

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Friday, April 29, 2024 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Board Members: Max Chauvin (Chair), Ellen Johnson (Vice-Chair), Birgit Elssner, Melissa MacKenzie, Earl Muise, Denise DiGiosia, Linda Campbell, Amy Lays, Louise Gillis, Sarah Moore, Shellene Sparks

Staff: Dawn Stegen, Kristel vom Scheidt, Amy Middleton, Meghan Murphy, Lashauna Smith, Ashley Gaudet

Guests: Charlie MacDonald, Chair of Employment Standard Development Committee; Alice Evans, Vice-Chair of Employment Standard Development

1. Welcome and Introductions

Max Chauvin, Chair welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board meeting and Ellen Johnson, Vice-Chair opened with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement. Max welcomed the new Board members appointed in February. He explained that they all have received two orientation sessions. Max then took the time to do a round of introductions of all current Board members.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda

The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

b. Outstanding Board Business

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director began by giving an update on some staffing changes at the Directorate, including Lashauna Smith who leads the Employment Standard work is leaving for another opportunity with the provincial government. Fola Adeleke, who is leading the Goods and Services term ends, Andrew Jantzen who supports PPSB's is currently on a leave, and Cris Adams the Administrative Assistant has accepted a research officer position with the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. These positions will be posted soon. A new addition to the team is Ashely Gaudet, as a Junior Policy Analyst.

Plans are underway to design and built an independent website for Board to use as a communication and engagement tool. A vendor will be selected shortly, and the Directorate will be looking for involvement and support from Board members who may be interested in contributing to this work over the next several months.

Dawn gave an update on outstanding board business which included their interest in providing advice on a provincial Vulnerable Persons Registry. Discussion on next steps for this outstanding item will be deferred to future meeting.

As well an action item from the February meeting was interest to submit advice based on concern over the delay in the Built Environment Standard being enacted and the pause on amendments to the Building Code.

Max suggested this item be part of the discussion at a future meeting.

Accessibility Directorate and Board have a new Minister. The Honourable Barbara Adams was recently sworn in. The Board provides advice to the Minister and meets with them once a year.

Dawn proposed adding learnings from the Indigenous conference in Membertou to a future Board meeting.

Max expressed gratitude to the staff leaving and wished them the very best. Lashauna was thanked by Max on behalf of the Board for her many years of service and commitment to excellence.

3. Standards

a. Employment Standard Development Committee (SDC): Draft Recommendations

Max explained that the Employment SDC has completed significant work and the recommendations they are advancing reflect the vast expertise of committee members, leading practices, and the lived experiences of the Nova Scotians who participated in both the survey and the consultation sessions held last fall.

He explained the Board will be using the consensus decision making model to seek approval on sections of the recommendations as they are reviewed.

Max welcomed the Chair and Vice Chair of the Employment Standard Development Committee Charlie MacDonald and Alice Evans, joined by Lashauna Smith, Senior Policy Analyst.

Lashauna reviewed the **Recommendations for Employers and Emergency Preparedness**. One Board member asked about Deaf or hard of hearing representatives on the SDC, and reference to sign language interpreters in the recommendations. Charlie responded to say there is not someone on the committee who identifies as Deaf or hard of hearing, however, they did have a presentation from the Deaf community. Lashauna also mentioned that in the definition section of the recommendations ASL interpretation is included under accessible formats and

accessibility services and supports. A follow up question was posed to confirm that braille is included in the definition of accessible formats.

The difference between the terms “shall” and “must” was asked. Lashauna responded to say that in government regulations “shall” is used most commonly.

There was a comment about *individualized evacuation plans* and the fact that people shouldn't have to advocate for themselves, and employers should already have a plan for people with different types of disabilities. Lashauna explained that this term was chosen because it would be different depending on the employee.

The onus put on potential employees to disclose that they have a disability and ask for accessibility supports was raised. Alice explained that the SDC had a lot of discussion about disclosure, accessibility, universal design, accommodation, and the differences between them. It was explained that the word accommodation was chosen because employers know that word, and it's legally defined.

There was discussion on the difference between a regulation under the Accessibility Act and a guideline for best practice.

Clarification was made that interpreters are not support people. They provide access to both languages for everyone. This is similar for captioning services.

A Board member asked about the possible barrier of accessing medical documentation when many Nova Scotians do not have a family doctor. Lashauna explained that under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act employers have the duty to accommodate up to a point of undue hardship, which requires medical documentation to prove discrimination on the basis of disability and disclosure is necessary in order to provide the employment accommodation and possibly workers compensation benefits.

Another discussion took place about the development of templates for employers to support them in some of these changes and when they would be available. Charlie explained that the SDC recommends that these tools be drafted as soon as regulations are developed, specifically for small employers.

5. Adjournment

Max thanked everyone for their discussion and made the decision to continue reviewing the recommendations at the Board's next meeting, May 16.