

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 1, 2024 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Board Members present: Rosalind Penfound (Chair), Max Chauvin (Vice-Chair), Birgit Elssner, Ellen Johnson, Anne Sinclair, Melissa MacKenzie, Earl Muise, Linda Campbell

Regrets: Lewis Pope, Marcie Shwery-Stanley, Denise DiGiosia

Staff: Dawn Stegen, Kristel vom Scheidt, Maddi Adams, Fola Adeleke, Amy Middleton, Meghan Murphy, Hannah MacDougall, Lashauna Smith, Terri Lynn, Cris Adams, Ashley Gaudet

Guests: Lisa Snider, Chair of Goods and Services Standard Development Committee; Aundrey Marshall, Consultant Goods and Services Research; Sherry Costa-Lorenz and Tammy Bernasky, Quality of Life Index for Persons with Disabilities

1. Welcome

Roz Penfound, Chair welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement and noted that February is African Heritage Month and encouraged all members to join one of the many events happening throughout the province. She also reminded the Board that this is the last meeting for three members who will be completing their second term: herself, Marcie Shwery-Stanley and Anne Sinclair. Roz also shared that Lewis Pope has given notice of his resignation from the Board, expressing gratitude for his contributions.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

b. Approval of Minutes from November 23 and 30, 2023

Motion: A motion to accept the November 23 and 30 2023 meeting minutes as circulated was moved by Anne Sinclair and seconded by Ellen Johnson.

c. Outstanding Business

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director, noted the Board's outstanding action related to submitting advice on provincial support for vulnerable persons registries.

Dawn shared that the Provincial Legislature will be sitting for the winter session starting on February 27, 2024.

She also confirmed the Minister has approved the Terms of Reference for Information and Communication SDC.

The Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, who presented at the last Board meeting, is working closely with the Directorate on planning approach to coordinate work on shared Prescribed Public Sector Bodies, specifically the Municipalities that will be required to have Anti-Racism and Equity Plans.

Dawn noted that Directorate staff will be attending and presenting at the “Hearing Their Voices Conference: Accessibility and Disability from an Indigenous Perspective” that is being held in Membertou March 22-24, 2024.

Plans for a separate website for the Board is moving forward with a Statement of Work to hire a vendor to design and build it later this year, with feedback and direction from all Board members. She also noted that the Board Annual Report for 2022-23 is available and posted on the Accessibility Directorate website.

An upcoming Prescribed Public Sector Bodies (PPSB) Virtual Gathering will focus on connection and sharing between organizations to share key learnings and build a community of practice.

3. Standards

a. Built Environment Standard: Update

Maddi Adams, Senior Policy Analyst reminded Board members that they were given an overview of the feedback from public review of the proposed standard last fall. Based on that feedback, including from the Board and Build Environment SDC the proposed standard has been updated. Maddi explained that before a standard can be enacted as regulation it must go through a process of regulatory review and formatting. This may take 6-12 weeks.

Maddi explained that education and awareness about the standard will be key to successful implementation and Directorate staff have developed an initial education and awareness plan for the next year.

A Board member stated that the delay of the release of this standard as well as the new Building Code will result in a further lack of accessible housing being built.

Action: This Board member offered to work with others to draft a letter of advice to the Minister of Justice expressing concern for this delay in the standard.

b. Education Standard: Update

Meghan Murphy, Senior Policy Analyst gave an update that they have been working closely with the Department of Justice solicitor and staff in the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Advanced Education, and Labour Skills and Immigration. They are focusing first on the recommendations for public pre-primary to grade 12, and for universities and Nova Scotia Community College, with a standard for these sectors to be enacted in 2025. Following this will be recommendations for early years and private education institutions.

This approach means we can accelerate the standard development process and aligns with the Government's commitment that standards would apply to the public sector first.

An interdepartmental working group is meeting monthly to help ensure communication and collaboration across departments and by Fall 2024, it is anticipated that a draft standard will be completed. At that time, we will seek approval to make the proposed standard available for 60 days for comments.

In response to a question regarding school administrators, Roz noted that that all centres for education developed accessibility plans and are supportive, although they are wondering about capacity to implement the standard.

c. Standard Development Committees

i. Goods and Services: Update

Lisa Snider, Chair of the Goods and Services SDC spoke about the ambitious timelines the committee is adhering to. They are reviewing in detail the Ontario and Manitoba standards and they are hoping to structure their work in the same way that the Employment SDC did with recommendations separated for different sectors.

There was a question from the Board about what is included in their definition of support persons, and concern about modeling the standard on what other provinces have done. Lisa responded to say that this will be addressed at an upcoming meeting.

ii. Goods and Services: Research Findings

Roz introduced Audrey Marshall, Professor of Indigenous Studies at Cape Breton University who was contracted to conduct research for the Goods and Services SDC on the experiences of Indigenous communities. Audrey gave a presentation to summarize the main findings and priority issues uncovered in this work. Audrey reminded the Board that the final report from her research was sent with the meeting material for more information.

iii. Public Transportation: Update

Amy Middleton, Director of Policy and Standards gave an update to say that Lisa Jacobs, Senior Policy Analyst, will now be leading the Public Transportation standard work. The Public Transportation SDC recruitment was launched mid-December with information shared on the Directorate's website, social media and through email. It was decided to extend the deadline for applications to mid-February and Directorate staff are working with relevant provincial government departments to identify which staff will put their name forward as representatives. The next steps are working with the Board SDC recruitment subcommittee to review the applications and make a recommendation regarding membership at a spring Board meeting.

iv. Information and Communication: Recruitment

Hannah MacDougall, Senior Policy Analyst provided an update on the recruitment process for the Information and Communication SDC. She reviewed the timelines for recruitment including an application deadline by the end of March. Hannah then gave an overview of the SDC recruitment plan and membership criteria and next steps, including the next steps of the Board SDC recruitment subcommittee to review applications.

v. Employment: Consultation Findings

Roz reminded the Board about their own consultation and discussion on the draft Employment recommendations last fall and introduced Lashauna Smith, Senior Policy Analyst who gave an overview of the themes coming out of the public and targeted consultation sessions.

Lashauna explained a large portion of consultation participants were employers, including the private sector and representatives from prescribed public sector bodies. There was also representation from organizations who provide employment supports and services to persons with disabilities. In addition, all Government of Nova Scotia departments were invited to review the SDCs draft recommendations, including targeted sessions with those most impacted by this standard area.

She explained that in general the majority of those who participated in the consultations felt that the recommendations were clear regarding removing barriers to employment for persons with disabilities. The most feedback was related to impacts on small and medium sized business. In addition, there was also feedback about the need for resources and support for employers.

Lashauna explained that the SDC will meet in March to finalize the recommendations, with the goal of submitting them to the Board in April.

4. Business

a. Office of Mental Health and Addictions

Due to time constraints Roz explained that a decision was made to defer this presentation to the next Board meeting.

b. Quality of Life Project

Roz introduced Tammy Bernasky Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Department of L'nu, Political, and Social Studies at Cape Breton University and Sherry Costa-Lorenz, Executive Director of the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities to present on a project funded by the Accessibility Directorate on creating a Quality-of-Life Index for Persons with Disabilities. Roz also mentioned that member Birgit Elssner represents the Board on the Provincial Advisory Council for the development of this index.

Sherry explained that this index will help government monitor progress from the Accessibility Act as well as highlight areas that people with disabilities are falling behind. She explained that the intention is for both government and community to use this data to target policies and programs that will have the biggest impact, as well as increase knowledge and understanding of the lives of persons with disabilities. Tammy then explained how the 13 domains for the index were developed, and what indicators in each of these will be measured.

There was a question from the board on gathering information by geographic region to better support local organizations and municipalities. Tammy responded to say that is currently not the plan, however important to consider. Sherry also spoke about their plans to connect with Engage Nova Scotia regarding regional data.

c. Roundtable and Thank You to Outgoing Members

Max Chauvin, Vice Chair led a conversation to recognize the three Board members who were completing their second and final terms: Rosalind Penfound, Marcie Shwery-Stanley and Anne Sinclair. Board members expressed their thanks and experience working with and learning from these individuals.

5. Adjournment

Roz thanked the Board for their contributions and reminded them that the next meetings will be scheduled after the appointments of the new board members in the next month or so.