

**Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board**  
**Meeting Minutes Part 1**  
**Thursday, February 16, 2023 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.**  
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

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Rosalind Penfound (Chair), Linda Campbell, Birgit Elssner, Ellen Johnson, Anne Sinclair, Lewis Pope, Max Chauvin, Melissa MacKenzie

Regrets: Denise DiGiosia, Marcie Shwery-Stanley

Guests: Honorable Brad Johns, Minister of Justice, Deputy Minister, Candace Thomas, Associate Deputy Minister, Michelle Higgins. Danny Graham, Chief Engagement Officer; Taylor Hill, Research and Data lead and Ryley Urban, Director Quality of Life Initiative from Engage Nova Scotia.

Staff: Terri Lynn Almeda, Dawn Stegen, Amy Middleton, Crissy Adams, Laura Beth MacPherson, Lisa Jacobs, Kristel vom Scheidt

## **1. Welcome**

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement with particular attention to recognize that February is African Heritage Month. Roz also acknowledged that Nova Scotia Heritage Day this year recognizes Rita Joe, Mi'kmaq poet and author.

Roz acknowledged David Caswell, Vice-Chair. David stepped down from the Board in December. She recognized that this Board benefited from his leadership, advice, and contributions for close to four years. The Directorate is working with the Department of Justice to have this vacancy filled.

Roz reported she has completed her term as Acting Deputy Minister of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

## **2. Board Operations**

### **a. Review of Agenda**

There was a question from the Board on the 2023 workplan that was circulated previously and clarification on the procedure to add items to upcoming meeting agendas. Dawn Stegen, Executive Director responded that the Board's workplan is flexible and new items can be brought to the roundtable discussion or by email in advance. The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

## **b. Approval of Minutes from December 15**

**Motion:** The minutes from December were moved by Max Chauvin and seconded by Ellen Johnson.

## **c. Outstanding Business**

- Dawn Stegen, explained the Board's recommendations for a standard in education have been advanced to the Minister of Justice. In addition, the Decision-Making Guidelines for Accessible Education have been publicly released on the Directorate's website.

**ACTION:** The Board will receive an email with more information on these Guidelines

- The Directorate has joined the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia (AMANS) on their accessibility steering committee. The Directorate will be attending upcoming conferences, such as AMANS and Recreation Nova Scotia. She asked the Board to share any other events or conferences that may be happening in their communities.
- A new position for a Director of Policy and Standards has been recently posted. This individual will provide leadership and direction for the development and delivery of accessibility standards and related policies.
- Four Directorate staff were recently awarded the Queens Platinum Jubilee Medal for their pioneering work to establish the Directorate and the development of the Access by Design 2030 Strategy.
- Accessibility Standards Canada is forming pan-Canadian working groups, one will develop a guide for accessibility in northern, rural, and remote communities, and the other is developing an adaptive housing guide and associated costing. Nova Scotia will have representatives on these committees.
- The Directorate recently met with representatives of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Nova Scotia to discuss concerns of people accompanied by guide dogs being denied access to stores, restaurants, hotels, taxis, and other facilities and services available to the public. The CNIB is calling for education for police officers, including RCMP about the Blind Persons Rights Act and consistent enforcement of the Act. The Public Safety division and the Accessibility Directorate are collaborating, with input from CNIB and impacted sectors, to develop a targeted multi year awareness and education campaign that aligns with Access Includes Everyone.
- There will be a spring recruitment campaign for upcoming Board vacancies.

## **3. Business**

### **a. Government of NS 2022-25 Accessibility Plan**

Laura Beth MacPherson, Senior Policy Analyst gave an overview on the highlights of government's second accessibility plan and next steps. Laura Beth reviewed how the plan was developed, priority areas that align with the accessibility standard

areas, and how implementation will be coordinated based on a total of 47 combined commitments from all departments.

She explained that outcomes of this plan are for people with disabilities to have equitable access to government employment, programs, services, buildings, and information and communications. It also ensures that government of Nova Scotia employees have the awareness and capacity to take action to improve accessibility.

There were questions from the Board and discussion followed. The Board asked about the biggest challenge that the Directorate has faced in this work. Laura Beth responded to say the ongoing process to build awareness and internal capacity and knowledge of accessibility and disability issues.

**a. Act Review Update**

Lisa Jacobs, Senior Policy Analyst provided an update on the progress from the first independent review of the Accessibility Act, by Dr. Katie Aubrecht. Lisa explained that the findings in the report will be based on information collected from almost 800 participants during the public consultations last year. This will include recommended changes to advance the goals of the Act, and a final report will be submitted to Minister this Spring. The Minister will make the report public within 30 days.

**c. Quality of Life for People with Disabilities**

Lisa Jacobs, Senior Policy Analyst provided an overview of a project that will be developing a Quality-of-Life Index for people with disabilities. She explained that currently there is no tool or method to comprehensively monitor increased accessibility.

The Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities will lead this two-year project to design and consult on the index which will include a mix of objective and subjective measures. The final index and baseline report will be published in 2024. An Index Advisory Committee of community organizations, people with disabilities, and experts will coordinate this work and the Directorate would like to invite a Board member to join. She asked for any interested Board members to connect with Roz.

**d. Preparations for Meeting with Minister**

Roz took a few minutes to prepare the Board before the conversation with Minister of Justice, Brad Johns. She reminded the Board that as per the Accessibility Act the Board meets with the Minister once a year to discuss their priorities for the upcoming year and to review any work that was recently submitted for approval.

**e. Meeting with Minister Johns, Minister of Justice**

Roz welcomed the Minister of Justice Brad Johns, and the Minister then introduced Deputy Minister of Justice, Candace Thomas, and Associate Deputy Minister, Michelle Higgins.

Roz introduced all Board members in attendance and gave an overview of the Board's work in the past year, including connecting with several government departments to learn about their policies and programs for persons with disabilities. She also reviewed the Boards' role in developing accessibility standards and their priorities for 2023, including feedback on accessibility measures and policies, building relationships with disability communities, considering the Act Review Report, providing comments on the proposed built environment standard, and advancing the membership for the Goods and Services Standard Development Committee.

Roz provided an overview of the work and scope of the recommendations for a standard in education. The Minister thanked the Board for their efforts to develop these comprehensive recommendations.

The Minister asked about who was consulted and what was their response to the education recommendations. Roz responded to say there was consultations at three stages during the process with over 900 Nova Scotians in both the public and private sectors. She explained the Education SDC also reached out to key stakeholders in the Mi'kmaw, African Nova Scotian, and newcomer communities for their input, and individuals with expertise in particular areas.

Minister Johns asked how staff and leaders in the education system responded to the recommendations. Roz indicated there was widespread support for the recommendations based on the work done to consult with the sector and diverse communities to ensure they were relevant and impactful. Roz explained that the Education SDC had a lot of discussion about ensuring reasonableness of the recommendations and that is reflected in the recommendations being different for some sectors.

Roz explained that the education system understands that accessibility is about human rights. The education sector as a whole understands the need for this standard and agree with the recommendations, but also cautioned that a commitment of resources and support is required for the standard to be implemented successfully.

**f. Quality of Life Index, Engage Nova Scotia**

Roz Penfound welcomed Danny Graham, Chief Engagement Officer at Engage Nova Scotia, who was joined by Taylor Hill, Research and Data lead and Ryley

Urban, Director Quality of Life Initiative. Danny gave a presentation to share findings from their 2019 Quality of Life Survey. This was modeled on the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and is the biggest dataset of its kind in North America. He explained there were three disability categories that respondents could identify with; physical disability, mental health challenge and chronic illness. This comprised about 28% of respondents, but they suspect because of how the questions were asked, not all of those living with a disability may have self identified.

Danny explained that when the responses from the disability categories were compared with the rest of the province, there was significant differences in how they rated their quality of life, specifically in the areas of community vitality, healthy populations, life satisfaction and living standards. He stated Engage Nova Scotia will be launching the survey again in 2024 with a few changes and are looking for any feedback from the Board.

The Board asked if in 2019 there were financial incentives for participation. Danny responded to say that participants were entered into a draw for grocery gift cards.

The Board asked if any of the survey findings were a surprise. Danny responded that the fact that people with disabilities had consistently different experiences shows there is a lot of work still to be done. Also, the results showed the importance of social connections and a feeling of “belonging”.

#### **4. Board Priorities and Standing Agenda Items**

##### **a. Roundtable**

Roz opened the floor to Board members to share about their work or issues in their communities. A Board member raised the upcoming Rick Hansen Accessibility Professional Network Conference that is taking place March 1 and 2 and shared the link for more information <https://www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/apn-2023-conference>.

Feedback was provided on the Boards’ work plan. The request was made for the Board to discuss what an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030 means at an upcoming meeting. Roz suggested that at a future Board meeting the Directorate could provide an update on progress to date.

#### **5. Adjournment**

Part two of the February meet will take place February 23 from 1-4pm on Zoom.