

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 16, 2022 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Rosalind Penfound (Chair), David Caswell (Vice-Chair), Linda Campbell, Birgit Elssner, Andrew Jantzen, Ellen Johnson

Regrets: Marcie Shwery-Stanley, Anne Sinclair

Staff: Dawn Stegen (Executive Director), Dustin Lyon, Craig MacKinnon, Kristel vom Scheidt, David Odufuye (summer student), Josh Bates, Lisa Jacobs, Hannah MacDougall, Maddi MacDonald

1. Welcome

Rosalind Penfound, Chair, welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

b. Approval of Minutes from July 12, 2022

Motion: The minutes for the July meeting were moved by David Caswell and seconded by Birgit Elssner. Motion carried unanimously.

c. Outstanding Business

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director gave an update on staffing changes at the Directorate, with staff is actively working to fill three positions.

Dawn reported she is waiting on follow up with Department of Health and Wellness regarding personal care assistants.

The full Education Recommendations will come to the board at the October meeting, but there will be a short introduction to prepare members for this presentation at the September meeting.

Directorate is recommending Prescribed Public Sector Bodies be a standing agenda item at board meetings.

Dawn gave an overview of the **Nova Ramp Up** pilot project, where the Directorate sits as a partner, led by the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia. The public launch for this initiative was this morning in Stellarton. The goal of the program is to add 50 temporary ramps to business and community organizations in the Pictou area. This project is a partnership with the Planning for Equity, Accessibility and Community Health (PEACH) research Unit at Dalhousie University, Recreation Nova Scotia, Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, and the Northeast Nova Scotia Correctional Facility where the ramps are constructed by individuals in their community work programs.

Regarding the status of MLA Office accessibility that was raised at the May meeting, staff have made Minister aware of the board's request and the Directorate will connect with Speakers' office for more information beginning in September.

Staff at the Directorate will be meeting with officials at the Halifax Regional Municipality and an invitation will be extended to the Mayor to attend a future board meeting.

The Directorate has been in touch with Ross Sampson, who sits on the Nova Scotia Building Code Advisory Committee representing the board. We recommend the board invite Ross to a future meeting to give an update on the committee.

Dawn gave an outline of the itinerary for upcoming regional meetings with PPSB's and disability organizations that her and Roz have planned while in Cape Breton August 29 to 31.

The board discussed concern about meeting quorum with such a small board and the fact that a small number of individuals would constitute a majority for decision making.

Roz thanked Dawn and noted that a letter from the board regarding the appointment of new board members has been sent to the Minister.

3. Standards

a. Standard Development Committees (SDC)

i. Employment: Update

Lashauna Smith, Senior Policy Analyst reported on behalf of the Chair that the Employment SDC has not met since June, but the sub-group meetings will begin this month and continue in between the full committee meetings

until April 2023. The committee's workplan has been adjusted to account for consultations on recommendations in Fall 2023 and the recommendations presented to the board in Winter 2024. The next scheduled SDC meetings are September 14 and 15.

ii. Education: Update

Roz Penfound gave an update on status of the Education SDC's progress on their recommendations. Recently they have met with the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority and the Department of Advanced Education. The recommendations themselves very comprehensive and as such there will be a presentation to the board at the September meeting to introduce the concepts and scope of these before a more detailed discussion in October.

b. Built Environment Standard Update

Maddi MacDonald, Senior Policy Analyst reported the first draft of the standard has been shared back to the Interdepartmental Working Group and the Executive Directors committee. Maddi will present the draft standard to the board at the September meeting and discuss process and progress. This presentation will give an update on the progress to date and next steps, ensuring time for questions and feedback.

4. Business

a. PPSB Cohort 1 Compliance and Monitoring

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director reviewed the compliance status of the Cohort 1 Prescribed Public Sector Bodies. The recent changes announced to some crown corporations is being examined by the Directorate to determine if it has an effect on some of PPSB's in Cohort 2.

Dawn reported that since last board meeting the Directorate has received one more accessibility plan bringing the number up to 79% of Cohort 1 PPSB's. In addition, most PPSB's without plans are in the process obtaining of internal approvals on their plans. There is one PPSB that has not made progress to date, and the Directorate will be meeting with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing on how best to support this community.

Of the plans that have been submitted 62% from Municipalities have been joint plans with other Municipal units. The Post-Secondary Education sector continues to meet as a network and support each other. Regional Libraries came together to develop a framework, and two out of three submitted are joint plans.

b. Overview of PPSB Plans

Hannah MacDougall, Junior Policy Analyst that has been working with the Directorate over the summer gave an overview of the highlights in some of the Accessibility Plans that were completed. She explained that in order to determine compliance all plans were reviewed to show progress on removing and preventing barriers. Staff also made note of innovative features and consultation processes, including their proposed evaluation and monitoring processes. Hannah then reviewed the most notable examples with excerpts from individual accessibility plans.

There was a question from the board regarding the sharing of these best practices and ideas to all other PPSB's to learn from. Hannah explained the plan is to review some of these examples at their upcoming virtual gatherings.

A follow up question was posed regarding how often PPSB's have to revisit these plans, and the response was every three years based on the Act.

There was comment from the board focused on the PPSB who has make no progress on their accessibility plan. The member was worried specifically about the residents of this municipality not having the same level of accessibility as other parts of the province.

c. Act Review Update

Lisa Jacobs, Senior Policy Analyst gave an update on the status of the Act review. She explained that over 700 people to date have participated in the review, with approximately 40% of these identifying as first voice. There has been an online survey, individual interviews, focus groups (both in person and virtually), short surveys during Access Awareness week, and website submissions. Formal engagement is closing September 16, at which time the website will be removed. The final report is to be submitted by March 1, 2023. At this point the Act requires the report to be made publicly available within 30 days. There was a question from the board asking if there a change in the cost of this work due to the extension. Lisa responded saying there was no change in cost.

d. Goods and Services Standard

Josh Bates, Senior Policy Analyst, leading fourth standard area, Goods and Services gave a presentation reviewing the timelines for the standard development committee recruitment and selection process. Josh referenced the membership criteria, application forms, Term of Reference, and targeted recruitment strategy that were circulated in advance of the meeting. He explained that these documents were created from on past SDC's but have been updated based on lessons learned. He reviewed the timelines, targeting October to launch recruitment and to form a subcommittee of the board to review applications. Josh

was specifically looking for feedback on any sectors or associations to target with for membership recruitment.

Josh spoke about a connection between Goods and Services and health care , explaining that all standards will likely apply in health care settings. He then gave an example that Ontario developed all the other standards before health care, with this standard addressing gaps in some of the other areas.

There was a comment from the board about what would need to be considered if health care would require its own standard area.

Feedback was received from the board to change the word walker to mobility device as an example of barriers.

At the end of the discussion the Chair proposed the following:

Motion:

Accessibility Advisory Board recommend that the Standard Development Committee Membership Criteria, Application, Terms of Reference and Targeted Recruitment Strategy be forwarded to the Minister of Justice for approval with the aim to launch SDC recruitment in October 2022.

Birgit Elssner moved the motion and Ellen Johnson seconded the motion.

e. Standard Development Committees Process

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director began a conversation with the board on the process of dissolving a standard development committee at the end of their term and what constitutes the end of a mandate. She explained that at this time there is no process for dissolving the committee and there are no details on this included in the Act. The Terms of Reference only mention the availability to SDC members, specifically the Chair and Vice Chair to consult with the board prior to submitting recommendations to the Minister. Up until now there has not been an indication to the Built Environment SDC members that the committee is dissolved.

The board agreed that it was important to have a formal process for dissolving SDCs including a letter of appreciation for their time and service.

The board chair commented that there should be a change to the SDC Terms of Reference to indicate the terms on committees could be longer than three years as and eligible for honorarium if they need to meet. There was a suggestion to connect the SDC dissolution date with the regulations going forward to Cabinet.

Decision: SDCs will be dissolved after the proposed standard is out for public comment and feedback discussed with the Accessibility Advisory Board.

5. Board Priorities

a. COVID-19

Roz reminded the board that it was decided at the July meeting to keep COVID-19 as standing agenda item. For the week of July 29 to August 5, Nova Scotia rated the highest in the country on the COVID-19 Hazard Index, although there has not been a change in Nova Scotia's public health protocols.

Nova Scotia has closed the last of its dedicated COVID units, which means that those admitted to the hospital while sick with COVID-19 are no longer being treated in a unit separate from patients who have not contracted the virus. Instead, hospitals are using a "care in place" model, meaning all patients will be treated in whichever unit of a hospital that meets their needs. This change is intended to streamline the flow for patients through the hospital and to help decrease delays in accessing health care. Although this change causes concern for people with disabilities who may now be at increased risk of contracting COVID while accessing health care. The seven-day isolation period for Nova Scotia Health employees who test positive for the virus remains in place, as does the vaccine mandate for health care workers.

There have been more reports on the prevalence of Long COVID, including a warning from Ability New Brunswick about the "new disability population" resulting from Long COVID. Roz reminded the board that this new population needs to be factored in discussions as our work moves forward. There may be a need to update the data we are using regarding disability in Nova Scotia.

In June, Maddi MacDonald shared the findings of outreach to disability organizations about the impacts of COVID-19. Directorate staff have made Minister aware of the findings and are preparing to have discussions about the findings with other departments.

There was a comment from the board that for those looking to access rapid COVID tests many MLA Offices still have them, and that they can be delivered if someone is self-isolating or unable to travel.

b. Affordable Accessible Housing

Roz reviewed the presentation the board received last month from the Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs on the development of the Housing Strategy and thanked those who gave feedback on the needs assessment survey.

ACTION: Directorate staff will provide addition feedback and report back on the status of this survey at the next meeting.

c. Roundtable

Roz started the discussion regarding the upcoming October 20 board meeting which has been planned to be in person. This has been proposed as an all day meeting, although she would like to know each member's comfort levels with coming together since there is significant planning and arrangements that need to be made ahead of time. Based on the discussion that followed Roz will proceed with plans to meet in person, although if necessary, staff could explore a hybrid option for anyone that needed to attend virtually.

ACTION: Directorate staff will start to make preliminary inquires about availability of meeting spaces.

The conversation then turned back to concerns about operating with such a small board and the fact that this limits their capacity. For example, at the moment there is not enough members to do work of approving the next SDC members for Goods and Services.

One member raised a question to better understand where the delay in appointing new board members is occurring and Roz explained the process.

Roz asked board members if they had anything they would like to share regarding what is happening in their community or other items of importance.

A board member would like to follow up with asking the Halifax Fire Department to attend an upcoming meeting. This member explained that since the last board meeting, they met with the Fire Chief regarding advice and accessibility expertise with hopes this opens the door for future collaboration.

ACTION: Directorate staff will review the Halifax Regional Municipality Accessibility Plan and will connect with their accessibility committee.

d. Agenda Items for Upcoming Board meetings

Roz referenced the Board's six month workplan that was brought forward at the March meeting and spoke to the fact that some agenda items have been moved around for various reasons. A board work plan for September 2022 to March 2030 has been created. Plan was shared with board members.

ACTION: Dawn will send this list to board members before the next board meeting.

e. Adjournment

Next meeting will be September 22 from 1-4 on Zoom. Most of this meeting will be spend on an overview of the Education recommendations and the initial draft Build Environment Standard.