

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 20, 2022 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Attendance: Rosalind Penfound (Chair), David Caswell (Vice-Chair), Cynthia Bruce, Linda Campbell, Birgit Elssner, Ellen Johnson, Marcie Shwery-Stanley, Anne Sinclair.

Regrets: Andrew Jantzen

Staff: Dawn Stegen (Interim Executive Director), Terri Lynn Almeda (Manager), Dustin Lyon, Maddi MacDonald, Laura Beth MacPherson, Avery Maynard, Amy Middleton, Lashauna Smith, Julia Stephenson, Kristel vom Scheidt.

1. Welcome

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, welcomed everyone to the first Accessibility Advisory Board meeting of 2022 with a Mi'kmaq land acknowledgement and hoped members had a restful holiday season, recognizing we are nearly two years into the Covid-19 pandemic which has impacts on everyone in different ways.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The Board reviewed and accepted the agenda as circulated.

b. Approval of Minutes from December 15, 2021

Motion: There was no mover of the motion to approve the minutes. Therefore, the December 2021 minutes with the administrative change will be brought back in February for approval.

c. Outstanding Business and Directorate Updates

The Board discussed the presentation received from Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage on the two accessibility grant programs at the December meeting. The Board was pleased to receive the updates and learn about projects funded, as supporting these accessibility improvements is an important commitment of the Government. The Board discussed the impact of COVID 19 on the business sector, as it may also impact their capacity to apply to the grant program. The Board agreed that supporting these programs to be fully subscribed is important to advancing accessibility across the province.

Motion: Cynthia Bruce moved that the Accessibility Advisory Board provide the Minister of Justice with advice on improvements to the Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage accessibility grant programs. David Caswell seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Dawn Stegen, Interim Executive Director, provided updates on Accessibility Directorate activities.

- Production of the third video for the awareness campaign has been delayed due to public health restrictions.
- The Accessibility Directorate hosted an orientation meeting with the Act Review team to provide context and background for their review.
- The Directorate provided the Minister with an overview of the phase 2 recommendations on the Built Environment standard. A meeting will be scheduled with the Minister and the Chairs of the Accessibility Advisory Board and Standard Development Committee, and then the recommendations will be made publicly available. Government staff continue their work to draft language for the proposed standard.
- The draft Compliance and Enforcement framework was submitted to the Minister.
- The Minister received a letter from a municipality seeking an extension to the April 1, 2022 deadline for establishing an accessibility advisory committee and preparing an accessibility plan. Minister is considering advice from the Directorate and Board before responding.
- The Accessibility Directorate has established a small working group with Accessibility Standards Canada on developing a Memorandum of Understanding to coordinate and collaborate in standards, and

harmonize where possible, share research, and support a demonstration project on the joint development of an accessibility standard with funding support.

- The Accessibility Directorate has joined a provincial committee on equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility that will inform approaches to addressing child poverty initiatives. The committee is led by the Department of Community Services.
- The guide to emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities, *Are You Ready*, has been posted to the government website. An official launch will be in the coming months.
- The Accessibility Directorate is meeting with Develop Nova Scotia in late January.
- The plain language work on the Accessibility Advisory Board's Annual Report is completed and design work is underway.

3. Accessibility Advisory Board

a. Standard Development Committees

i. Employment

Lashauna Smith, Senior Policy Analyst, Accessibility Directorate, provide an update on the Employment Standard Development Committee. The SDC held a successful half day orientation on January 18 and are planning their first business meeting in February. Work is underway to recruit to the vacant member position, aiming to bring a recommendation to the Board's February meeting.

ii. Education

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, and Cynthia Bruce, Vice-Chair, Education Standard Development Committee and Amy Middleton, Senior Policy Analyst, Accessibility Directorate, provided an update on the SDC's work to develop recommendations, including the work to date, the content of the recommendations for consultation, the consultation process, and upcoming milestones.

The SDC finalized their draft recommendations for early years, public P-12, private P-12, universities, private career colleges, private language schools, and the Nova Scotia School of Adult Learning. The

SDC will be consulting on these draft recommendations with stakeholders in February and March, and a vendor has been hired to assist with the consultations.

The SDC also shared the draft recommendations with the Board for their review at this meeting, to ensure the Board does not note any major errors or omissions prior to consultation.

The Board recognized the significant work of the SDC in preparing the draft recommendations and had no concerns with the draft recommendations going forward for consultation. The Board provided comments on the draft recommendations, including adding audism to the list of definitions, specifying ASL interpretation as ASL/English interpretation and that bilingualism in Deafspace means ASL/English or ASL/French. The Board also noted that post-secondary institutions could collaborate with an ASL interpreter coordinator, rather than each having their own.

The Board also asked that the proper names are used rather than acronyms, enforcement approaches are clarified, and to ensure consultation approaches reach newcomer stakeholders.

The SDC will revise the draft recommendations based on the Board's feedback. It was also noted that these are not the final recommendations from the SDC. The SDC will review the feedback from stakeholders and will bring forward a revised version to the Board for review and approval in June. Board members are also invited to do a more thorough review of the recommendations and provide feedback over the next month and are welcome to attend consultation sessions.

b. Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan 2022-2025

Laura MacPherson, Senior Policy Analyst, Accessibility Directorate, reviewed the draft priority areas and commitments prepared for government's second multi-year accessibility plan, and asked the Board for feedback.

The Board discussed the importance of accessibility in the agencies, boards and commissions process, noted the language doesn't

include “persons with disabilities, Deaf and neurodivergent persons”, and the priority of infrastructure improvements in the built environment due to the time required for these improvements. The Board also discussed increasing the participation and representation of persons with intellectual disabilities, and the priority of building awareness of the diversity of persons with disabilities and the barriers to participation. The Board noted that community transportation gaps have been identified and the importance of addressing these gaps.

The Board discussed the importance of building awareness and also building capacity and infrastructure to realize culture change that will enable government to provide accessible services, as well as to provide oversight and ensure quality of accessible services. The Board noted the need for increased professionals and trainers in accessible services.

c. Board Work Plan 2022-2023

David Caswell, Vice-Chair, provided an overview of the Accessibility Advisory Board’s work plan priorities, including the former Board’s priorities and the Board’s role as outlined in the Accessibility Act, and asked the Board for their feedback.

The Board identified a number of areas that the Board should address through its work plan, including the gap in capacity among accessibility consultants, building capacity in employment for board members to support them in making recommendations to Minister in this area, and informing procurement criteria to require first voice expertise in a meaningful role.

David Caswell will be leading work to update the work plan in time for the March Board meeting, and may request participation from Board members in a working group to support this.

4. Board Priorities

a. COVID-19

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, provided an update on COVID-19 activities since the December Board meeting. The Board is progressing well with completing their own Proof of Vaccination process, and will be finished soon. The Accessibility Directorate is continuing to monitor impacts on Nova Scotians with disabilities throughout the pandemic and this Omicron wave. The Board noted that accessibility improvements are needed to 211 to ensure both phone and text access, and will also continue to monitor issues and bring forward to the Directorate for follow up.

b. Accessible Housing

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, provided the Board with an update regarding the December 21, 2021 letter sent to Minister and letter to editor. The Minister has not yet provided a response to the letter. The letter to the editor was shared by some disability advocates through social media however there has not been significant response from the disability community regarding the letter.

The Board expressed their thanks to the Chair for writing the letter, and discussed opportunities for follow up. Rosalind Penfound expressed interest in inviting the Department of Community Services to attend a Board meeting.

5. Adjournment

Rosalind Penfound adjourned the meeting. The next Board meeting will be held February 15, 2022, from 1 PM to 4 PM via Zoom.