

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, July 12, 2022 – 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Rosalind Penfound (Chair), David Caswell (Vice-Chair), Birgit Elssner, Andrew Jantzen, Ellen Johnson, Anne Sinclair, Linda Campbell

Regrets: Marcie Shwery-Stanley

Staff: Dawn Stegen (Executive Director), Terri Lynn Almeda (Manager), Dustin Lyon, Maddi MacDonald, Kristel vom Scheidt, Hannah MacDougall, Jasmine Smart, Laura Beth MacPherson

Guests: Sherri Aikenhead, Project Executive and Vicki Elliott-Lopez, Senior Executive Director of Housing, Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Ryan MacLean and Jenn MacIntyre, Consultants.

1. Welcome

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The agenda with amendments previously circulated was accepted.

b. Approval of Minutes from May 17, 2022

Motion: The minutes for the May meeting were moved by Anne Sinclair and Birgit Elssner seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

c. Outstanding Business

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director gave an update on the appointment to fill the vacancies on the board, with the expectation this will happen in August.

There are currently some staff vacancies the Directorate is actively working to fill. As a result, the focus is on obligations and priorities while other work pauses. Julia Stephenson has accepted a new position in government, and Terri Lynn Almeda is the interim lead for Prescribed Public Sector Bodies. Jasmine Smart was introduced as a new Program Specialist.

Dawn reported there is no further update or follow up from Health and Wellness regarding personal care assistants and accessibility in general.

Dawn mentioned plans for upcoming regional meetings with disability organizations and Prescribed Public Sector Bodies starting the end of August in Cape Breton. She will be joined by the board chair.

Timelines for the Act Review include draft report due November 2022 and final report to the Minister by March 2023.

The Directorate anticipates several initiatives will come forward in September including the public launch of the Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan, the Are you Ready Guide for Emergency Preparedness, Compliance and Enforcement education materials, and the announcement of the fourth Accessibility Standard.

A recent update on the Accessibility Awareness campaign show that there have been 1.6 million impressions from the digital ads since they were released in April 2022.

Following the updates, the board inquired on the status of accessibility of the Member's of the Legislative Assembly offices, a question raised at the May board meeting. There was also an inquiry regarding accessibility of construction sites in Halifax. Dawn reported that follow up on both of these inquires will happen and will report back at a future meeting.

Board members expressed frustration over the delay in appointing new members to the board and concern that the board is currently at eight members. Roz and Dawn agreed to discuss further.

5. Board Priorities

a. Affordable Housing

Roz welcomed Sherri Aikenhead, Project Executive leading the Provincial Housing Strategy for Affordable Housing, Vicki Elliott-Lopez, Senior Executive Director of Housing both from the department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as Ryan MacLean and Jenn MacIntyre, who will be leading the public consultations. Sherri presented on the development of Provincial Housing Strategy, including undertaking a needs assessment. She explained that areas of focus for the Housing Strategy are to increase housing supply, maintain and sustain affordable housing, and build and deliver housing programs that people need.

One board member commented that the current programs available to make accessible modifications in residences are not eligible for anyone under 65 years, and this gap needs to be addressed.

A public survey will be launched this summer as part of the needs assessment. Part of the survey includes feedback from the board. Initial feedback was given including the survey being screen reader friendly, and the definition of disability to include Deaf, hard of hearing, and neurodivergent persons. Another comment was that some of the questions were skewed towards mobility disabilities and a few accessibility features were missing, such as adult change tables, visual alarms, and accessible buzzer systems.

The board asked Housing and Municipal Affairs to ensure accessibility be included in planning for housing, and that safety, escape routes, accessible alarms, and navigation be also considered. For example, all buildings in Ontario are required to have visual alarms <https://www.firstalert.ca/smoke-legislation/>. There was some discussion about the value of a universal design approach.

The next step will be community workshops in the fall.

ACTION: Directorate staff will assist with collating and sending feedback on the survey back to Housing and Municipal Affairs.

4. Business

a. Barriers Impacting Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and Inclusion Nova Scotia (INS)

Roz welcomed Patricia Neves, Executive Director and Leslie Dunn, Communications Director of Inclusion Nova Scotia. Patricia gave a presentation on the work of INS supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities. The fact that many people do not have formal diagnosis means they therefore face challenges accessing health care, education, employment, and housing. The resulting impact on their daily life is often a higher rate of violence and poverty. Patricia explained that Inclusion Nova Scotia also provides navigational services to individuals with intellectual disabilities and develops public resources to help educate the community.

Leslie reviewed the employment support they offer including the Inclusive Employment Collaborator network which connects job seekers and employers, as well as plans to launch a job coaching app for individuals to access supports remotely. Employment programs support the social model of disability.

There was a comment from the board on the importance of supporting those with intellectual disabilities to gain life skills in order to enter the job market. One board member asked a question about the process for individuals to access a job coach, specifically if they didn't have access to technology.

3. Standards

a. Standard Development Committees

i. Employment: Update

Kristel vom Scheidt, Policy Analyst gave an update on behalf of Lashauna Smith who is currently on leave. The minutes from the May 11 and 12 meetings were included in the board package. The committee last met on June 28, 2022, to discuss Recruitment, Hiring and Onboarding. There were two guest speakers including presentations on Accessible Employment in the deaf community and Recruitment and Hiring in the provincial public service. The next Employment SDC

meeting is scheduled for Sept 14 and 15 to discuss Retention and Advancement.

ii. Education: Update

Roz gave an update on the Education Standard Development Committee who last met on July 11, 2022 and reviewed draft recommendations. The SDC has upcoming meetings with the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority and others to gather feedback. The goal is to have draft recommendations to the board for the October meeting.

b. Built Environment Standard Update

Maddi MacDonald, Senior Policy Analyst reported the Phase 2 Recommendations were posted online today and a draft of the built environment standard is complete.

In advance of public consultation on the draft standard there will be a cost estimation for the standard, and an implementation and compliance and enforcement plan prepared. The draft standard will be shared for public consultation in early winter. The board will receive a presentation of the draft standard at the September meeting.

The board asked how the public should use the Phase 1 and 2 Recommendations. Maddi responded that the Phase 1 and 2 Recommendations can still be referred to along with the Canadian Standard Association's B651: Guidelines on Accessible Design for the Built Environment.

There was a comment from the board about the timeline for the Built Environment Standard, knowing how much time construction takes.

ACTION: Maddi will pass along the press release regarding the posting of the Build Environment Phase 2 Recommendations, and review timelines with the board when they present in September.

4. Business continued

b. Prescribed Public Sector Bodies Compliance and Monitoring

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director reviewed the compliance status of the Cohort 1 Prescribed Public Sector Bodies (PPSBs). Currently 78% have

developed plans and 21% will have them completed by Fall 2022. The Directorate is providing education and support to those who have not yet met their obligations under the Act. Directorate staff are reviewing the plans in order to pass along feedback to PPSBs. A summary of this review will come to the board at the August meeting.

The deadline for Cohort 2 PPSBs is April 1, 2023, and they will be surveyed to determine if support is needed.

c. Municipal Accessibility Support Initiative

Terri Lynn Almeda, Manager gave an overview of a new Municipal Accessibility Support Initiative through a funding agreement with the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia. This created a new position, the Municipal Accessibility Support Coordinator to assist Municipalities with their capacity building work, grants and other initiatives.

Additional support for all PPSB's includes quarterly virtual gatherings as well as the development of a webinar and accompanying workbook for the Engaging with Persons with Disabilities workshop. The Introduction to Disability electronic course is now recorded and will be made publicly available on the Directorate's website and there is a new Introduction to Barriers learning module being developed.

There was feedback from one board member that the Engaging with Persons with Disabilities workshop was offered to the entire campus community at Saint Mary's University with no indication that it was an in-depth, interactive session.

ACTION: Directorate will follow up on promotional information for the above mentioned workshop.

5. Board Priorities continued

b. COVID-19 Outreach

Roz opened the discussion and noted that Nova Scotia has further eased restrictions, including lifting the requirement to self-isolate for those who have tested positive for COVID-19. The only restrictions that remain are mandatory vaccination for high-risk settings and masking and self-isolation requirements for those who have tested positive in

long-term care facilities, homes licensed by the Department of Community Services under the Homes for Special Care Act, and congregate living settings (like a correctional facilities, shelters or transition houses).

Roz asked the Board if they would like to continue COVID-19 as a standing agenda item. There was consensus that the board would like to keep this on their agenda for the time being, and if there are new developments to share there is time allocated for a discussion, with recognition this may not be at every meeting.

c. Round Table

Roz asked board members if they had anything they would like to share. One member was interested in getting more information on the Halifax Fire public consultations. In response to this another board member explained their experience during a public consultation, including the lack of accessibility considerations. Although when feedback was given the organizers were willing to adjust future sessions and connect with Paul Vienneau, the accessibility consultant for Halifax. Another board member highlighted that the second Accessibility Plan for Wolfville was passed by their Council. A third board member expressed concern with the design for Spring Garden not being fully accessible and would like to pass along feedback to the Municipality.

ACTION: Staff will follow up with the Halifax Regional Municipality.

d. Adjournment

Next meeting will be August 16 from 1-4 on Zoom. The approval of the Goods and Services Standard Development Committee materials will be one of the main agenda items.