

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Friday, June 21, 2024 – 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Board Members: Max Chauvin (Chair), Birgit Elssner, Melissa MacKenzie, Earl Muise, Linda Campbell, Amy Lays, Louise Gillis, Sarah Moore, Shellene Sparks

Regrets: Ellen Johnson (Vice-Chair), Denise Pictou Maloney

Staff: Dawn Stegen, Kristel vom Scheidt, Amy Middleton, Ashley Gaudet, Sumona Sonda, Lisa Jacobs, Craig MacKinnon, Terri Lynn Almeda

Guests: Sherri Aikenhead, Coordinator, Travis Gunn, Vice-Chair of Employment Standard Development Committee; Lianne Sarson, Thinkwell, Francine Vezina, Executive Director of Office of Addictions and Mental Health.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Max Chauvin, Chair welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting and opened with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement. Max noted that it was National Indigenous Day and encouraged people to participate in activities underway at the Mic Mac Mall in Dartmouth. He introduced coordinator Sherri Aikenhead and thanked Kristel vom Scheidt for her support of the Board over the years.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

b. Outstanding Board Business and Directorate Updates

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director began by introducing staff attending the meeting. Dawn summarized any required Board action from meeting minutes February, April and May 2024. One item from the February meeting hasn't been actioned yet (to submit a letter of advice to the Minister regarding the NS Building Code and Built Environment Standard).

There is a new Deputy Minister of Justice, Jennifer Glennie. They were previously Associate Deputy for Executive Council Office and a former Executive Director with Justice in legal services and court services. Dawn reports to Justice Associate Deputy Minister Michelle Higgins. The Office of Equity and Anti-Racism which previously reported to the Deputy Minister of Justice now reports to African Nova Scotia Affairs Deputy Minister Tracey Thomas.

On May 17, Nova Scotia signed a MOU with Accessibility Standards Canada to collaborate on work to develop standards. New Brunswick introduced legislation to establish an Accessibility Act making it the 7th province to have legislation in place.

Amendment to the Accessibility Act General Regulation is recommended. The recommendation includes adding the Nova Scotia Provincial Housing Association (NSPHA) as a public sector body and Invest NS and Build NS be named. The Accessibility Directorate is supporting municipalities, regional libraires and post secondary institutions with tools/webinars on how to update their accessibility plans, due April 1, 2025.

Work has begun on government's updated Accessibility Plan 2025-2028. Highlights will be shared at the October Board meeting. Accessibility training through the Public Service Commission for managers within the civil service is now being offered..

Dawn spoke to the CBC Radio series that ran in May regarding the goal to have Nova Scotia accessible by 2030.

3. Standards Updates:

a. Employment Standard Development Committee (SDC):

Max welcomed the Chair and Vice Chair of the Employment Standard Development Committee Travis Gunn.

Travis shared that the committee is making great progress. There have been seven (7) meetings of the committee since February. Lianne Sarson, from Thinkwell Research has been providing support to the committee to ensure that the recommendations for the standard stay on track. The Board will receive a presentation in July with the recommendations for a standard to approve to go to public consultation in the fall, 2024.

The format for Nova Scotians to have input will be similar to other SDC consultations, with focus group sessions and a survey to provide written feedback.

As part of the discussion, the definition of "support people" as it relates to interpreters, intervenors for those that are deaf/blind, was raised and discussed. ACTION: Accessibility Directorate staff will make standard development committees aware of the issue.

b. Education Standard Update:

Max welcomed Amy Middleton, Director of Policy and Standards, to provide an update. Amy indicated government departments are working collaboratively to support the development of a standard for public Pre-Primary to Grade 12,

Universities and NSCC. They have reviewed 46 recommendations for public elementary and secondary education and, the 57 recommendations for post-secondary education. This summer the Directorate will meet with RCE and CSAP leadership, and the University Presidents to provide an update on the standards work. The goal is to have a draft proposed standard ready in late fall 2024 and seek approval to make it available for public comment in 2025.

c. Employment Standard Update:

Max welcomed Amy Middleton to provide an update. Since the Board approved recommendations for the employment standard to advance to the Justice Minister staff has been preparing the formatting and it will be submitted shortly.

d. Order of Built Environment Standard Update switched with d. Public Transportation Update:

Max shared that the Justice Minister has approved the recommended members proposed by the Board to serve on the Public Transportation Standard Committee. He thanked Melissa MacKenzie, Earl Muise and Ellen Johnson for their work reviewing applicants. He welcomed Lisa Jacobs, Sr. Policy Analyst, Accessibility Directorate, to update the process to finalize the announcement of the committee.

A Board member asked if the makeup of the recommended members changed when an alternate was selected, and Lisa said it resulted in one more member with a disability joining the committee.

e. Built Environment Standard Update

Dawn Stegen provided the update. Since last fall, the proposed regulations were shared with the public for comments for 60 days and, following review of the input, revisions to the regulations were made based on that input, including feedback from the Board. The regulations, like all others in government, were shared with the Office of Registrar and Regulations, for review and formatting. That work is underway.

Staff would also like to do a presentation on the process of developing and enacting regulations with the Board at an upcoming meeting and discuss lessons learned so that the Board can benefit from understanding.

ACTION: Add to Board workplan

A Board member suggested that a small team prepare a letter of advice to the Justice Minister regarding advancing the amendments to the Building Code and Built Environment Standard. A discussion followed and it was decided that several members will meet in July to draft a letter of advice for the Board to approve to send to the Minister.

MOTION:

“That the Accessibility Advisory Board work together to draft a letter to the Justice Minister and ask about the rationale on the delay of Building Code amendments and ask that be approved in 2024.”

Linda Campbell moved the motion seconded by Birgit Elssner. Motion passed unanimously. As a follow-up action, several Board members will meet on Zoom to draft the letter in July.

f. Information and Communication:

Max who, along with Board member Linda Campbell, sits on the selection committee for this Standard Development Committee shared a presentation on the information and communications accessibility standard membership. He gave an overview of the scope of the recommendations, to identify, prevent, and remove barriers to accessing information and communication, including barriers that exist digitally, in print, or through interactions with technology or people.

In total, there were 48 applicants and 30 were from people with disabilities. The recommendation from the selection sub-committee include 22 members and of those, 17 are people with disabilities, including the chair and vice-chair.

Motion:

“That the Accessibility Advisory Board approve the recommendations for the Information and Communications Standard Development Committee members as proposed by the selection sub-committee, and the membership recommendation be advanced to the Minister of Justice for approval.”

Birgit Elssner moved the motion, and it was seconded by Amy Lays. Motion was unanimously approved.

4.a Board Website Development

Max welcomed Dawn Stegen and Kristel vom Scheidt to present on the timelines and overview for a new Board website.

A Board member asked whether the new website would have an embedded system to receive applications because people in the deaf community have a hard time applying through government’s Agencies, Boards and Commissions website because they find it confusing with all the listings there and that it is difficult to navigate. This feedback will be shared with the Executive Council Office of the government who are making accessibility improvements to their systems. Board members Linda Campbell, Earl Muise and Birgit Elssner offered to join the sub-committee developing the Board website. Some of the other ideas Board members would like to see incorporated on the website are:

- Plain Language and accessibility features like large print and just the standard easy readability and interactive

- Transparent workflow of how the Board advises Minister
- Contact information on the website where there is an email for the Board
- Photos and bios of Board members
- Mini Videos to tell stories of success
- Media articles related to people with disabilities

4.b Media Scan Trends

Accessibility Directorate staff member Craig Mackinnon gave an overview of the purpose of the media scans that are shared bi-weekly. He shared a presentation on where the articles are taken from, the trends in Nova Scotia and the challenges getting the news since some sites are now blocked.

The Board indicated the media scans are helpful and asked a few questions about sources.

4.c Office of Addictions and Mental Health

Max welcomed Francine Vezina, Executive Director of the Office. She gave an overview of mental health and addiction services available in Nova Scotia, stressed that there is flexibility in new programs being offered. Pilots are underway for clinical services and billing codes are being evaluated. Recruitment continues to be an important issue. The office is trying to improve mental health services for the deaf. The Board discussed how this is an important issue.

Francine will take that feedback to her team working on the Health Human Resources Plan to ensure they are aware of the need for deaf therapists who know sign language, including the resource of an Ontario professor who is deaf and specializes in mental health for children who provides workshops.

4.d Act Review Government Response:

Max welcomed Terry Lynn Almeda, Director of Programs and Services, who gave a presentation on the Review of the Accessibility Act and the status of the 48 recommendations by Dr. Kate Aubrecht. She highlighted the 15 recommendations that pertain to the Accessibility Advisory Board and the Standard Development Committees.

The government accepted all of Dr. Aubrecht's recommendations but one related to changing the governance of the Accessibility Advisory Board. Terry Lynn summarized the key actions of work on the standards that the Board will be involved in over the next three years in response to the government response.

Terri Lynn was asked by a Board member if she would provide regular updates on the Government Response to the Act Review and, the Chair agreed that would be a good idea.

ACTION: Add regular updates to Board workplan

Accessibility Advisory Board Discussion Focus for 2024/2025

Following Terri Lynn's presentation, Max asked Board members how the board can connect with communities and form relationships that are important moving forward? What should we focus our time on. What's important?

Requests were made for a presentation on the Remedy - Department of Community Services, and the Autism Action Plan.

Almost every member emphasized the need for more communication from the Board, including social media posts and videos, developing a proactive plan that starts with the website launch.

Other suggestions included:

- Plain language training
- Increase information and awareness with municipalities and small businesses
- Receiving an update from HRM and other prescribed public sector bodies (PPSB) on their processes and implementation plans, as well as an overall update on Prescribed Public Sector Bodies
- Ensure our work is informed by an increasing diversity of people with disabilities

Action Arising:

Maria Medioli, DCS has been invited to the September Board meeting to present on the Remedy. Those leading the Autism Action Plan will be invited to present.

Arrangements will be made to have a PPSB panel and for the Accessibility Directorate to update the Board on ppsb obligations and compliance.

Max sought roundtable feedback on the day-long meeting.

Members felt full day meetings are easier to schedule and overall, the 2-hour break was appreciated.

4. Adjournment

Max thanked everyone for their discussion and reminded them there will be a one-hour meeting for discussing draft recommendations developed by the Goods and Services Standard Development Committee in late July early August followed by the September in-person meeting September 27 that will include a dinner together.