist with filling in forms and so on, with courtesy.
- Allow extra time to complete tasks, if necessary.

**MENTAL HEALTH:**

Mental Health disabilities include a range of disorders; however, there are three main types of mental health disabilities:

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Behavioral

People with mental health disabilities may seem edgy or irritated, be perceived as pushy or abrupt, be unable to make a decision, start laughing or get angry for no apparent reason.

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

- Treat each person as an individual. Ask what would make him/her the most comfortable and respect his/her needs to the maximum extent possible.
- Be patient and try to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Stay calm and courteous even if the customer exhibits unusual behavior.
- Focus on the service they need and how you can help.

**Disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish**

**SMELL** disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or a hypersensitivity to odors and smells. A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odors, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food.

**TOUCH** disabilities can affect a person's ability to sense texture, temperature, vibration or pressure. Touch sensations may be reduced or heightened resulting in a hypersensitivity to touch, temperature or the opposite – numbness and the inability to feel touch sensations.

**TASTE** disabilities can limit the experience of the four primary taste sensations; sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or noxious substances.

**OTHER** disabilities result from a range of conditions, accidents, illnesses and diseases including ALS, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement.