



**ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE TOWN HALL
MINUTES
November 21, 2023**

PRESENT: Andrew Taylor, Chair
June Feswick, Vice Chair
Councillor Cathy Deagle Gammon
Councillor Trish Purdy
Elizabeth Doull
Rachele Manett
Jordan Waterbury

REGRETS: Councillor Paul Russell
April Adams
Kristen Hemming
Michelle Mahoney

STAFF PANEL: Melissa Myers, Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office
Darren Young, Manager of Major Projects, Facility Design & Construction – Property Fleet, & Environment
Erica Fleck, Director of Emergency Management – Community Safety
Max Chauvin, Housing and Homelessness Director – Community Safety
David Nantau, Supervisor of Bus Operations, Access-A-Bus – Halifax Transit
Cassady Yochoff, Inclusion & Accessibility Specialist, Aquatic & Inclusion Services – Parks & Recreation

OTHERS PRESENT: Annie Sherry, Legislative Assistant
Alicia Wall, Legislative Support

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

The agenda, reports, supporting documents, and information items circulated are online at halifax.ca.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. and the Committee adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and acknowledged that the meeting took place in the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people, and that we are all treaty people.

The Chair welcomed all in attendance and encouraged attendees to share their feedback. The Chair advised that the panel members would be providing updates on current projects and sharing successes and challenges faced by the Municipality with respect to accessibility.

2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND UPDATES

Melissa Myers, Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office provided an update of work done over the past year with respect to accessibility including ongoing work implementing the recommendations in the Accessibility Strategy, attending meetings to bring awareness to the importance of accessibility, working with the Clerk's Office to make presentations to Halifax Regional Council more accessible, providing inclusion training, and other initiatives to improve accessibility within Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Myers further noted the Accessibility Strategy would be updated in accordance with Provincial legislation and public consultation would take place in the spring.

Darren Young, Manager of Major Projects, Facility Design & Construction, Property Fleet, & Environment provided updates on accessibility projects:

- Completion of the Kiwanis Grahams Grove Community Building, Eastern Shore Lifestyle Centre, and completion of renovations at the Dartmouth North Community Centre
- The pool at the Halifax Commons opened over the summer
- The Horizon Centre renovations are ongoing
- The Beechville Lakeside Community Centre was out for tender
- The new Regional Headquarters for Fire and Emergency Services was approved
- Audits were done on over 35 facilities
- Ongoing work with the Clerk's Office to ensure polling stations are accessible for the upcoming election

Young further noted that challenges included capacity to deliver with a small team, lack of construction industry staff, and capacity to complete audits.

Erica Fleck, Director of Emergency Management highlighted some of the initiatives undertaken over the past year and noted the Community Safety Business Unit was created on April 1, 2023, the Vulnerable Persons Registry was launched and 72 residents had registered, braille materials were ordered, ongoing website updates to be more user friendly from an emergency measures perspective, and ongoing outreach to community groups to identify vulnerable persons.

Max Chauvin, Director of Housing and Homelessness, Community Safety provided an update of work done during this past year to assist with the housing crisis in HRM and noted that there were over 1,000 homeless people on the registry and of those, 67 self-identified as someone facing mental health issues, someone with a learning disability, or someone with an after-birth brain injury. Chauvin highlighted that the HRM was assisting people with food, water, tents, sleeping bags, connecting them with various resources including medical assistance, and focused on humanitarian aid to help people until suitable housing was found. Chauvin noted that challenges included the lack of public housing, the condition of the current public housing, high rent costs, and even higher rent for units with supports for those having recently been homeless.

David Nantau, Supervisor of Bus Operations, Access-A-Bus, Halifax Transit stated that Transit's mission was to provide a safe, reliable transit system that was continuously being improved. Nantau highlighted the installation of Mobile Data Terminals on every bus to help track buses in real time and provide valuable data used to improve service, the launch of the accessibility travel training program designed to assist people with navigating the transit system, and the launch of the 24/7 Extra Care Taxi Service which had an average of 53 passengers per day. Nantau noted Halifax Transit's goal of making all bus stops fully accessible by 2030, that as of November 2023, 71% of bus stops were classified as fully accessible, and that an online booking system for buses would be launched in the next few months.

Cassady Yochoff, Inclusion & Accessibility Specialist, Aquatic & Inclusion Services, Parks & Recreation provided an update on work undertaken in 2022-2023 and shared that three accessibility audits on HRM parks had been completed, work was completed on accessible pathways and installing accessible bleachers in fields, a youth camp was created, and the number of summer inclusion staff had increased. Yochoff announced the purchase of a grip chair which could be used for off roading and noted that ongoing challenges included creating a strategy to audit parks and playgrounds, and staffing shortages.

3. FEEDBACK, INPUT, QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC

The Chair reviewed the ground rules and opened up the floor for the public to share their feedback.

Carrie-Ann Bugden expressed concerns around access to affordable housing and services in HRM, inquired as to whether funding was available, and noted that they may have to return to Newfoundland due to the lack of assistance with services.

Melissa Myers, Accessibility Advisor highlighted the scope of Municipal services, indicating that many of the support services fell under the jurisdiction of the Province of Nova Scotia, and encouraged the resident to contact their provincial representative.

Lui Greco asked for clarification on what was considered an accessible bus stop and stated concerns with getting to and from accessible bus stops on inaccessible routes. Greco further inquired as to whether Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standards applied to accessible bus stops.

David Nantau, Supervisor of Bus Operations, Access-A-Bus clarified that Halifax Transit was responsible for ensuring all bus stops defined as fully accessible were consistent with and built to national CSA standards for accessible design for built environment.

The Honourable Steve Craig, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia noted that a bus stop would not be fully accessible if it was not physically accessible to get to.

Darren Young, Manager of Major Projects, Facility Design & Construction provided clarification regarding where bus stops are mentioned in the CSA standards.

Vicky Levack spoke to accessibility improvements and shared that they were able to go swimming the first time in a long time. Levack expressed concerns around communications with Access-a-Bus and inquired as to whether the forthcoming online portal would provide email confirmations when trips are booked.

Nantau confirmed that email confirmations were standard when booking Access-A-Bus trips.

Mike Arthur inquired as to whether the numerous new housing developments around the city would be accessible.

Erica Fleck, Director of Emergency Management responded that new developments were being designed with an accessibility and community safety lens to ensure safe, accessible neighbourhoods.

Weldon Young expressed concerns around difficulties seeing the routes included on the messages displayed on the front of buses and noted that the placement of signs and garbage cans had created issues at transit terminals to accessing the bus schedule displays.

Nantau agreed to speak to Planning & Development regarding the placement of signs and noted that the buses verbally announce the route and upcoming stops.

A community member expressed concerns regarding the treatment of their child with sensory and mobility issues by Halifax Transit while trying to use the accessible seating. The Community Member further expressed their disappointment with how the complaint was handled by HRM.

Celine Vautour asked how HRM was working with the Provincial Government to support the homeless community and reduce barriers faced by disabled persons to prevent them from becoming homeless. Vautour noted that shelters were hostile, short-term solutions and that innovative ways of preventing people from becoming homeless were needed.

Max Chauvin, Director of Housing and Homelessness responded that shelters were only a temporary solution, that housing should be safe, secure, and accessible, and that conversations with staff from the provincial Department of Community Services occurred on a regular basis.

Gerry Post thanked HRM for listening to the community and putting on town halls, and noted that they were pleased to see the launch of the Vulnerable Persons Registry and accessibility improvements at Peggy's Cove. Post requested that Halifax Transit consider implementing bus service to Lawrencetown Beach and Peggy's Cove during the summer months.

Lui Greco noted there were several developers who were negligent with placement of signage and ensuring safe job sites and asked how this was being enforced.

Fleck indicated that they would bring this concern back to By-law Enforcement.

4. ENVISIONING A MORE ACCESSIBLE FUTURE – OPEN FLOOR

Tracey Jones-Grant, Managing Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO opened the visioning session and encouraged attendees to share their thoughts on the biggest accessibility concerns facing the Municipality in 2024.

A community member spoke to concerns with many publicly accessible washrooms not actually being fully accessible and that there was a lack of knowledge within the HRM regarding accessibility.

Carrie-Ann Bugden spoke to the need for students to be welcomed with open arms and provided with the appropriate supports.

Anne Camozzi spoke to wanting to see more information on the HRM website about using Transit and Access-a-Bus.

Jones-Grant indicated that this was an ongoing effort from the HRM.

A community member inquired about work being done to assist people with maintaining housing and asked about employment initiatives at the HRM.

Jones-Grant replied that recruitment was working closely with the Diversity & Inclusion team to review how the HRM recruited staff and ways to become more inclusive.

Chauvin responded that Community Safety was looking at ways to provide employment supports and options were being explored to possibly employ residents of encampments to maintain the sites.

Kaitlynn Lowe shared that technology could make things less accessible and inquired about what was being done to adapt to climate change from an emergency management perspective.

Councillor Deagle Gammon shared their desire to see Access-a-Bus services extended to beyond 1,000 meters from an existing bus stop and expressed concerns around the affordability of transportation.

Sarah Moore stated that HRM needed safer streets and safer Transit.

A community member asked why there were no accessible swings with a full back at the Halifax Common.

Young shared that the playground at the Halifax Common was in the second phase of being redesigned and that accessible features were included.

Kendall Worth shared their work as an advocate for people with accessibility and affordability needs.

5. CLOSING COMMENTS – Andrew Taylor, Chair, Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Chair thanked the panel and the public for attending and noted that the concerns had been heard by staff and work would begin on the issues raised.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Alicia Wall
Legislative Support