

Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Summary
Tuesday, January 31, 2025 – 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Virtual

Board Members: Max Chauvin (Chair), Melissa MacKenzie, Linda Campbell, Louise Gillis, Ellen Johnson (Vice-Chair), Rob Patey, Denise Pictou Maloney, Birgit Elssner, Earl Muise

Regrets: Amy Lays, Sarah Moore, Shellene Sparks

Staff: Dawn Stegen, Amy Middleton, Sumona Sunda, Terri Lynn Almeda, Ashley Gaudet

Guests: Justice Minister Becky Durham, Associate Deputy Minister Michelle Higgins, Danny Graham, Chief Engagement Officer of Engage Nova Scotia, Jonathon Hall, Outreach Officer, Engage Nova Scotia, John Smith, Vice-Chair of the Goods and Standard Development Committee and Jeff Overmars, Chair of the Information and Communication Standard Development Committee.

1. Welcome

Max Chauvin welcomed everyone to the meeting. He acknowledged the devastating impact the Los Angeles fires had on so many people with disabilities, as well as the recent number of deaths by intimate partner violence in Nova Scotia. Stats Canada data reports women with disabilities are over two times more likely to experience violent victimization than able bodied women.

Dawn Stegen, Executive Director of the Accessibility Directorate, provided a brief update on the Accessibility Directorate while the Board waited to meet quorum. Dawn said there is one senior policy analyst position vacant, and the hire process is underway. She announced Manager Laura Beth MacPherson is also leaving government and will be greatly missed. She worked on many projects including the Government of N.S. Accessibility Plan 22-25 and supporting prescribed public sector bodies with plan development and implementation. She then gave an overview of the changes at the Department of Justice since the November provincial election took place. Cynthia Carroll, former executive director of Autism Nova Scotia, was appointed Associate Deputy Minister of Justice. The Accessibility Directorate will continue to report to Associate Deputy Minister Michelle Higgins. She also mentioned several training sessions and workshops underway. As it relates to prescribed public sector bodies, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has posted its accessibility plan.

Dawn then reviewed accessible meeting protocols. She introduced staff members Amy Middleton, Sumona Sunda, Terri Lynn Almeda, Ashley Gaudet and Meghan Murphy attending today's meeting.

Max shared a Mi'kmaq and African Decent land acknowledgements.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda and Minutes

The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

Minutes Review: The minutes were amended to make one change followed by a

Motion: "to approve the minutes previously circulated from the Board's November 26 meeting."

Action: The motion was unanimously approved.

Action: The minutes for Nov. 26, 2024, will be advanced to the Justice Minister for information and made publicly available.

b. Outstanding Board Business

Dawn provided the Board with an update that correspondence and advice to Minister went forward. The recommendation to appoint John Smith as vice-chair of goods and services and to transfer Travis Gunn from vice-chair to chair was approved. A letter has been sent to Minister LeBlanc, the Minister of Growth and Development, responsible for the Nova Scotia Building Advisory Committee, recommending Ross Sampson be reappointed for a second term representing the Board.

The Board's Annual Report for 2023-24 is almost complete and ready to be made public. The Accessibility Directorate met with Elections Nova Scotia to raise the issue of barriers faced by people with disabilities during the November election that the Board brought to light. It was a positive meeting, and the Accessibility Directorate has been invited to sit on the Elections Nova Scotia diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility committee.

3. Business

a. Updated Access By Design 2030

Max welcomed Amy Middleton who gave an overview of the development of the updated Access by Design 2030. Members discussed the strategy and were invited to submit further feedback.

b. Communication and Engagement Recommendations

Max thanked Board members Rob Patey, Birgit Elssner, and Shellene Sparks for their work on recommendations to improve communications by the Board in the upcoming year. Birgit and Sherri Aikenhead gave a presentation that included the results from a November survey on Board members' communication preferred methods. They paused to defer the presentation when Minister Druhan joined the meeting to meet with the Board.

b. Minister Becky Druhan

Max welcomed Minister Druhan and Associate Deputy Minister Higgins. He introduced the Accessibility Advisory Board and noted it has a full membership with twelve members, the majority of whom are persons with disabilities from various sectors across the province. Each member then introduced themselves.

Minister Druhan gave her remarks. She shared that her background includes accessibility and inclusion work throughout her career.

Minister Druhan said she is aware that Nova Scotians are reporting the highest rate of disability in the country, and nearly half of our senior population report having at least one disability. She believes it emphasizes the need to make progress in reducing barriers to accessibility. She thanked the Board for their significant contributions, insights and leadership.

Minister Druhan spoke about a key priority for her government - intimate partner violence which continues to affect far too many individuals and families, including people with disabilities. She assured the Board government is committed to working together with communities, advocates, experts and other levels of government to build the framework to seek solutions before incidents occur. This work needs to reflect the diversity of communities to meet everyone's needs.

Max thanked the Minister and gave an overview of the Board's work this past year. He highlighted the development of accessibility standards and the work of committees. The Board's engagement with several government departments to offer insight into the barriers that persons with disabilities face was raised. Max asked the Minister to continue to support the Board's work and share the advice put forward by the members with the rest of her government colleagues. A questions and answer period followed.

c. Engage Nova Scotia

Max welcomed guests from Engage Nova Scotia, Danny Graham, the Chief Engagement Officer and Jonathon Hall, Engage Nova Scotia's new outreach lead

for the Disabilities Communities, to share information about the upcoming Quality of Life Survey for spring 2025.

Danny gave members information on the background of the survey. The first Quality of Life Survey was conducted in 2019 in collaboration with the University of Waterloo and 13,000 Nova Scotians participated in how to improve the quality of life in Nova Scotia. The findings were analyzed by Statistics Canada then shared with governments, municipalities, universities across the province.

Danny asked the Board to help promote the upcoming 2025 survey so that as many people with disabilities participate. There will be 230 questions that will include issues related to accessibility. Members discussed how they could assist.

Action: Denise Pictou Maloney offered to meet with Engage Nova Scotia to find ways to be inclusive of Indigenous communities in the survey.

4. Standard Development Committee Updates

a. Goods and Services: Update

Max welcomed John Smith, Vice-Chair of the of the Goods and Services Development Committee, who gave an update on the feedback the committee received during the public consultation on the draft recommendations. The committee members will be making suggested changes based on the consultation feedback.

b. Information and Communication Update

Max informed members that Michelle Bartam has resigned from the Standard Development Committee and Shelley Barry, Manager, Advocacy Atlantic Canada, CNIB, Halifax has joined the committee. Shelley's application was previously approved by the Board as an alternate during the initial selection process, so Max will provide the Justice Minister with an update. Jeff Overmars, Chair of the Information and Communications Standard Development Committee, said the committee held an orientation session in November and its first meeting in January to discuss the scope of work to develop recommendations for a standard.

3. b. Communication and Engagement Recommendations continued

Following the two standard updates, Max welcomed back Birgit Elssner and Sherri Aikenhead who finished presenting the recommendations to enhance communications by the Board.

Action:

Max thanked the presenters for their recommendations followed by a **Motion:** “to create a Communications and Engagement Working Group of five Board members to meet six times a year to lead the implementation and rollout of the communications plan for the 2025 calendar year.”

Melissa MacKenzie moved the motion, seconded by Louise Gillis. The motion was unanimously approved.

Action: Densie Pictou Maloney, Dr. Linda Campbell, Rob Patey, Shellene Sparks and Birgit Elssner volunteered to be on the committee for 2025.

4. c. Public Transportation Update

Max asked Ellen Johnson, Vice-Chair of the Public Transportation Standard Development Committee, to give an update. Ellen reported that the Public Transportation Standard Development Committee met in January and received a presentation from the Joint Regional Transportation Agency, a government body that is developing a regional transportation plan for the rapidly growing population within a one-hour radius of Halifax Regional Municipality. The committee also met with a representative from the Ecology Action Center who linked the concept of sustainability to the SDC’s work.

d. Education Update

Max welcomed Meghan Murphy, Sr. Policy Analyst with the Accessibility Directorate, who supports a government committee reviewing the Board’s recommendations for an Education Standard. It is expected that the public review on the proposed standard regulations will get underway in the fall of 2025 for 60 days as required by the Accessibility Act.

Action: Members Dr. Linda Campbell and Denise Pictou Maloney offered to help with the public review rollout to ensure it reaches members of the Indigenous and Deaf communities.

e. Built Environment Update

Max asked Amy Middleton to give an update on the Built Environment regulations. Amy reported they are still with government as part of the regulatory approval process.

f. Employment Standard Update

Max asked Amy Middleton to give a verbal update on the Employment Standard Development Committee Evaluation Report. Amy indicated the report had been

previously shared with Board members and drew their attention to comments related to the timeliness of the Board feedback to the Standard Development Committee.

5. Adjournment

Max thanked Board members and asked them to promote the website launch when emails are sent around, so it is successful in reaching people. The next meeting will be held virtually on March 21, 2025.

Max adjourned the meeting.