

Summary of Advice for the Government of Nova Scotia on Accessibility Standards in the Built Environment: **Phase 1**

Plain language summary

*Given to the Minister of Justice by the
Accessibility Advisory Board*

August 2020

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Summary of Advice for the Government of Nova Scotia on
Accessibility Standards in the Built Environment: Phase 1

ISBN: 978-1-77448-101-1

The Built Environment Standard Development Committee is a group of experts. They have experience in areas like architecture, urban planning, engineering, and accessibility.

The committee met and talked about barriers to accessibility. They talked about how to make the built environment more accessible in Nova Scotia. They decided on a list of standards that could improve buildings and outdoor spaces.

This is important because everyone has a human right to access buildings and outdoor spaces – the places people live, work, learn, and play.

The committee gave a list of standard recommendations to the Accessibility Advisory Board in July 2020. The board is a group of people from the community who give advice to government about accessibility.

The Accessibility Advisory Board agreed with the recommendations. They made small changes to include the needs of people with different disabilities. The board gave the recommendations to the Minister of Justice. The Minister of Justice is in charge of accessibility laws in Nova Scotia.

Most of the members of the board and the committee are people with disabilities.

Introduction

Every person is born equal.

We all have the same rights as everyone else. These are called human rights.

Human rights help guide how we live together and treat each other. Everyone must respect the human rights of other people. No one can take away someone else's human rights. Some examples of human rights are the right to live freely and to feel safe. Other examples are the right to be treated the same as everyone else, the right to have a job, and the right to safely navigate buildings and outdoor spaces.

There are laws and agreements in Nova Scotia, in Canada, and with other countries that say what governments should do to make sure everyone has these human rights. The government says that access to buildings and outdoor spaces where people live, work, learn, and play is a human right.

Making sure everyone can access buildings and outdoor spaces means getting rid of the things that make it hard for people to access these spaces. These are called barriers. It means listening to people with disabilities and making sure they are leaders in making these standard recommendations. It also means changing the laws about how buildings and outdoor spaces where people live, work, learn, and play are designed and built so that everyone can safely use them.

"People with disabilities" are the words we are using to describe people who have bodies that work differently and people who have brains that work differently. Some people with disabilities use other words to describe themselves. The advice we are giving in this report is meant to make the built environment better for all of these people.

About the Accessibility Act

Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act is a law that says accessibility is a human right. It has a goal for Nova Scotia to be accessible by the year 2030. It allows the government to make accessibility standards.

Accessibility standards are rules that tell people, organizations, governments, and businesses what they must do to make sure people with disabilities can access their services and programs.

The Nova Scotia Government will make accessibility standards in six areas:

- Education
- Buildings and outdoor spaces
- Buying and selling things, and accessing services like going to a gym or eating a meal at a restaurant
- Sharing information with each other (Communication)
- Employment
- Public transportation, like buses and taxis

About Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment

The Built Environment Standard will be a set of rules that will make sure people with disabilities can safely use buildings and outdoor spaces where people live, work, learn, and play. Architects, engineers, builders, planners, the Province of Nova Scotia, and municipalities will have to follow these rules. The new rules will apply to new and renovated buildings, sidewalks, parking lots, and outdoor spaces all over Nova Scotia. These spaces will not be allowed to be built or renovated if they include barriers to accessibility.

In March 2019, the Accessibility Advisory Board created a Built Environment Standard Development Committee. This committee's job is to help the board give advice to government about the built environment standard.

The Built Environment Standard Development Committee is a group of community members who are experts in the built environment and people who work for the government. Most of the committee members have a disability. (A list of committee members is at the end of this document.)

How the Committee Is Doing Its Work

The Built Environment Standard Development Committee is doing its work in two phases:

Phase 1: Make standard recommendations to address things that are not covered in the rules today and safety issues. These are recommendations for the rules that the committee thinks people should follow to make sure that people can access buildings and outdoor spaces. These are the recommendations that are summarized in this document.

Phase 2: Make more specific standard recommendations for each area in the built environment. These are also rules that they think must be followed to make sure

everyone can access buildings and outdoor spaces. These will be given to government by September 2021.

To do the Phase 1 work, the committee used an online form in Spring 2019 to learn about what is stopping people from accessing buildings and outdoor spaces, and what needs to change. In March 2020, they met with Nova Scotians in person to hear what they liked about their advice for government and what need to be changed.

The Built Environment Standard Development Committee learned about what other provinces and countries are doing. They also learned from others who design buildings and outdoor spaces.

What Government Should Do with the Advice

The Built Environment Standard Development Committee wants government to help everyone who designs and builds buildings and outdoor spaces to start making changes now. The committee hopes that government will turn their Phase 1 standard recommendations into a combination of laws, support programs, and guides to tell people how to design and build accessible buildings and outdoor spaces. This would be called a regulation.

During Phase 2 of their work, the committee will give government more advice about how they can make even more accessibility rules for the built environment.

The Standard Development Committee's Advice

We are telling government that the laws about buildings and outdoor spaces in Nova Scotia must make important changes so everyone can access these spaces. This document summarizes the standard recommendations that the committee is making.

Summary of Recommendations

The full Phase 1 report submitted to the provincial government contains 68 recommendations. These recommendations cover all aspects of the built environment. For example, some recommendations deal with areas outside of buildings like accessible parking, sidewalks, and entrances to buildings. Some deal with areas inside of buildings like accessible washrooms, elevators, signage, and emergency systems. Some deal with recreation spaces like accessible playgrounds, swimming pools, and parks and trails.

It is envisioned that accessibility standards will be implemented in a variety of ways, from guidelines and support programs to government policy and regulations.

This summary does not include the recommendations themselves. Rather it lists the objectives of the recommendations – what the recommendations are intended to ensure. It describes some features of what the committee hopes will be part of our future accessible built environment.

The Standard Development Committee broke the built environment recommendations out into smaller topic areas. Each topic area and its objectives are outlined here:

ACCESSIBLE PARKING

Accessible parking means both street parking and public and private parking lots.

Objectives of the recommendations:

- The parking permit system is reviewed by government.
- Parking lots provide accessible spaces that are maintained and consistent everywhere in Nova Scotia.
- Specific types of parking lots use the Canadian Standards Association's Standard as a foundation for ensuring accessibility.
- Accessible on-street parking spaces exist in the areas where they are needed.
- Curb cuts exist near accessible on street parking spaces. These curb cuts are accessible and consistent everywhere in Nova Scotia.
- Accessibility symbols and signage in parking lots receive regular maintenance.
- All parking surfaces, including gravel, will have safe accessible parking spots and a safe path for people to get from the parking spots to where they are going.

ACCESSIBLE PARKING *continued*

- Commercial lots with a gated entrance will have different options for people to communicate if they need help opening the gate.
- Removing snow and ice from accessible parking spaces and curb cuts is prioritized.
- Parking lots have clearly marked accessible paths for people to move through the parking lot.

PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Pedestrian facilities means sidewalks, crosswalks, and paths of travel.

Objectives of the recommendations:

- Sidewalks follow the Transportation Association of Canada Guidelines.
- Curb cuts use tactile indicators and are colour contrasted.
- New sidewalks use tactile walking surface indicators.
- Traffic lights and new lit intersections use vibration and audio signals.
- Plans for new streets including the sidewalks, crosswalks, and things in the sidewalks like trees or benches are reviewed by the Municipal Accessibility Committee.
- Street furniture like benches, tables, or signs will not be in the way when people move through the space.
- Snow and ice removal for municipal sidewalks and bus stops is prioritized.
- Raised crosswalks are considered for high volume and mid-block crossings.
- Construction zones follow the Canadian Standards Association standard for accessible pathways to ensure pedestrian safety.

EXTERIOR APPROACHES

Exterior Approaches are the entrances and exits to buildings and the path of travel from the sidewalk or road to the building.

Objectives of the recommendations:

- Accessible paths from public spaces to main entrances are included in the planning process and comply with the Canadian Standards Association Standard.
- Primary accessible entrances are highly visible from sidewalks and open spaces or provide clear signage showing where the accessible entrance is.

EXTERIOR APPROACHES *continued*

- The main building entrances are lit so that the entrance and paths are visible from a distance. This lighting is even and well maintained.
- Pathways from the sidewalk or parking lot to accessible entrances
 - are free from obstructions
 - are marked with tactile indicator strips
 - are colour contrasted
 - have clear signage
 - comply with the Canadian Standards Association Standard
- Tactile indicators are present at the top of stairs, in accordance with Canadian Standards Association standards.
- If a building cannot meet these requirements because of the structure or space that they are working with, other options will be available.

EMERGENCY SYSTEMS

Emergency systems include areas of refuge, evacuation plans, fire doors, and building procedures for things like how people are alerted that there is an emergency. These can be different for different types of buildings. They depend on requirements in the Fire Code and type of building.

Objectives of recommendations:

- Specific buildings post evacuation instructions that are accessible and will not be easily destroyed in an emergency. New construction includes accessible technology to broadcast evacuation instruction if there is an emergency.
- Specific organizations update evacuation procedures to include how to assist persons with disabilities and provide training for staff.
- Certain buildings have a voluntary register of disabled persons and designate staff to help persons with disabilities evacuate.
- Buildings have visual fire alarms.
- Certain buildings with stairs at accessible entrances and exits have an evacuation chair or similar device.
- Fire exits involving stairs clearly mark how persons with disabilities should evacuate.
- Buildings offering essential services to public have an area of refuge at each level of one fire exit designated stairway.

EMERGENCY SYSTEMS *continued*

- Fire doors include a window.
- Emergency doors are a different colour from the things around it.

SITE SELECTION

Site Selection means the ways in which government and other public bodies choose the location of their buildings and spaces.

Objectives of recommendations:

- Site selection for new Government of Nova Scotia, public sector, and municipal buildings and spaces
 - is determined with consultation
 - is located close to the community it is intended to serve
 - includes active transportation / sidewalk access to site, where possible
 - includes public transit stops close to main building entrance, where possible
 - includes accessible parking onsite
 - includes easy and safe drop off locations, close to the main entrance
 - includes barrier free and slope friendly paths of travel from sidewalks/transit
- Accessibility criteria for Government of Nova Scotia and municipal buildings and spaces is a priority when leasing or partnering with other organizations.

WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

Wayfinding and signage means how people travel through buildings and spaces and the signs that direct them to where they need to go.

Objectives of recommendations:

- The Province of Nova Scotia adopts the Canadian Standards Association standard for signage as a provincial standard.
- Communications NS accepts responsibility to look at what other countries are doing to improve accessible wayfinding on a regular basis and make changes when needed.

WASHROOMS

Washrooms refers to washrooms available to the public.

Objectives of recommendations:

- New and renovated public and commercial buildings have accessible washrooms.
- Washrooms are close to the lobby and reception with clear signage.
- Accessible washrooms
 - meet the Canadian Standards Association standard
 - are in contrasting colours by at least 70%
 - have a clear path to enter
 - are accessible via automatic door opener, or screen wall entry
 - have emergency lighting
 - have an emergency alert system (if buildings are staffed)
- Buildings offering essential services to the public have at least one adult change table that meets the Canadian Standards Association Standard and has an accompanying lift.

INTERIORS

Interiors refers to the inside of a building. It includes hallways, elevators, doorways, stairs, and how building are navigated.

Objectives of recommendations:

- Buildings have logical and direct path of travel. Signage is clear and accessible.
- How people move through a building during an emergency and where people can be safe when they are waiting for help are included in the design of buildings.
- New and renovated buildings include adjustable lighting options in specific areas.
- Hotels comply with the Nova Scotia Building Code, with colour contrast.
- Elevators meet the Canadian Standards Association Standard. They have an auditory announcement of floors and accessible technology to initiate emergency services.
- Doorways in government buildings and buildings offering education and healthcare meet the Canadian Standards Association Standard.
- Stairways, ramps, and moving walkways meet the Canadian Standards Association Standard.
- Doors utilize some amount of glass.

INTERIORS *continued*

- Interiors use contrasting colours.
- Sound reverberation is considered.
- If a building cannot meet these requirements because of the structure or space that they are working with, other options will be available.

HOUSING AND RESIDENCES

Recommendations apply to multi-unit residential buildings that have four or more units and that are over three stories and have ground floor access.

The Accessibility Act says that we can't make laws for privately owned homes. For these types of homes, the Standards Development Committee is recommending guidelines and funding programs to help people build more accessible homes.

Objectives of the recommendations:

- All new multi-unit residential buildings with four or more units that are over three stories and have ground floor or elevator access are visitable. This means that people with disabilities are able to enter the building, navigate the main living area of an apartment, and use the washroom. If a building cannot meet these requirements other options will be available.
- For all other residential unit types, the Government of Nova Scotia adopts an accessible housing guideline, with an awareness and financial incentive program for citizens, developers, and not-for-profits.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and recreation means outdoor spaces and recreation facilities, including pools.

Objectives of recommendations:

- New trails have accessible sections at trailhead, where the terrain allows.
- Nova Scotia adopts the Rick Hansen Foundation Guidelines for trails.
- Access to transit is considered when choosing the site location of new accessible trails, beaches, and outdoor spaces.
- An accessible trails website is created by government, working with Canadian Parks Council and the Nova Scotia Trails Federation.
- Parks and recreation facilities are marked with braille and have tactile high contrast signage, with information about accessible amenities and the slope and difficulty of trails.

PARKS AND RECREATION *continued*

- Menu signage for outdoor eating areas includes accessible menus.
- Outdoor play spaces and their paths of travel are accessible.
- Newly constructed or renovated municipal pools have ramps or lifts. They also have tactile indicators and colour contrast along edges and access points of the pools.
- Each area of the province has an accessible public beach. Where possible, these beaches are located near transit routes with barrier free path of travel to the beach.
- Recreation facilities and accessible beaches have accessible change rooms that meet the Canadian Standards Association Standard.

Committee Members

Laurie Cranton, *Chair* - Councillor, Municipality of the County of Inverness, Margaree Centre

Ramzi Kavar, Vice-Chair - Director, Greening and Sustainable Business Practices, Housing Nova Scotia, Bedford

Paul Burt - Manager, Building, Planning and Licensing, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Sydney

Douglas Foster - Planning Specialist, New Dawn Enterprises, Sydney River

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Andrew Jantzen - Research Assistant, Electronic Technologist, Nova Scotia Community College, Halifax

Megan Lloyd - Intern Architect, RHAD Architects, Dartmouth

Earl MacKenzie - Director, Public Works, Town of New Glasgow, New Glasgow

Sheena Moore - Senior Architect, Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, Halifax

Allison Moz - Way-finding Partner, Co-owner, eyecandy SIGNS Inc., Halifax

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Jennifer Powley - Urban Planner, Halifax

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Saira Shah - Planner, Municipality of the District of West Hants, Lower Sackville

Gordie Snook - General Manager, Facilities and Operations, Town of Port Hawkesbury, Port Hawkesbury

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