

**Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, October 21, 2021 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Attendance: Rosalind Penfound (Chair), David Caswell (Vice-Chair), Cynthia Bruce, Linda Campbell, Birgit Elssner, Andrew Jantzen, Ellen Johnson, Marcie Shwery-Stanley, Anne Sinclair.

Regrets: none

Staff: Dawn Stegen (Interim Executive Director), Terri Lynn Almeda (Manager), Lisa Jacobs, Dustin Lyons, Maddi MacDonald, Laura Beth MacPherson, Peter McCracken, Amy Middleton, Lashauna Smith, Julia Stephenson, Kristel vom Scheidt.

Guests: Quenta Adams (Director Student Academic Success, Dalhousie University), Rachel Bedingfield (Director of Parks and Recreation, Town of Kentville).

1. Welcome

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board (AAB) meeting by acknowledging that October is Mi'kmaq History Month and by acknowledging that the meeting takes place on traditional and unceded Mi'kmaq territory.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The Board reviewed and accepted the agenda as circulated.

b. Approval of Minutes from September 21, 2021

Motion: David Caswell moved to approve the minutes of the September 21, 2021, meeting. Birgit Elssner seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

c. Outstanding Business & Directorate Updates

Dawn Stegen provided updates on initiatives and outstanding business.

- The province has appointed the first independent reviewer of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, Dr. Katie Aubrecht. They will lead the first review focused on identification of any possible changes to the Act, the standard development processes and implementation of Access by Design 2030, the plan to make NS accessible by 2030. Dr. Aubrecht is a well-known and respected disability and seniors care scholar who is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at St. Francis Xavier University and the Director of the Spatializing Care: Intersectional Disability Studies Lab. She is also a Canada Research Chair in Health Equity and Social Justice Tier II.
- Stemming from the September Board meeting discussion on COVID-19, the Accessibility Directorate followed up with Communications NS on the importance of accessible communications and offer support as needed.
- Minister of Justice has received the Built Environment phase 2 recommendations and enactment plan. Briefing meetings will be set up.
- The Board's recommendation that Goods and Services be the fourth standard area to be developed, starting in 2022 has been advanced to Minister for approval.
- The External Awareness Campaign is progressing, and staff are very busy finalizing the new web site for the campaign and development of a third element (video, print add, etc.). We are aiming to launch the campaign in early February 2022.
- The Board's motion regarding the filling the three vacancies on the Board and that the Board places top priority on having racial and ethnic diversity on the Board, including Mi'kmaq/Indigenous and African Nova Scotian/racially visible persons has been advanced to Minister of Justice.

- At the Chairperson's request, Dawn was asked to speak to the recent decision to remove the option of virtual presentations at Law Amendments. Dawn provided background on the situation noting the Directorate is making inquiries on the matter, and that this government is committed to accessibility.

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, noted that a news article was shared in this month's Board package regarding access to Government's Law Amendment Committee. The Premier had previously stated that he wanted the public to continue to have the option of appearing by video to present to the law amendments committee, however, this week there was discussion of resuming in-person presentations only. This is an important matter of accessibility as many Nova Scotians are not able to access legislative committees in-person.

Motion: Cynthia Bruce moved that pursuant to section 17 of the Accessibility Act the Accessibility Advisory Board advise the Minister of Justice of the importance of ensuring that all persons, including disabled persons, have full access to participate in the Province of Nova Scotia's democratic processes, including all committees of the Legislature and specifically the Law Amendments Committee. This should include the ability to make written submissions, appear in person or by video link, and the provision of ASL interpretation, CART and all materials in accessible formats. Birgit Elssner seconded the motion.

3. Accessibility Advisory Board

a. Standard Development Committees

i. Education

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, provided an update of the Education Standard Development Committee, which last met on September 22, 2021. The committee had two resignations over the summer months and has decided not to replace those members. The committee is

currently focused on areas outside of P-12 education, including early childhood education and career colleges.

The committee is planning a number of online sessions by sector for February/March 2022 with the intent of having the final recommendations to the Board by the end of May 2022.

Ellen Johnson raised a question regarding awards for students and whether the Standard Development Committee would be addressing this as students with disabilities are disproportionately not awarded for their academic success.

Action: Rosalind Penfound will bring above noted concerns about awards for students to the Standard Development Committee.

ii. Employment

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, introduced Lashauna Smith, Senior Policy Analyst, Accessibility Directorate, who presented the Employment Standard Development Committee Chair and Vice-Chair recommendations as well as the proposed Terms of Reference for the committee. Lashauna shared a presentation of the proposed Terms of Reference, which were largely the same as the Terms of Reference used for the Education and Built Environment Standard Development Committees. Lashauna explained the differences of the proposed Terms of Reference, most of which regarded the scope of the committee.

Motion: David Caswell moved to approve and advance to Minister the Employment Standard Development Committee Chair and Vice-Chair recommendation as proposed by the review/selection sub-committee as well as the proposed Employment Standard Development Committee Terms of Reference. Cynthia Bruce seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

b. Board Report 2020-21: For Approval

Maddi MacDonald, Policy Analyst, Accessibility Directorate, presented the plain language edited draft 2020-2021 Board Annual Report for approval. A number of board members raised concerns

about the language level of the report and expressed concerns with the plain language edit not being accessible. A few board members also suggested that the report should be printed in addition to published online.

The Board approved the content of the report with the understanding that the plain language editing of the report required revisiting to ensure language is accessible. The Accessibility Directorate will update the Board on the finalization of the report in future meetings.

c. Nova Scotia Building Advisory Committee

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, informed Board members that the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing has written requesting The Accessibility Advisory Board identify someone as for appointment to the Nova Scotia Building Advisory Committee. The person is expected to have a good knowledge of the building and/or plumbing code, National Building Code of Canada, National Energy Code for Buildings, Nova Scotia Building Code Act, etc. The person does not have to be a member of our Board to represent the Board. The Board is suggesting Ross Sampson for his professional and lived experience as well as his commitment to accessibility.

Andrew Jantzen moved to recommend Ross Sampson as the Accessibility Advisory Board's representative on the Nova Scotia Building Advisory Committee. Cynthia Bruce seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Board Priorities

a. COVID-19

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, presented a brief update on COVID-19 data for Nova Scotia as well as recent concerns in the media for persons with disabilities relating to COVID-19. It is reported that Nova Scotians who are blind or visually impaired continue to face barriers due to pandemic restrictions. Physical distancing instructions and directional signs present barriers for people who

cannot see them. The Accessibility Directorate is aware of this concern and is working with partners across government to address this concern.

b. Accessible Affordable Housing

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, noted the landmark ruling from the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal finding the Province had discriminated against the three individuals, and all persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia, in not providing access to supportive housing in the community. The Province also announced an investment of \$35 million as part of an effort to build 1,100 affordable housing units across the province. Dawn Stegen, Interim Executive Director, Accessibility Directorate, noted that Housing Nova Scotia is a prescribed as a public sector body, and they are beginning recruitment for their accessibility committee. Housing Nova Scotia is keen to meet with the Accessibility Directorate to identify supports that may assist them in complying with the Act and Standards. These include resources and supports available to assist Housing Nova Scotia in developing its community consultation plan. Advice on the timing of check-ins with the Directorate based on the experiences of other prescribed public sector bodies in development of their Action Plans. Evaluation of the Housing Nova Scotia Action Plan will be in alignment with the framework developed by the Accessibility Directorate.

c. Roundtable Discussion

The Board held a roundtable discussion to allow Board members to raise questions, concerns, or insights that they might be hearing in their communities and networks.

A Board member shared that the MacEachern Institute for Public Service is conducting a research project titled “Working across Disciplines to Understand and Improve Evacuation of Persons with Disabilities.” There is a survey associated with the project, which will be shared with the Board.

Marcie Shwery-Stanley asked the Directorate to share with the Board the on-line workbook and input opportunity on a new National Long-Term Care Services Standard.

5. Special Presentation

a. Measurement & Evaluation Quarterly Update: Check-in with Prescribed Public Sector Bodies

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, introduced Dawn Stegen, Interim Executive Director, and Lisa Jacobs, Senior Policy Analyst, of the Accessibility Directorate, who presented findings from the check-in with Prescribed Public Sector Bodies (PPSBs). The check-in focused on progress on meeting legislated requirements, use of resources developed by Accessibility Directorate, value of resources developed by Accessibility Directorate for PPSBs, needs of PPSBs to meet accessibility requirements, and outcomes related to awareness and level of capacity.

Board members suggested that the Accessibility Directorate could encourage municipalities to work together and share with each other as it relates to their accessibility work. It was also suggested that the Accessibility Directorate should follow up with those PPSBs who did not respond to the check-in.

b. Prescribed Public Sector Bodies Panel

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, introduced special guests Quenta Adams (Director Student Academic Success, Dalhousie University) and Rachel Bedingfield (Director of Parks and Recreation, Town of Kentville) for a discussion on their prescribed public sector bodies' accessibility plans and committees.

In creating accessibility plans, it was shared that lots of conversations with stakeholders through various approaches worked well. Challenges have been delays due to COVID-19, refinement of priorities, and buy-in across the organization.

In convening accessibility committees, it was shared that recruiting members for committees has been successful. Having a community-led plan and having half of committee members identify as having a disability worked well. Challenges have been that there is a lot of committee work to manage (e.g. meeting agendas, meeting minutes, etc.) as well as staff turnover.

Both guests notes that the work is important to the culture of their organizations so that accessibility becomes part of normal business.

6. Adjournment

Rosalind Penfound adjourned the meeting. The next Board meeting will be held November 16, 2021, from 1 PM to 4 PM via Zoom.