

Accessibility Advisory Board Annual Report

2019–2020

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Message from the Chair

In 2019–2020, the Accessibility Advisory Board continued our critically important work of providing the Minister of Justice with advice and recommendations about how Nova Scotia can reach the goal of being accessible by 2030.

At the start of the year, we established two new committees: the Education Standard Development Committee and the Built Environment Standard Development Committee. (“Built environment” means human-made spaces in which people live, work, learn and play and includes buildings, rights-of-way, and outdoor spaces.)

Each committee includes persons with disabilities, Deaf, and/or neurodivergent persons as well as people who work for organizations and other government departments. Throughout the year, the committees did research and consulted with other experts to develop recommendations for accessibility standards in their areas.

Their work helps the Accessibility Advisory Board decide which recommendations we will send to the minister in 2020–2021. We look forward to government rolling out these standards and the positive impacts they will have in Nova Scotia.

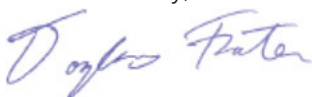
As we look ahead, I want to thank all our stakeholders and partners in advance for their continued support. In the coming year, the board will continue to advise Government of its priority areas of

- developing standards
- raising awareness about the importance of accessibility
- collaborating with and supporting others on accessibility issues
- monitoring and evaluating the standards as they are put in place, and
- ensuring Nova Scotia is complying with the standards

The 2019–2020 year ended with COVID-19 hitting Nova Scotia in March. As a result, the board will find new ways to carry out our work in 2020–2021. We will continue our collaborative approach of discussing and advising the Government of Nova Scotia on accessibility issues that are important to persons with disabilities, Deaf, and/or neurodivergent persons.

I want to thank each of the board members for their stewardship and dedication to this work. On behalf of the board, I'd like to thank the staff at the Accessibility Directorate for your tremendous support and for your continued effort to improve accessibility in Nova Scotia.

Sincerely,



Doug Foster

Chair of the Accessibility Advisory Board

In Memoriam

It is with tremendous sadness that we lost one of our board members shortly after the 2019–2020 year ended. Alex Peeler had been a member of the Accessibility Advisory Board since it was established in 2018. He was a thoughtful and experienced voice on the board, and always ensured issues of importance to youth and those living in rural communities were considered. During this time, Alex was instrumental in developing the board's recommendations to government on the province's accessibility strategy and in establishing the province's first accessibility standard development committees.

Alex was a passionate advocate for accessibility in Nova Scotia and he played an active role in multiple organizations, including Muscular Dystrophy Canada, South Shore for a Cure, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, and serving as chairperson for the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities since 2018. Through his work as a videographer, Alex advocated for an increased awareness about important accessibility and disability issues. Alex will be profoundly missed by his family, friends, and community, including all of us at the Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board and the Accessibility Directorate.



Accessibility Advisory Board Values

The Accessibility Advisory Board is committed to ensuring that the following values are upheld in fulfilling its mandate:

First Voice

We prioritize first voice, recognizing persons with disabilities, Deaf, and neurodivergent persons as experts in accessibility. Our work is guided by the lived experience and professional expertise of persons with disabilities, Deaf, and/or neurodivergent persons.

Respect

We value interactions that are respectful and considerate, and we encourage and facilitate free and frank discussions, inclusive of divergent perspectives.

Human Rights

We uphold accessibility as a fundamental human right and model this through our work as champions for Nova Scotians with disabilities. We commit to ensuring that equal rights are granted to all Nova Scotians without discrimination on the basis of a disability, as established in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Diversity

We recognize the full range of disabilities and the diverse ways that other identities and life circumstances/experiences intersect with disability to construct accessibility barriers. We are mindful that we work for all Nova Scotians and will consider universal design in everything we do. We will also recognize the diverse interests of key stakeholders, including government, private business, and community members.

Collaboration

Recognizing the intersectionality of accessibility, we will promote collaboration and coordination among sectors, stakeholders, and initiatives.

Innovation

We believe innovation, responsiveness, and flexibility are essential to advancing accessibility. We will take into account existing and emerging research and research methodology in our work.

Accessibility Advisory Board Priorities

The Accessibility Advisory Board has six priority areas.

- Board Operations
- Standard Development
- Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan
- Awareness and Communication
- Collaboration and Support
- Monitoring and Evaluation

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Board Mandate

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board was established in 2018, as required under the Accessibility Act. The board's mandate is to advise and make recommendations about accessibility in Nova Scotia to the Minister of Justice. Specifically, the board

- suggests measures, policies, practices, and requirements the government may implement to achieve accessibility
- assesses whether existing measures, policies, practices, and requirements are consistent with the purpose of the act
- sets priorities for establishing accessibility standards and timelines for implementing them
- sets long-term accessibility objectives for furthering the purpose of the act
- responds to requests for accessibility advice from the minister

Board Membership

The Accessibility Advisory Board has 12 members and the majority of them are persons who identify as having a disability. Members are from different areas of the province and have diverse experience and expertise in accessibility and form a variety of sectors.

The following people served on the Accessibility Advisory Board in 2019–2020:

Douglas Foster, Chair	Sydney
Rosalind Penfound, Vice-Chair	Dartmouth
Barry Abbott	Halifax
Cynthia Bruce	Kentville
Linda Campbell (appointed in November 2019)	Halifax
David Caswell	Waverley
Alexander Peeler	Conquerall Bank
Warren (Gus) Reed	Halifax
Kevin Russell	Halifax
Marcie Shwery-Stanley	Sydney
Anne Sinclair	Halifax

2019–2020 Activities

The board met four times in 2019–2020. The public can read the meeting summaries, which are posted on the Accessibility Directorate website.

In addition to developing internal processes, such as workplans and procedures, the board was also active in the following key areas:

Accessibility Standard Development

The Accessibility Advisory Board is responsible for recommending standards for the province to put in place to become fully accessible by 2030.

In 2019–2020, the Built Environment and Education Standard Development Committees each held seven meetings. Members received an orientation to the processes they will use to develop standard recommendations. Each committee developed a work plan and terms of reference, and completed a jurisdictional review to provide a foundation for their work.

The majority of members of the standard development committees are persons with disabilities, Deaf, and/or neurodivergent persons. The committees have members from sectors that will need to comply with the standards, and from relevant government departments. Each committee also invited subject matter experts to their meetings to provide additional information that will help shape the recommendations.

At the beginning of the process, the committees consulted with the community to identify barriers to accessibility and to establish priorities. They used that input to develop their first draft of recommendations, and then consulted with the community again for more feedback. The committee chairs also updated the board at each board meeting so members could provide advice and direction.

In 2020–2021, the board will submit the first phase of recommendations to the Minister of Justice, and both committees will continue work on the second phase of recommendations.

Also in 2020-2021, the Board will recommend the order in which the next standard areas will be developed.

Awareness and Capacity Building

The board advises the Accessibility Directorate on various accessibility policies and initiatives.

In 2019–2020, the board gave their input on a multi-year awareness campaign that will

- highlight the barriers that exist for persons with disabilities, Deaf, and/or neurodivergent persons
- create awareness that accessibility is a human right
- provide information about the Accessibility Act, government's commitment to accessibility, and the progress toward it

The board also gave feedback on accessibility planning toolkits that have been developed for municipalities and other public sector bodies. These toolkits will help the users develop accessibility plans and establish accessibility advisory committees.

<https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/public-sector-bodies-toolkit.asp>

<https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/municipal-toolkit.asp>

Collaboration with Government and Community

The board stays connected with government departments that have a role to play in making Nova Scotia accessible, as well as to organizations and individuals who work on issues related to disability and accessibility in the community. This year, several community-based organizations, government departments, and accessibility champions gave presentations to the board.

In 2019–2020, the following presented to the board:

Community presentations

- Jennifer Powley, Michelle Anderson, and Edward Edelstein: proposal to the Department of Community Services and the Department of Health to provide independent living for persons with disabilities, Deaf, and/or neurodivergent persons through a pooled attendant care model. The board provided a letter of support for this initiative.

- Rural Transportation Association: overview of the Accessible Transportation Assistance Program and recommended changes.

Government presentations

- Department of Lands and Forestry, deputy minister: accessibility initiatives in provincial parks.
- Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, deputy minister and staff: update on accessibility actions identified in the Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan.
- Employment and Social Development Canada, Accessibility Secretariat, executive director: overview of the Accessible Canada Act.
- Canadian Accessibility Standards Development Organization (CASDO, now Accessibility Standards Canada), chief executive officer: overview of CASDO.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In 2019–2020, the board contracted an independent consultant to help develop tools that will monitor the province's progress toward reaching our goal of becoming a fully accessible province by 2030.

Looking Ahead to 2020–2021

The 2019–2020 year ended with the COVID-19 pandemic reaching the shores of Nova Scotia. As a result, the board is quickly transitioning to meeting virtually on a monthly basis in order to continue to meet its mandate. Many of the board members that have been with us from the start will end their terms in late 2020–2021. The board looks forward to welcoming new members in February 2021, while some current members continue with a second term.

The board will receive and review the first phase of standard recommendations from the Built Environment and Education Standard Development Committees, which will be submitted to the Minister of Justice in summer 2020. The board will also continue to invite senior government leaders to share their progress on how they are becoming more accessible within their departments and to discuss issues impacting persons with disabilities, Deaf, and/or neurodivergent persons. The Accessibility Advisory Board will continue to look for ways to support government and community collaborations that contribute to our goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030.

