



March 26, 2013

***ACCESSIBILITY IN ONTARIO OFFICES MAY SOON BE CHANGING ,  
...FOR THE GOOD OF ALL OF US:***

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**By Lynn McGregor**

Proposed Changes to Ontario's Building Code, will, if approved, increase the Accessibility of all spaces for all of us. Listed below, are just a few of the proposed new rules, that we believe stand a strong chance of being approved for implementation in 2014. The provided BEFORE plan integrates what the public might find in many typical Ontario office spaces. The AFTER plan, has been modified to integrate the following list of proposed changes. Please refer to the number associated with the proposed change, located also on the modified plan.

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1. The accepted turning radius of a wheelchair will likely be changing from 1500mm to 1800mm, to accommodate not just manual wheelchairs, but other assistive devices such as motorized wheelchairs, scooters, crutches, etc.
2. The minimum acceptable Door width will likely be increasing, to provide a clear passage way of 34", (this means clear of all hardware on the doors). This might mean that a 38" wide door leaf becomes the common size in offices, instead of the typical 36". This will have an effect on the width of corridors, as 24" of access area will still be required beside any door, on the opening side, if automatic door opening hardware is not provided.
3. It is proposed that stairs become less steep, with longer "runs", and shallower "rises", to accommodate those who have weak, or have shorter legs. If this is approved, a typical stairwell will take up more space than it does today. But there will likely be fewer accidents on stairs, making this a very good idea.
4. Minimum passage ways may become a little wider, at 34". This would mean areas between workstations, etc., would need to be larger than what has been provided in the past. When this is combined with the larger proposed turning radius of 1800mm, it will allow those with assistive devices to occupy any workstation - not just a unique, specially designed one. This will also allow any occupant of a workstation who is temporarily handicapped with an injury, (such as a broken leg), to still work in their standard workstation.
5. Automatic Door Openers are being contemplated to be mandatory on all doors that someone needs to move through, as they experience a work environment. It used to be that these devices were used only on main exit doors.

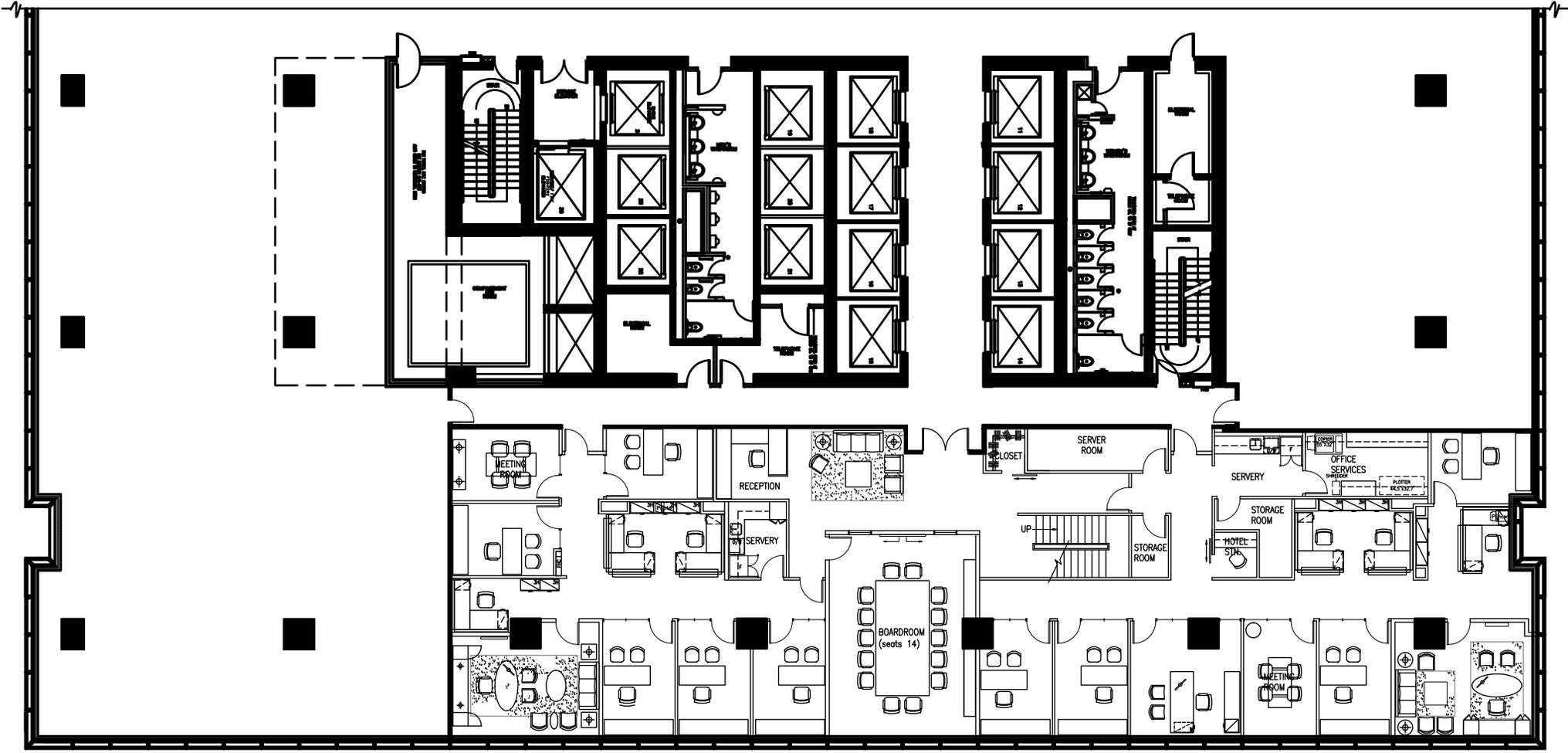


6. Tactile Texture Strips with directional indicators are being proposed to act as a warning to anyone who is visually impaired, of a change in the floor - be it a floor cutout, or a level change. But these strips will also help anyone who is simply preoccupied, and not looking at the floor; making it a very good idea for everyone.
7. The spirit of the changes that Ontario is proposing to make, includes a more democratic way of providing access. Wherever possible, space should be designed to allow all people to access all areas. Even small areas such as Hotelling Stations, should be designed with the assumption that someone using an assistive device have the right to use the station with the same independence and dignity that others use it.
8. It has been discovered that the currently mandated handicapped stalls in public washrooms are not large enough for many people who need them. First, an adequate turning radius is often not provided in the stall, for larger assistive devices. And often, handicapped individuals require a personal assistant who needs to be in the stall at the same time. So these stalls are proposed to be larger in the future and better equipped.
9. When an individual's personal assistant is not of the same sex as them, (a spouse, etc.), they are not able to use the handicapped facility in the washrooms provided for a dedicated sex. So the province is proposing that private washrooms be provided to accommodate this type of situation. It has been thought that these private washrooms should not eliminate the need for handicapped stalls in the public washrooms, as choice should be provided.
10. A change that has been discussed for quite some time, is to ensure all corridors in offices, (including public ring corridors provided by the Landlord on multi-tenant floors); provide the new wider turning radius for individuals, every 30 metres (98.5 feet), minimally. This allows individuals with assistive devices to turnaround and change direction without having to wheel more than 30 meters. But ideally, the corridors should be designed to be minimally 1800mm (71 inches), to allow everyone to turnaround at any point. This also allows for easier passing of people going in the opposite direction. This change will have a huge effect on older buildings, and will require that these changes are made when renovations are planned.
11. Another easy change that is being considered is to mandate that handrails be installed on both sides of a stair or ramp, to provide better support for those going in either direction, and / or passing others. Currently, there exist many situations where only one handrail is required.

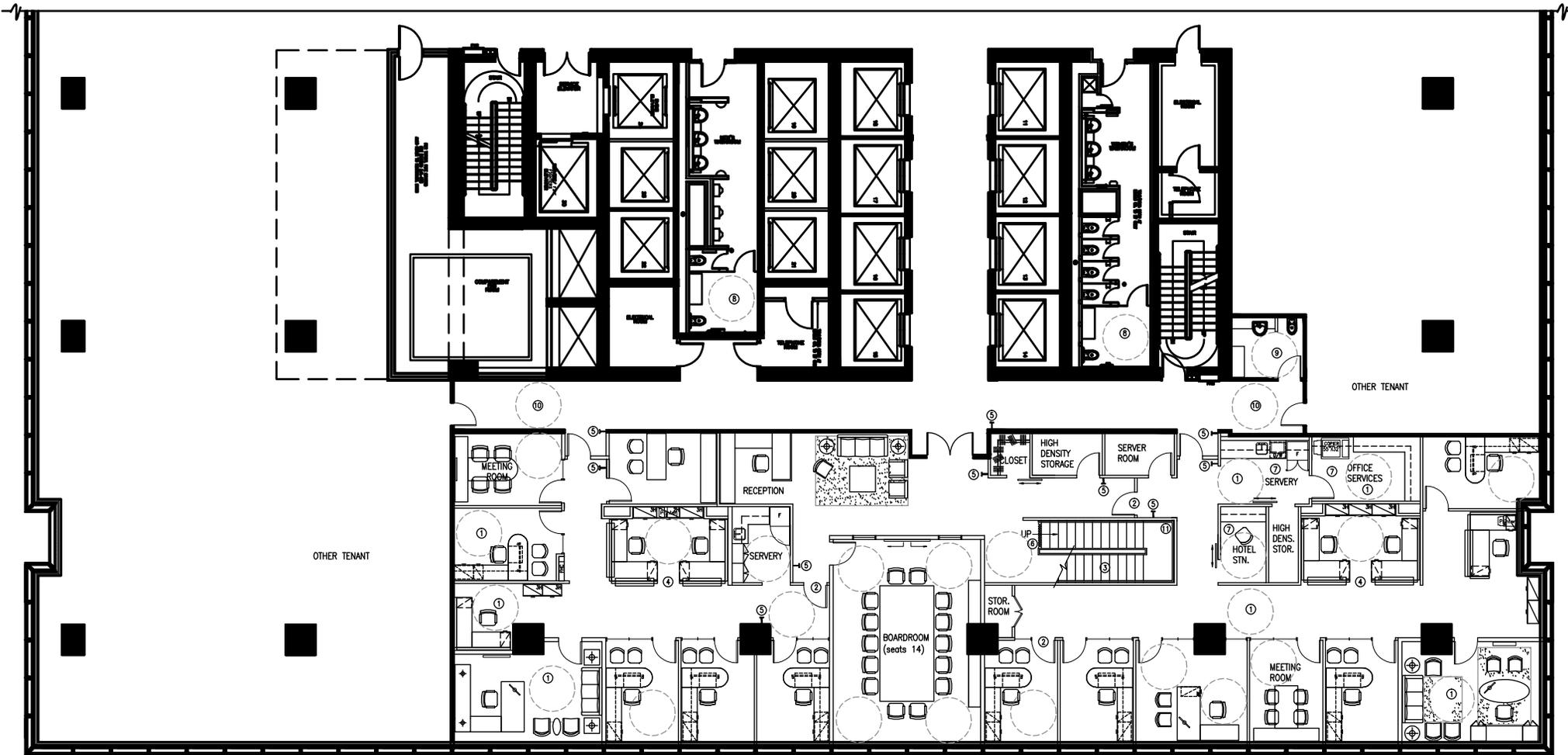
**Summary:**

It is very important to note that these proposed changes often result in more square footage being needed, if clever planning and design is used, often these proposed rules can be accommodated in the same space, by simply using the space differently. If you review the plans provided, we have lost very few functional requirements, when we comply with these proposed new rules. It's not always "how much space you have", but "how you use it".

**Please refer to the following BEFORE and AFTER plans.**



BEFORE



AFTER