



WE LOVE REGINABUT! 2009

PROGRESS TOWARD A MORE INCLUSIVE
COMMUNITY?

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During the civic election of October of 2006, IDEA Regina developed a presentation that was intended to bring to the attention of voters and candidates for Mayor and City Council issues that are important to the citizens of Regina who have a disability.¹ The *We love Regina....but!* presentation focused on the issues of accessibility, employment, parking and public transportation.

During the last civic election Mayor Fiacco promised to strike a Mayors Task Force on Accessibility and this paper will look at what has happened since 2006.

Since the last civic election

True to his word, Mayor Fiacco worked with Council to strike the Mayor's Task Force on Accessibility. The Task force was given the following mandate:

Advises City Council and the Administration on the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies to position Regina as a model community for the inclusion of all citizens, including persons with a disability;

Supports the development and implementation of appropriate guiding principles, policies, program priorities and evaluation processes for:

- *a comprehensive plan for an accessible City of Regina;*
- *enforcement of accessible parking zones;*
- *a City of Regina employment program for persons with a disability; and*
- *accessible and affordable public transportation;*

Identifies stakeholders related to improving access and inclusion, including municipal, provincial, and federal government, and other relevant parties; and

Reports to City Council through the Executive Committee, through the provision of an annual report summarizing the activities of the Mayor's Task Force on Access.²

In more recent months the Mayor's Task Force on Access has struck two subcommittees Parking Enforcement and Transportation Subcommittee and Comprehensive Plan for an Accessible City of Regina Subcommittee.

Employment

In “We love Reginabut!” Idea Regina recommended that the City of Regina,

¹ According to the Statistics Canada *Small Area Estimation of Adult Disability Count and Rate Using Data from the 2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey*, Regina's “total population” was 157,500 and the “population with disabilities” was 27,230, representing a rate of 17.20%.

² From the Terms of Reference of the Mayor's Task Force on Accessibility, City of Regina ,2007.

“Introduce an employment internship program for individuals with disabilities: providing work experience and job skills.”

We believe the our municipal government has a leadership role in the promotion of inclusion of people with a disability into the Regina's workforce and in the City of Regina Workforce Diversity Strategy 2007-2009 the city expresses the what they called the business case for workforce diversity. This report says, in part, that these benefits are:

- *Being perceived by business partners and stakeholders as a socially responsible corporation.*
- *Having employees that are representative of the diverse Regina customer base enhances customer understanding and responsiveness.*
- *Provide moral leadership among our community of employers.*
- *A more valued workforce which leads to increased employee engagement and reduced costs.*
- *Being perceived by the Regina community as a contemporary employer.*

The City of Regina has been part of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission's Employment Equity Program since 1988 and publicly proclaims its commitment to employment equity. However the city has not had much success in meeting the SHRC goal.

In 2007 the City adopted a *Workforce Diversity Strategy 2007-2009* and is currently updating this strategy for the next three years. But after all is said and done IDEA Regina is disappointed to find that in spite of anything that the City may be doing, by their own account, it is not working. As shown by the chart ³ below the percentage of the city's workforce that is identified as having a disability has not changed since September of 2006.

Employment Equity Statistical Report as of March 3rd, 2009

Yearly Totals	TOTAL	FEMALE		ABORIGINAL EMPLOYEES		EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES		VISIBLE MINORITY EMPLOYEES	
		F	T %	T	T%	T	T%	T	T%
March 3 rd , 2009 TOTALS	2,498	776	31.1%	197	7.9%	120	4.8%	100	4%
October 31, 2008 TOTALS	2,513	782	31.1%	199	7.9%	127	5.1%	94	3.7%
September 30, 2007 TOTALS	2432	735	30.2%	171	7.0%	112	4.6%	44	1.8%
September 21, 2006 TOTALS	2362	691	29.3%	165	7.0%	120	5.1%	39	1.7%

**The results contained in the above chart are reflective of employees who self-identify as a member of an equity group.*

3 From a report to the April 28, 2009 meeting of the Mayor Task Force on Accessibility

What the chart does not show is that as part of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission's Employment Equity Program, the City of Regina's target is that 9.7% of its work force will be people who are identified as having a disability. The City is bogged down at less than 50% of its target. And in the City's *Employment Equity Program, Annual Monitoring Report For The Year Ended December 31, 2008* there appear to be not reference to dealing with this failure.

While we recognize that the City is creating a lot of activity in this area the results are not there for people with a disability, nor any of the other target groups.

Parking and Transportation

In “We love Reginabut!” IDEA Regina recommended that the City of Regina ,

“require property owners to enforce disabled parking zones”

and further that the City of Regina

“increase investment in public transportation to meet the needs of all citizens and promote public transportation as an environmental conservation measure.”

For most citizens of Regina parking is a non issue or at worst an annoyance but for citizens who have mobility problems going to the mall and having to use parking that is a long distance from the business they wish to visit and/or cramped into a parking stall that is barely big enough for the most agile of us, it is more than an annoyance. For most citizens public transportation is a back up plan in case the car is not available. But for citizens who have a disability and whose disability limits mobility, public transportation is essential to their well being. It is often the difference between getting out of the house and not.

The subcommittee on Parking and Transportation has been engaged in discussions about change particularly to the parking policy. The group seems to be focused on the problem of the abuse of “handicapped parking” as an educational issue and are discussing the introduction of a “Accessible Parking Awareness Day”. While this may be well and good a more aggressive policy of enforcement, we believe, will be a necessary part of any successful strategy to curb this abuse.

There has been some work done of late on Paratransit but in the end it is a system that is yet to be fixed. According to a report from the Paratransit Advisory Board in 2008 18,664 trips were request that could not be book. Over 10% of all requests for Paratransit service must be refused because it does not have the resources.

(The real number of rides not taken is higher because experience tells us that many people do not

even try to book a ride because they know it will be refused.)

This has led to the current practice of rationing resources based on the perceived importance of the trip; i.e. employment and medical treatment travel is given priority over recreational and social travel. We believe the solution lies not in restrictions, which the general public would reject for themselves, but in adequate funding..

Accessibility Plan

In “We love Regina ...but!” IDEA Regina recommended that the City of Regina,

“implement a comprehensive plan for creating an accessible environment for all citizens. A comprehensive plan includes meaningful consumer involvement, dedicated budget, public accountability and specific time frames.

According to reports and minutes found on the City website the Subcommittee on a Comprehensive plan has been discussing some important issues most notable they have been investigating whether it might be possible for the City to require all reports going to council to include a mandatory section on “accessibility impact”. This IDEA Regina believe would go a long way to make “*Regina as a model community for the inclusion of all citizens, including persons with a disability*”. We encourage the City to adopt this strategy and we are prepared to provide any support necessary. But this is not enough. Within the City's vision for Regina 2020 we need to have a more comprehensive picture of how people with disabilities will fit in.

Making people with disabilities part of the Vision

It is clear that over the last three years the City of Regina, through the development of the Mayor's Task Force on Access, has begun to talk about many of the issues that are important to the citizens of our city who have a disability. Some of the issues have not changed and it is equally clear to us that citizens with disabilities have not become part of the City of Regina's vision. In 2007 our City Council adopted the vision that says

“Imagine Regina 2020, Canada's most vibrant, inclusive, attractive, sustainable, community where people live in harmony and thrive in opportunity.”

We would call for serious work to begin today to provide a policy framework for the inclusion of people with disabilities. The concept of inclusion expresses two ideas: being physically part of things and being social part of thing. A physical presence is a precondition of social participation. In other words you must be physically present in the community to be part of its social and economic life. Being welcomed and respected is an important part but often people with disabilities need support to even be physically present in the community. Things like a bus ride and a door that he or she can enter. Without these physical supports social participation is impossible.

We want to implore the city to take serious leadership in the creation of a Regina that is free of the physical and social barrier and truly includes people with disabilities . This means adopting as strong set of principles that support inclusion such as those of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which says

- (a) Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;*
- (b) Non-discrimination;*
- (c) Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;*
- (d) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;*
- (e) Equality of opportunity;*
- (f) Accessibility;*
- (g) Equality between men and women;*
- (h) Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.*

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 3, General Principles

Conclusion

IDEA Regina is pleased to see that the City has acted on the issues and recommendations it raised during the last civic election. The striking of the Mayor Task Force on Accessibility with a mandate to “*Supports the development and implementation of appropriate guiding principles, policies, program priorities and evaluation processes ...*” was a positive step towards change.

IDEA Regina believes that it took longer than it ought to have to get the Task Force organized and addressing the issue set out of it, but that aside, some of the important questions have been raised (e.g. the discussions around including “accessibility impact” as part of all reports to Council,) and are being discussed. On other issue like accessible parking specific strategies have been developed and we are pleased that action may be taken in the near future.

IDEA Regina is not as encouraged by the work in the area of equity employment or workforce diversity. After many years of effort there has been no appreciable change and it is manifest to us that the City needs to engage in an in depth conversation with stakeholders, especially people in the disability community, in order to find out why what it has been doing does not work.

Finally we believe that the City must begin with dialogue with the disability community on the issue of a comprehensive plan that we hope will be based on the principles expressed in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.