

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 15, 2021 – 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

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

Regrets: Andrew Jantzen

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

Guests: Bill Greenlaw (Executive Director, Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage), Wayne Matheson (Accessibility Coordinator, Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage), Dr. Katie Aubrecht (Accessibility Act Reviewer), Kelly O'Neill (Accessibility Act Review Lead Associate and Project Manager).

1. Welcome

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting with a Mi'kmaq land acknowledgement and shared greetings of happiness and peace to all celebrating the holiday season.

2. Accessibility Advisory Board

a. Accessibility Grants: Presentation

Bill Greenlaw, Executive Director and Wayne Matheson, Accessibility Coordinator, Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage provided an overview of the delivery and impact of the Business Access-Ability and Community Accessibility, two accessibility grant programs provided by the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

The Board provided feedback on grant program elements, including reducing the applicant's contribution amount required as a percentage of the total budget, enabling in-kind contributions as part of the applicant's contribution, opportunities to increase engagement with the business community, funding needs and timelines for municipalities, and the need for increases to the total funding of the grant programs.

b. Act Review: Update

Dawn Stegen, Interim Executive Director, introduced Dr. Katie Aubrecht, who was appointed by government on October 5, 2021 to conduct the first review of the Accessibility Act. Dr. Aubrecht provided an update on the approach to conducting the review, which will be an inclusive design with an intersectional and iterative approach. Dr. Aubrecht introduced Kelly O'Neill, Lead Associate and Project Manager and advised that the team is primarily comprised of people with different lived experiences to disability and accessibility, who will also be guided by a group of advisors with expertise in accessibility and disability rights. The team is working with a vendor to develop an accessible website to support the review and is interested in co-hosting community meetings with community organizations. The Board discussed opportunities for community organizations to work with the review team to participate in this work.

3. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The Board reviewed and accepted the revised agenda as circulated, with the additional topic of accessibility at the Queens Marque public space, if time permits.

b. Approval of Minutes from November 16, 2021

Motion: Ellen Johnson moved to approve the minutes of the November 16, 2021, meeting with corrections made. David Caswell seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, provided an update on issues pertaining to CART and interpretation services at the Board's two most recent

meetings, and thanked Linda Campbell for bringing attention to these issues. Rosalind assured that the Board is committed to learning and doing better on these matters, and shared the plan developed with the Directorate for meetings going forward.

In future, should there be an interruption in CART or interpretation services, the Board meeting will be paused until it can be addressed. The Directorate will also engage interpreters from Ontario for all Board meetings in the short term, as work continues toward a more permanent solution, including hiring staff to provide interpretation, manage the engagement of outside interpreters as needed, assist in liaising with the Deaf community and provide advice. The Directorate has also begun to work with government on other accessibility tools, including Otter.ai.

Linda Campbell noted her thanks for listening to concerns and for this plan, and her hope that this becomes smoother for all of board members, with quality oversight and control,

c. Outstanding Business

Dawn Stegen provided updates on initiatives and outstanding business.

- The Board's motion at their November 16, 2021 meeting regarding accessible housing was submitted to the Minister of Justice.
- There were several staff changes at the Accessibility Directorate. Caroline Read Kendell has taken a position with the Office of Addictions and Mental Health and Peter McCracken has taken a position with the Municipality of the County of Colchester. Maddi MacDonald is now in the position of Senior Policy Analyst and will be leading the Built Environment standard work and Lashauna Smith is supporting the compliance and enforcement work. The Directorate is recruiting for the vacant Policy Analyst position.
- There was also a change in the leadership at the Department of Justice. Lora MacEachern has been appointed as Deputy Minister of the Department of Environment and Climate Change and Dana MacKenzie is Associate Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice, with responsibility for the Accessibility Directorate.
- Dawn Stegen and Rosalind Penfound recorded a television show with Eastlink, which will air one week beginning November 28 in

recognition of International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3. The Directorate also posted a new Guide to Accessible Online Meetings on the website.

- The Directorate has been engaging with prescribed public sector bodies as part of the promotion of December 3, including sharing social media graphics, and to support their accessibility initiatives.
- The Directorate has also scheduled times with all Board members to provide their proof of vaccinations.
- The Directorate has been working on other initiatives related to sign language interpretation as part of an interdepartmental committee, including developing a request for proposals for consultations to inform the development of a best practice and guidance document.

Action: The Accessibility Directorate will follow up with Eastlink for availability of the video, and if available, will send to Board members.

4. Accessibility Advisory Board (continued)

c. Standard Development Committees

i. Education

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, provided an update of the Education Standard Development Committee. Small groups of the committee with an interest in specific sectors have been meeting to discuss recommendations for those sectors. The whole Committee is meeting on December 20 to review and finalize the recommendations for consultation in the new year and will share the recommendations with the Board at the January 2022 meeting.

ii. Employment

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, introduced Lashauna Smith, Senior Policy Analyst, Accessibility Directorate, who provided an update on the Employment Standards Development Committee. Lashauna advised that the Minister approved the Committee membership recommendations, all but one recommended member accepted their positions, and the Committee membership was announced on December 3, 2021.

The person who declined membership as they had left their position, which was related to employment for persons with disabilities, and work is underway to provide Minister with a member recommendation with related background and experience.

The Directorate is working with the SDC Chair and Vice-Chair on planning for the Committee's orientation, scheduled for January 18, 2022, and the first working meeting of the Committee in February.

d. GNS Accessibility Plan 2022-2025: Update

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, introduced Laura Beth MacPherson, Senior Policy Analyst, to provide an update on government's progress to develop its next accessibility plan. Laura Beth provided a presentation with an overview of the process to develop the plan which has involved representatives from 25 departments, engagement with community and input from employees with disabilities. To date, 15 government departments have provided draft commitments and other departments are finalizing their commitments. Next steps include synthesizing the commitments, seeking Ministerial and Cabinet approval of the plan, and working with Communications Nova Scotia to translate and design the plan. Laura Beth invited Board members to provide feedback by email.

Anne Sinclair advised that there are a number of accessibility related audit tools and that the tools work best when they include a recommendations column along with comments and ratings, and when the tools are dynamic, enabling adjustments to be made as improvements are made and standards are developed.

5. Board Priorities

a. Board Vacancies

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, introduced Maddi MacDonald, Senior Policy Analyst, to provide an update on the Board vacancies. Maddi noted that there are currently three Board vacancies. There are several steps to the appointment process that are required by legislation, and the Directorate is working toward submitting a list of potential members to Minister in January, with members appointed by

late February or early March. Currently, over 80 individuals have applied to be a member of the Accessibility Advisory Board, with racial, ethnic, linguistic, geographic and disability diversity.

b. Accessible Housing

All Directorate staff left the meeting at this time except the Interim Executive Director. Rosalind Penfound provided an update regarding accessible housing issues, as this has been a significant issue for the Board since the start of the pandemic. Most recently, government's decision to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada regarding the recent Nova Scotia Court of Appeal decision related to Disability Rights Coalition et al vs Attorney General of NS et al.

The Board discussed their concerns regarding accessible housing for persons with disabilities, and government's decision to appeal the Court of Appeal decision. The Board agreed to send a letter to the Minister and a letter to the Editor expressing their concerns with this decision.

c. Queens Marque

Anne Sinclair provided an overview of the recent CBC article regarding accessibility concerns with the Queens Marque public space, including no tactile indicators or guards separating the steps from the ocean. Board members expressed their concerns with this and with Develop Nova Scotia's approach to address accessibility in later phases of the project.

Action: The Accessibility Directorate will follow up with Develop Nova Scotia to discuss these issues.

6. Other Business

Marcie Shwery-Stanley advised that she recently received information that the federal government will launch a call for ideas for two housing related initiatives.

Action: The Accessibility Directorate will share this information with Board members.

7. Adjournment

Rosalind Penfound adjourned the meeting. The next Board meeting will be held January 20, 2022, from 1 PM to 4 PM via Zoom.