

Summary of Phase 2 Recommendations for an Accessibility Standard in the Built Environment

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



Dedication

These recommendations are dedicated to Laurie Cranton, who passed away in March 2022. Laurie served as Chair of the Built Environment Standard Development Committee since April 2019.

Laurie was instrumental in developing the Accessibility Advisory Board's recommendations for an accessibility standard in the Built Environment. Laurie is warmly remembered as an advocate for accessibility and inspirational leader. He would often say, "we can accomplish great things if we work together." Laurie will be greatly missed, and his legacy will live on.

Introduction

The enclosed recommendations were developed by the Built Environment Standard Development Committee and submitted to the Accessibility Advisory Board in July 2021.

The Accessibility Advisory Board reviewed, made amendments, and approved them for submission to the Minister of Justice.

Nova Scotia has more persons with disabilities than any other province in Canada.

By “persons with disabilities,” we mean 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.

Having a disability means participating in school, work, and community can be hard because they are not very accessible. This includes things like getting on a bus if you’re using a wheelchair, being able to read a sign if you can’t see, and being able to succeed at school if you learn differently.

That’s why Nova Scotia wants to become accessible to persons with disabilities by 2030. “Being accessible” means that people of all abilities in the province can enjoy everything Nova Scotia has to offer. Accessibility is a human right.

The Accessibility Advisory Board’s job is to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister of Justice about ways to make Nova Scotia accessible.

As part of our job, we created the Built Environment Standard Development Committee. This committee researches and recommends ways we can change and improve Nova Scotia’s built environment so people with disabilities can safely use it.

What is the built environment?

The built environment includes buildings, sidewalks, parking lots, and human-made outdoor spaces such as parks. These are places where people live, work, learn, and play. Everyone has a right to access these spaces.

What is a standard?

A standard is a set of rules. Nova Scotia's built environment standard will be a set of rules that people and organizations will have to follow when building or renovating buildings and outdoor spaces.

One of the ways to make Nova Scotia accessible is to prevent and remove barriers by creating rules for how to build accessible spaces.

Who is on the committee?

The Built Environment Standard Development Committee is made up of experts from the community and government who have experience in areas like architecture (the art and science of building structures), urban planning (how we design our cities), engineering using math and science to solve problems), and accessibility. Most of the members are people with disabilities.

How the committee works

The Built Environment Standard Development Committee started meeting in April 2019 to research topic areas on accessibility, discuss barriers, and develop recommendations for a standard.

They are making their recommendations in two phases.

In Phase 1, which is already complete, they suggested recommendations for ways to fix things that were missing in the existing rules, as well as some safety concerns. These recommendations were sent to the Minister of Justice in August 2020. You can see the Phase 1 recommendations at <https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/built-environment/>.

In Phase 2, the committee's goal was to make more detailed and technical recommendations.

After outlining their Phase 2 recommendations, the committee held nine online meetings in March and April 2021 so others could comment. The committee invited representatives from several sectors, including parks and recreation, municipalities, post-secondary education, regional centres for education, industry, provincial and community disability organizations, business associations, the public, and people with disabilities.

The committee listened to the comments given at the meetings and used that feedback to refine their recommendations. These recommendations were submitted to the Accessibility Advisory Board. The board accepted the recommendations with changes and submitted the recommendations to the Minister of Justice.

What happens next?

The Minister of Justice will do the following:

- Review the recommendations and use them to propose a built environment accessibility standard. The minister may use the recommendations in whole, in part, or with any changes the minister considers to be appropriate.
- Make the proposed standard public for 60 days.
- Consult with the Accessibility Advisory Board about any comments the minister receives about the standard, and revise it, if necessary.
- Recommend the accessibility standard to the governor-in-council so they can approve it and turn it into a regulation.
- The Nova Scotia Building Code, Accessibility Regulations and accompanying guidelines will be updated to match the new standard.

Summary of Phase 2 recommendations

Exterior approaches

Exterior approaches are the entrances and exits (doors) to buildings, and the paths of travel a person takes from the sidewalk or road to get to the building.

Summary of the recommendations:

- Restaurant patios will be accessible and will include ramps. They will also have barriers around them that can be detected by a cane and are in a distinctively different colour.
- Curb ramps (the ramp you see cut into a sidewalk where it meets the street) will line up with the direction a person is travelling.

- Tactile (textured) curb cuts that are in a contrasting colour from the sidewalk will have their colours maintained. These are the sections of sidewalk that are bumpy to indicate that the sidewalk is meeting a street corner.
- Utility companies will work with municipal accessibility committees to ensure they are following the rules when they replace power or phone poles.
- For a specific time only, mobility devices (such as walkers and motorized scooters) will be allowed in bike lanes if the sidewalk does not offer a clear path of travel.
- All provincial and municipal projects will include universal design principles during their design phase. “Universal design” means something can be accessed, understood, and used by anyone.
- All public buildings will have power doors at both the main entrance and all accessible entrances.
- Government will change the Nova Scotia Building Code to make sure power-assisted doors are safe and accessible.
- Safety experts will consider accessibility when they are developing emergency/ safety protocols.
- Access to public building entrances (doors) and accessible parking spaces will be kept free from debris.
- Storage areas for active transportation devices (scooters, bicycles) will be accessible, user friendly, colour contrasted, and have clear signage.
- Pathways from public roadways and parking lots to buildings will be barrier free.
- Benches or seating areas on a path of travel will be accessible and in a distinctly different colour from the ground. They will have space for a wheelchair, service animals, and mobility aids. They will also have arm rests and provide a variety of seating, including seats of different sizes.
- Handrails along outdoor pathways and entrances will comply with CSA B651. The CSA B651 is a Canadian Standard for best practices.
- All pedestrian entrances will be accessible and will connect to an accessible outdoor path of travel. This does not include service entrances.
- Bus stops will follow CSA B651 standard for bus stops.

Interiors

Interiors are the insides of a building and include hallways, elevators, doorways, and stairs. This also includes how we find our way around inside buildings (how we navigate them).

Summary of Recommendations:

- Government will change the Nova Scotia Building Code to say where accessible washrooms must be located in a building.
- Accessible slab on grade ground floor entrances will be barrier free and include a maximum ¼ inch threshold.
- If a building has a shared kitchen, the path to the kitchen will be barrier free. The kitchen will also have a counter with different heights and all outlets, switches, and appliance and equipment controls will be at a height that can be easily reached, as per CSA B651.
- Indoor spaces will be designed to be sensory friendly – this includes quiet areas, soft lighting, etc.
- Water bottle filling stations will be accessible.
- Every interior door that is normally kept closed and has a self-closing device will have a power door opener so others can open the door.
- The gas given off by building materials (such as paints, glues, and caulking) will either have no volatile organic compounds (VOCs), or a low level of VOCs.
- People will not be allowed to idle their cars in passenger loading zones or will only be allowed to idle for a short period of time.
- Smoking areas will be located a minimum of four metres from entrances and air intakes.
- Public hallways will be designed with materials that sound different in main hallways than in less-used hallways to make it easier for people to find their way around. These materials should not increase noise.
- Government will provide design guidelines for how loud the noise level can be in common areas, as well as the types of building material that may help reduce sound.

- Background noise will be kept down and located away from meeting/assembly areas.
- Public announcement and call systems will be capable of being zoned to key areas so not everyone has to hear them.
- Touchscreen technology used in public buildings and multi-unit residential buildings (such as apartment buildings) to help people find their way will include braille, audio, or physical options.
- Display shelving in libraries and retail stores will be set at a height according to CSA B651 Annex A.
- Recreation and public buildings will have enough storage for accessible equipment when the equipment is not in use.
- Buildings will provide both ramps and stairs, where possible.
- Emergency equipment will be at an accessible height.
- New guidelines will limit visual noise, which can include lights, colours, and clutter, in conference rooms.
- Some accessibility requirements need electricity or water to work. Buildings that do not have access to these services will not have to meet these requirements.

Housing

These recommendations apply to multi-unit residential buildings (such as apartment buildings) that

- have four or more units
- are over three storeys high
- have ground-floor access

Summary of recommendations:

- All units will be adaptable so they can be changed to be accessible units and will have visual alert and emergency alert systems. Buildings with 20 or more units will include at least one accessible unit. Buildings with more than 50 units will have at least one in 50 accessible units. Accessible units will include a roll-in shower.
- Within one year of this standard becoming law, Government of Nova Scotia will work with Accessibility Standards Canada on a solution for the lack of accessible and affordable housing in Nova Scotia.
- Existing units that are adapted (renovated) to be accessible will follow guidelines that address things such as all doors and faucets having lever handles, units having extra space so wheelchairs can turn around, and showers being roll-in accessible with a shower seat.
- Accessible multi-unit residential buildings will have an accessible waste management system that is reached by a barrier-free path of travel.

Parks and Recreation

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

Summary of recommendations:

- Government of Nova Scotia will develop a system to rank and label provincial, municipal, and non-profit parks and trails by how accessible they are.
- Accessible sections of trails, parks, and outdoor recreation areas will have accessible signage and viewpoints. This will include accessible technology and communications that connect to mobile devices where possible.
- Government of Nova Scotia will develop and implement a parks and recreation accessibility educational program. This program will include financial incentives for users, builders, owners, managers, and trail coordinators who make their facilities accessible.
- Provincial, municipal, and non-profit recreational master plans, operational plans, and budgets will put a priority on keeping their accessible trails, parks, beaches, and outdoor spaces in good order.
- New trails, parks, campgrounds, and other recreational facilities must be accessible to qualify for grants and funding from the Government of Nova Scotia.
- At least ten per cent of the camping sites and washrooms in all new and renovated campgrounds will be accessible.

- Each county will ensure it has at least one trail, playground, park, and recreation public space that is fully accessible, where these facilities exist.
- Guidelines will be developed to help community gardens have accessible beds. Community gardens will also have accessible water filling stations for both gardening and drinking.
- Indoor and outdoor recreational facilities will provide space for service animals while their owners participate in activities. This will include access to water for the animal.
- Accessible parks and outdoor spaces will provide accessible water-filling stations.
- Accessible parks, trails, and outdoor spaces will provide an accessible washroom.

Wayfinding and Signage

Wayfinding and signage refers to the signs and other signals that help people travel and find their way through buildings and spaces.

Summary of recommendations:

- Government of Nova Scotia will work with persons with disabilities to develop accessible symbols for signs. These symbols will be used consistently on signage across the province and will be easily understood.
- The language used on signage will be clear, easily understood, and in multiple languages.
- The signage will follow best practices to be inclusive (gender neutral) and easily seen and read, including by people who have low vision.
- Signs will be easily seen and will be placed in areas where people need to make decisions about which direction to take.
- Signs will be lit in a way that makes them easy to read, including by people with low vision.
- Audible (talking) signs will be used with visible signs, when it is practical to do so.
- Information on electronic signs will also be available in an audio or a tactile format, such as braille, and will meet the Accessible Signage Standards.
- Signs designed for specific areas or purposes (such as parking, entrances, welcome signs, emergency evacuation, etc.) will meet standards for those areas/purposes.
- Washroom signage will include technology that tells people with disabilities when a space is occupied.

Schools and Public Libraries

All public and private primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities will have to follow these recommendations. These recommendations will also apply to both school libraries and public libraries, including their auditoriums and gathering spaces.

- Auditoriums, classrooms, staff rooms, administrative and reception areas will meet the CSA B651 standard.
- Schools that are building new play structures, or replacing existing ones, will ensure playgrounds are accessible and have an accessible path of travel from the school to the playground.
- The intercom system for schools will be accessible and will have a text-based option. Existing systems will be retrofitted to provide this option.
- School cafeterias will be accessible. This includes making counter heights, seating options, and paths of travel accessible.
- A minimum of five per cent of seating in cafeterias and auditoriums will be accessible and the seating will be spread throughout the room.
- Assistive classroom technologies to help students who are hard of hearing, such as induction loops, will be included in all schools.
- Large auditoriums, areas with stages, or areas where public gatherings take place, will have a stage that is accessible by ramp or lift and a barrier-free path of travel.
- Five per cent of the sinks and counters in school laboratories will be accessible with a clear path of travel between counters, in accordance with CSA B651.
- Libraries will include visual fire alarms placed where they can be viewed from all areas of the library. They will also have a clear path of travel between shelving.
- Accessible seating will be provided in multiple places throughout the library. Accessible computer stations will be available.
- Outdoor classrooms will be accessible to all students.
- New and renovated school washrooms will include a screened entrance, automatic flush toilets, automatic taps, and automatic paper towel dispensers.
- All new and renovated multi-level schools will have either an accessible elevator or an accessible hydraulic lift large enough for both a wheelchair and an attendant to ride together.
- Schools and libraries will include rest and relief areas for service animals.

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