

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 22, 2022 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Rosalind Penfound (Chair), David Caswell (Vice-Chair), Linda Campbell, Birgit Elssner, Andrew Jantzen, Ellen Johnson, Marcie Shwery-Stanley

Regrets: Anne Sinclair

Staff: Dawn Stegen (Executive Director), Dustin Lyon, Lashauna Smith, Amy Middleton, Hannah MacDougall, Kristel vom Scheidt, Josh Bates, Maddi Adams, Terri Lynn Almeda

1. Welcome

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement. Before beginning the meeting Roz addressed the recent public announcement of her appointment as interim Deputy Minister at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Roz confirmed her commitment to this board and explained that she has reviewed the provincial Conflict of Interest Act and if there is an instance where she must declare a conflict, David Caswell will take over the Chair duties.

Board members congratulated Roz on this role.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

b. Approval of Minutes from August 16, 2022

Motion: The minutes for the August meeting were moved by Birgit Elssner and seconded by Ellen Johnson. Motion carried unanimously.

c. Outstanding Business

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director gave an update on staffing changes at the Directorate with staff actively working to fill two outstanding positions: a part-time Senior Policy Analyst and part-time Capability Building Program Specialist. Since the last board meeting the Accessibility Directorate has hired Caroline Kovesi in an Awareness and Education Coordinator Intern position and has welcomed

back Hannah MacDougall as a part time Accessibility Capacity Building Program Specialist.

When the four board vacancy positions are approved an email will be sent to the board. Josh Bates, Senior Policy Analyst will lead the board orientation of the new members, which will include inviting current board members to a virtual meet and greet during their orientation.

Staff from the Halifax Regional Municipality will be invited to present at an upcoming meeting.

The Directorate is still awaiting follow up from the Department of Health and Wellness regarding personal care assistants.

The Speaker's office has recently updated their website to include the accessibility status of each Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) office as of August 2022. They are using the "barrier-free" access and design requirements of the Nova Scotia Building Code. Currently all MLAs are reporting accessible offices except for three, one of which is awaiting contract work to be completed, and the last two just moved into new offices and the audit has yet to be completed. It was noted that they are using an outdated version of the Building Code.

ACTION: Staff will send the Board the link to review the status of each MLA office and will follow up with the Speaker's office to review their audit tool and checklist.

Dawn gave an update on the series of meetings that herself and Board Chair, Roz Penfound had in Cape Breton at the end of August. They were there for the para sailing event, the Mobility Cup, conducted a radio interview with CBC Cape Breton and met with officials with the Cape Breton Chamber of Commerce, multiple disability organizations, provincial government offices and local prescribed public sector bodies (PPSBs). She specifically spoke about a meeting with the Mawita'mk Society in Wycocomagh, who runs a group home and community centre.

The main take aways from these meetings were that organizations are interested in raising awareness need support with the implementation of their accessibility plans, specifically in understanding the next steps with compliance and enforcement. They are interested in sharing plans and creating a community of practice around accessibility.

There was a question from the board on the meeting with PPSBs that are currently in a situation of noncompliance with their accessibility planning. Dawn explained that these PPSBs were offered support and assistance while they move ahead this work.

Dawn also brought attention to a notice that was passed along to board members from the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism regarding public consultations on language, including ableism.

There were a few comments from board members on these consultations, specifically the lack of context in describing the term “ableism”. It was also noted that there was no mention of accessibility or interpreter services being provided for these meetings.

ACTION: Staff will connect with the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism to ensure that accessibility services are offered for these public consultations.

The Directorate has received a report on the public accessibility awareness campaign which includes 1.4 million impressions on the website due to television, web and social media advertisements. The next step is to add new content through a targeted photography campaign, that will take place over the next few months.

Lastly Dawn informed the board that she is going to first Pan-Canadian Forum on Standards hosted by Accessibility Standards Canada in October. She will have an opportunity to connect with other Provinces and Territory partners regarding collaboration, potential harmonization, and a shared research agenda. She will give an update from these meetings at the next board meeting.

3. Standards

a. Standard Development Committees (SDC)

i. Employment: Update

Lashauna Smith, Senior Policy Analyst reported on behalf of the Chair of the Employment SDC that the committee continues to work to develop its recommendations and minutes of the June 28 Employment SDC meeting were included with the board’s meeting package. Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM) is in October and the Directorate is planning some initiatives to promote DEAM. The next scheduled full SDC meetings are November 7 and 8, with a focus on the topics of Workplace Accommodations and Employment Support Services and Return to Work Processes.

ii. Goods and Services: Update

Josh Bates, Senior Policy Analyst gave an update on recruitment materials for the Goods and Services Standard Development Committee. He said the aim is to launch the call for membership and application in October with an accompanying ASL video. In addition, a jurisdictional scan and regulatory review of accessible goods and services will be completed by a consultant so this information will be available to the committee as soon as they are appointed.

Focus groups will take place this fall with people with disabilities and front-line goods and service providers. There is a plan for a consultant of African descent and an Indigenous consultant to perform focus groups with their respective communities.

b. Built Environment Standard Process and Progress

Maddi Adams, Senior Policy Analyst gave an update on the development of the Build Environment proposed standard. They explained that the draft standard must be publicly posted for at least 60 days and then feedback shared with the board. Maddi explained that the standard work includes additions or amendments to the provincial building code, regulations under the Act (the standard), accompanying guidelines, and support for PPSBs. An implementation and compliance plan is being drafted for this standard and the Directorate will seek approval to conduct public engagement in early 2023 with accessible communication materials. In 2023 the standard would be advanced through the regulatory process and then enacted and implemented in 2024.

Maddi stated that most of the recommendations from the standard development committee and board are reflected in the draft standard, and through guidelines and amendments to the Building Code. Currently 57 of the recommendations made by the board are accepted or strengthened, 38 recommendations are partially or accepted with modification, 13 are addressed elsewhere or not accepted, and another 26 are still under review or in development.

A board member had a question regarding the scope of the Nova Scotia Building Code. Another question was regarding the integration of Deaf Space concepts into the standard. Maddi explained they are interwoven in various areas, mostly as they relate to interiors, although they will review the current draft to ensure that all five principals of Deaf Space are incorporated.

c. Education: Introduction to Recommendations

Cynthia Bruce, Vice Chair of the Education Standard Development committee gave an introduction as to the process and approach that was undertaken to draft the recommendations. Amy Middleton, Senior Policy Analyst then gave an overview of the timelines, the committee, its scope, and what was considered when they were writing their recommendations. She explained there is a separate set of

recommendations for each sector and alignment between them all, with the majority drafted as regulations. Amy stated that all of the recommendations are aimed at increasing awareness, capacity and encouraging change with significant differences between public and private sectors. Amy gave a high-level summary of the content of the recommendations to help board members prepare for when they receive the full text.

There was a question from the board about seeking input from a deaf education expert, explaining that this standard will set a precedent and this perspective is important. Roz Penfound responded and said it is not too late to collect additional feedback and she will follow up with the board member individually for contact information.

This member wanted to clarify the term “language access”, as interpreters providing facilitation between two languages, and this is important due to the language deprivation that occurs in the deaf community. Language deprivation impacts the learning experiences of students and those providing language access is the teachers and Educational Assistants, not the interpreters.

Another question from the board was regarding some of the recommendations being optional. Cynthia Bruce explained that due to the current reality of some of the private career colleges, the SDC believed a balance approach was important to ensure they remained operational.

A further question was about the how these recommendations would be presented to the public in plain language.

4. a PPSB Cohort 1 Compliance and Monitoring

Terri Lynn Almeda, Manger reviewed the compliance status of the Cohort 1 Prescribed Public Sector Bodies (PPSBs): with 79% completed their accessibility plans, 19% have plans scheduled to be completed by this fall, and 2% have not yet begun progress. All those not in compliance will be contacted, and information and support offered. This support has included meeting with individual and groups of PPSBs, presenting to Accessibility Advisory Committees, responding to specific questions and working collaboratively with the Municipal Accessibility Coordinator hired by the Association of Municipal Administrators. There is also a scheduled a virtual gathering for all PPSBs on September 29 and additional gatherings are being planned throughout the fall and early winter.

b Government Accessibility Plan 2022-25

Laura Beth MacPherson, Senior Policy Analyst gave an update on the Government of Nova Scotia (GNS) second accessibility plan (the plan) which spans 2022-2025. The plan has been drafted with the support of the GNS Accessibility Interdepartmental Committee over the last 16 months who have adapted their Terms of Reference to ensure their work supports the plan moving forward. It was drafted by a plain language writer, designed in an accessible format and translated into ASL and French. All departments have made commitments which aligns with departmental mandates and internal priorities. The plan includes a set of guiding principles to ensure consistent implementation across government, commitments, including 6 government wide actions. Laura explained they are currently waiting on approval of the plan and are looking to do a public launch, in which all board members will be invited.

ACTION: Staff will send the board the press release for the 2022-25 Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility plan with details as soon as plan is approved and released.

Board Priorities and Standing Agenda Items

5. a. COVID-19 and Housing

Roz Penfound explained that since the last board meeting case numbers, hospitalizations, and deaths related to COVID-19 have very slowly trended downward and there have been no changes to Nova Scotia's public health protocols. Directorate staff are presenting the findings of the impacts of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities to other government departments this fall, and staff are also monitoring the situation with monkeypox as it may impact persons with disabilities.

Roz also reminded the board on the presentation at the last meeting from the Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs on the development of the Housing Strategy. This housing needs assessment survey will be publicly distributed on social media and an accompanying website.

b Roundtable

Roz started the discussion by addressing an update to upcoming meetings. The in-person meeting scheduled on October 20 has now been changed to a half day virtual, and the November 17 meeting to be a full day in person meeting.

Roz also mentioned the board's work plan which outlines some of the presentations and topics the groups will cover before the end of the year.

One board member spoke of their experience attending the Accessibility Standards Canada Annual General Meeting and the fact that it was not conducted in plain language.

Another member explained that the situation with having access to personal support workers is an ongoing challenge that has gotten much worse. They explained there is a constant circulation of advertisements and still a shortage of workers persists.

c Adjournment

The next meeting will be October 20 from 1-4 on Zoom with most of the meeting spent on the recommendations for a standard in education.