

Digby Accessibility Plan

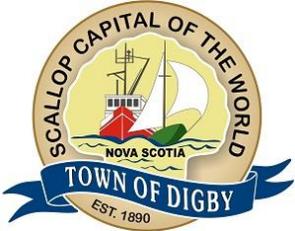


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Introduction

In 2017 Nova Scotia became the third province to pass accessibility legislation. The Nova Scotia *Accessibility Act* recognizes accessibility as a human right and sets a goal to make Nova Scotia an accessible province by 2030. The purpose of the *Act* is to prevent and remove barriers that restrict people with disabilities from fully participating in society.

The *Act* also enables the government to develop standards for accessibility. Provincial accessibility standards will be developed for the following: goods and services; information and communication; transportation; employment; the built environment; and education.

The *Act* requires public bodies, such as towns and municipalities, to form an Accessibility Advisory Committee and to create an Accessibility Plan.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is required to engage with the community, draft the Accessibility Plan, implement the plan, and update the plan every three years. The mandate of the committee is to advise the Town and Municipal Councils on identifying, preventing, and eliminating accessibility barriers to municipal and town programs, services, and infrastructure.

The Accessibility Plan needs to be approved by April 1, 2022. It must include the following:

- Achievements to date in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers in policies, program, practices, and services;
- How we will identify, remove, and prevent barriers in policies, program, practices, and services; and
- Process in place to assess the effect of our policies, programs, practices, and services on accessibility.

The focus of the Accessibility Plan is on the infrastructure owned and managed by our units.

The Municipality of Digby, Town of Digby, Villages of Weymouth, Westport, Tiverton, and Freeport, and the Digby Area Recreation Commission have joined together to form an Accessibility Advisory Committee and to draft an Accessibility Plan. Each unit may release individual accessibility action plans based on their own needs, timelines, and budgets. But the committee will continue to meet to communicate and meet its mandate under the *Act*.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee, along with each participating unit, is committed to fostering a culture of accessibility and encouraging the prevention and removal of accessibility barriers in our community. We recognize accessibility as a human right. We intend to be a role model for the private sector and the broader community.

Definitions

Accessibility Act

The provincial law enacted to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The law defines the role and responsibilities of the Accessibility Directorate and the Accessibility Advisory Board, and addresses standards, compliance, and enforcement.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

A volunteer committee established by a municipality to advise municipal council about identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee plays a pivotal role in helping the municipality become a barrier-free community that complies with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act. At least one half of the members of the advisory committee must have a disability or represent an organization that represents people with disabilities.

Accessibility Coordinator

A person appointed to support the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee in developing and implementing the Accessibility Plan.

Accessibility Directorate

The provincial body that is responsible for implementing and administering the Accessibility Act, supporting accessibility initiatives and advancing broader disability related issues.

Barrier

Anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, or a practice.

Disability

A physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.

Equitable/Equity

A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same. Equity means everybody is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.

Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan

A multi-year plan setting specific priorities and commitments for achieving accessibility within the Government of Nova Scotia. The first plan was published in 2018 and covers the years 2018-2021.

Plain Language

Clear, conversational communication that makes sense to the intended audience. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information.

Prescribed

Means prescribed in the Accessibility Act General Regulations. The Accessibility Act enables the government to use the regulations to identify which organizations must comply with certain requirements. These requirements include forming an Accessibility Advisory Committee and developing an Accessibility Plan. The use of the word prescribed in legislation is intended to give wide authority for regulations to be made that set down a specific rule or direction.

Community Engagement

The Accessibility Advisory Committee undertook public consultation efforts in late 2021.

The committee held three separate public meetings, located in Weymouth, Tiverton, and Digby. These were advertised through social media, flyers posted around the community, and by directly contacting and inviting people to attend.

The committee also held a focus group which took place at Digby Town Hall. Several different organizations and people from throughout the community were invited to attend.

The attendance at these public meetings and the focus group was unfortunately limited. This could be a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges that result from it. But those who did attend were passionate and there were spirited conversations about accessibility.

In addition to these in-person consultations, the committee developed an online survey, with paper copies available as needed, and this resulted in close to 60 people who responded. The questions were focused on our programs, services, and infrastructure. The demographics of those who filled out the survey showed representation from all over our community, all age ranges, and all income levels. The majority of our respondents, around 74%, identified as female. Approximately 35% of our respondents identified as having a disability.

The conversations and the answers provided by the in-person sessions and the survey were informative and extremely useful for the committee in identifying barriers in our community.

Areas of Focus

The Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan identified five areas of focus for accessibility. These are as follows: Transportation; Goods and Services; Built Environment; Information and Communications; and Employment. We will work towards equitable access in each of these areas of focus to help identify, prevent, and eliminate barriers for persons with disabilities. We will meet the standards as set out by the province for accessibility in each of these areas. Our focus will be on the infrastructure owned and managed by our units.

Transportation

We are committed to ensuring that residents and visitors with disabilities have equitable access to the transportation that is provided in our community.

Transit Infrastructure – We will support transit as appropriate and where possible. This will include ensuring that our buses are accessible for those persons with disabilities, and working to improve our transit stops and signage to ensure these are accessible.

Parking – We will ensure that all parking areas managed by our municipal units have accessible parking spaces and appropriate drop-off locations. We will further ensure that snow removal at our municipal owned or managed parking areas is prioritized.

Pedestrian Infrastructure – We will work to improve the existing municipal and town owned sidewalks. We will ensure that safety is prioritized when it comes to audible signals, tactile walking surface indicators, appropriate lighting, signage, and having well marked crosswalks. We will also work to have benches placed in appropriate locations to allow for rest.

Goods and Services

We are committed to ensuring that residents and visitors with disabilities have equitable access to the goods and services that are provided in our community.

Services / Programs – We will work to enhance the services and programs we provide by making them more accessible to persons with disabilities. This will include improving our communication, our websites, our customer service methods, and welcoming service animals and support persons. It will also include recognition that many persons with disabilities do not have access to the internet and are not able to access services by that method. We will promote the full participation of all residents in our programs and these will be planned and delivered to ensure they are affordable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of our residents.

Physical Spaces – We will ensure that our buildings, recreation facilities, and physical infrastructure meet the accessibility standards set out by the province. We will work to ensure that our spaces are conducive to positive accessible customer service experiences.

Education – We will work to educate our councilors and staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of accessibility, equity, and barriers in our community. This will serve to improve their ability to interact with and understand the barriers for those who have a disability.

Events/Meetings – We will work to improve accessibility for events and meetings delivered by our units and will ensure we plan these with accessibility in mind. This will include adequate event parking, accessible washroom facilities, accessible signage, and places to rest from sensory overwhelming environments.

Built Environment

We are committed to ensuring that residents and visitors with disabilities have equitable access to our buildings and outdoor spaces.

Buildings – We will have all of our buildings assessed to determine what improvements need to be made to meet the built environment standards released by the province. This will include, but is not limited to, our offices, airport, transfer station, library, and arena facilities.

Public Spaces – We will work to improve access to our public spaces, including our recreation facilities, our parks, and our trails.

Washrooms – We will assess and improve our existing washrooms to ensure they are accessible and look for opportunities to construct more accessible washrooms where possible.

Construction – We will work to ensure that accessibility is maintained during temporary disruptions or construction.

Information and Communications

We are committed to ensuring that residents and visitors with disabilities are able to equitably access information and communications provided by our units.

Delivery – We will ensure that there is delivery of communication about our services, programs, and events in many different formats that are accessible to persons with disabilities. This will include a recognition that many persons with disabilities do not have access to the internet and are not able to receive communications by that method.

Website – We will work to ensure that our websites are accessible to persons with disabilities and use current best practices to improve navigation.

Signage – We will improve our signage around our buildings and facilities so that persons with disabilities are able to identify and access those locations.

Employment

We are committed to being equitable employers and supporting the careers of those employees with disabilities.

Culture – We will work to foster a culture of inclusion that cultivates an environment where those employees with disabilities are supported and have opportunities for advancement.

Hiring – We will improve opportunities for persons with disabilities to achieve employment by ensuring that our job postings clearly state that they are open to persons with disabilities and by ensuring that our advertisements are done in accessible formats.

Support – We will support those employees with disabilities by providing accommodations and a flexible work environment where possible.

Representation – Approximately 30% of all Nova Scotians over the age of 15 identify as having at least one disability. We will work to actively recruit persons with disabilities for employment, committees, and other opportunities so that these roles reflect our diverse community.

Implementing the Plan

Responsibilities

Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will meet approximately three times per year to communicate about accessibility achievements, concerns, and issues. The committee will make recommendations to councils for the municipal units. The committee will review and update the Accessibility Plan every three years as required by the *Act*.

Accessibility Coordinator

The Accessibility Coordinator will guide the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee which includes drafting the Accessibility Plan. The Accessibility Coordinator will recruit members for the committee, schedule the meetings, prepare the agendas, and help lead the meetings. The Accessibility Coordinator will act as the liaison between the committee and the municipal units.

Councils

The Councils for both the Municipality and Town, the Village Commissions, and the board for the Digby Area Recreation Commission are responsible for approving the Accessibility Plan and ensuring that adequate funds and resources are allocated to meet the requirements under the *Accessibility Act*.

Staff

Staff members from the Municipality, Town, and the Digby Area Recreation Commission will attend and participate in the committee meetings. These staff will ensure that complaints, questions, comments, or concerns submitted to them are relayed to the committee.

CAOs

The Chief Administrative Officer from each municipal unit is ultimately responsible to ensure that the Accessibility Plan is implemented and that the requirements under the *Act* are met.

Timeline

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act was passed in 2017 and it set the goal of making Nova Scotia an accessible province by 2030. We aim to meet the deadline as stated by the province when it comes to our infrastructure. Each unit will need to develop their own accessibility action plans based on their needs and budget so that the deadline of 2030 can be met.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will meet on a regular basis so that it is updated on the latest accessibility achievements, issues, and action plans for each unit. The committee will work to assist units with these plans and share information where appropriate. The committee will review new directives, guidelines, and updates from the province as they are released. The committee will then determine if updates to the Accessibility Plan are needed and will make recommendations to each unit on the need for updates to their accessibility action plans.

Responding to Questions and Concerns

Any member of the public can ask a question or express a concern about accessibility in our community. These should be directed to the relevant municipal unit or the Digby Area Recreation Commission where applicable.

The staff member for the relevant unit can consult with the Accessibility Coordinator if needed about the question or concern and then respond in a timely manner.

A record of concerns or comments should be provided to the Accessibility Coordinator so that these can be considered when the Accessibility Plan is reviewed.

Any member of the public can make a request to the Accessibility Coordinator to make a presentation to the Accessibility Advisory Committee or to submit a letter or material for the committee to review.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Members

Accessibility Coordinator:

Tyler Pulley, Manager of Municipal Services, Municipality of Digby

Committee Members

Elected Officials:

David Tudor, Councilor for the Municipality of Digby

- Appointed September 28, 2021
- Terms expires September 28, 2023

Peter Turnbull, Councilor for the Town of Digby

- Appointed October 4, 2021
- Term expires October 4, 2023

Community Members:

Jackie Giguere, Community Member for the Town of Digby

- Appointed October 4, 2021
- Term expires October 4, 2023

Charlotte Sabeau, Community Member for the Municipality of Digby

- Appointed September 28, 2021
- Term expires September 28, 2023

Staff Members

Town of Digby:

Leslie Brinton, Executive Assistant, Town of Digby

Digby Area Recreation Commission:

Sharon MacAlpine, Director, Digby Area Recreation Commission