

**Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 26, 2026 – 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
In-Person Halifax Tower Hotel**

Board Members: Ellen Johnson, (Chair) Rob Patey (Vice Chair) Earl Muisse, Louise Gillis, Thomas Jollata, Birgit Elssner, Shellene Sparks, Dr. Sarah Moore

Regrets: Amy Lays, Denise Pictou Maloney

Staff: Sumona Sonda, Lisa Jacobs, Jenny Thornhill, Amy Middleton, Meghan Murphy, Bridget Beswick-Escanlar, Dawn Stegen, Sherri Aikenhead

Guests: Jeff Overmars, Chair of the Information and Communications Standard Development Committee and Vice Chair Linda Campbell, Jenna Keddy, Van Bernard youth

1. Welcome and Introductions

Ellen Johnson Board Chair welcomed everyone to the Accessibility Advisory Board (Board). She opened with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement and highlighted the importance of African Heritage Month and the theme "Strength in Unity: Moving Forward with Purpose, Prosperity, Power and Progress."

Dawn Stegen reviewed the meeting protocols and introduced the staff attending the meeting.

2. Board Operations

a. Review of Agenda: The agenda as previously circulated was accepted.

b. Minutes Review: The Dec. 17, 2025, minutes were reviewed and approved with changes submitted by Member Birgit Elssner.

c. Outstanding Board Business

Dawn Stegen provided updates the Prescribed Public Sector Bodies (PPSB) Cohort 1 (89 organizations) were required to have their accessibility plans updated by April 2025 and there is a very good compliance rate. The one outstanding municipality is working to update its plan. The next deadline is for the Cohort 2 organizations whose updated plans are required by April 1, 2026.

Dawn shared some highlights of the Provincial Budget 2026-2027.

The Accessibility Advisory Board's Annual Report for 2024-2025 is complete and will be shared with the Justice Minister and posted on the Board's website. Alex Ikejani was appointed as the new Deputy Minister of Justice in January.

Dawn informed the Board that after a long career of 40 years, including her role as Executive Director of the Accessibility Directorate, she will retire effective March 31, 2026.

The Board discussed providing advice to Minister regarding the Budget for 2026-2027 through a letter.

Action: Board Chair (Ellen) and member Sarah Moore will work on an advice to letter to Justice Minister regarding Budget 2026-27 following a motion moved by Member P. Earle Muise and seconded by Member Louise Gillis that passed unanimously.

3. Business

a. Communications and Engagement Update

i. Working Group Chair Rob Patey presented a summary of the Working Group's first year listed here:

- Met six times in 2025
- Monitored website traffic (From Launch date to Dec 2025 - 7140 page views and 939 downloads in its first year)
- Most popular page was on the "Goods and Services Standard Development Committee" page with 438 users.
- Promoted launch of the Accessibility Advisory Board new website
- Developed Board logo
- Developed a Board Presentation for Community Engagement
- Dr. Linda Campbell, former Board Member met with organizations representing the Deaf community (Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians, SMU, NSCC) sharing the Advancing Accessibility in Nova Scotia Presentation
- Planned and held a youth consultation session with 10 young people who have disabilities to inform the Board about barriers and issues they face

Action: Working Group Rob moved a motion seconded by Member Birgit Elssner that members the Communications and Engagement Working Group will continue for a second year to complete actions of the Board's Communications Plan. The motion passed unanimously.

ii. Youth Panel

Working Group Chair Rob Patey presented the reasons for creating a new First Voice Youth Panel as proposed by the Communications and Engagement Working Group. The panel was a commitment in Government's Response to the Act Review.

He welcomed two youths, Jenna Keddy and Van Bernard, who participated in the November youth consultation, and were invited by Rob to speak to the Board. Both youth spoke about their lives and barriers they experience as youth with disabilities. They expressed eagerness for young people to contribute to the changes underway in Nova Scotia to make the province more accessible and their desire to have a formal channel for youth to offer feedback and be engaged with the Board. Several Board Members expressed their thanks and gratitude to Van and Jenna for their professionalism, energy and enthusiasm.

Van and Jenna left the meeting.

Action: Following a discussion, Vice-Chair Rob Patey moved a motion seconded by Member Shellene Sparks that the Board passed unanimously to create a First Voice Youth Panel based on the governance model presented. Board Member Dr. Sarah Moore will act as the Board liaison with the panel.

b. Board Letters to Justice Minister Update

Chair Ellen Johnson updated the Board on two letters of advice sent to the Minister. The chair is awaiting a response from the Minister on changes to the Board's profile (selection criteria). Ellen received a letter from the Minister in February welcoming advice regarding the two vacancies on the Board.

c. Update Government Response Accessibility Act Review

Dawn Stegen gave a presentation on the progress underway by the Accessibility Directorate and Board on Government's Response to the Act Review. She updated the board on completed actions, actions in progress and those not started yet. Those not started yet are part of the Board's Work Plan for 2026-2027.

4. Business – Standards Updates

a. Built Environment Standard:

Seamus McGreal, the new Accessibility Directorate Built Environment Program Lead, reminded the Board that the first Built Environment Accessibility Standard adopted under the *Accessibility Act* became law in March 2025. He explained how

compliance of the standard's regulations will apply as of April 1, 2026. The Accessibility Built Environment Standard applies to the following entities:

- Government of Nova Scotia
- Prescribed Public Sector Bodies (e.g. municipalities, towns, villages, NS Health, Crown corporations, IWK, NSPHA, and more)
- Organizations that own, operate, and/or maintain the built environment (including businesses and community organizations)

Design Requirements:

- Design requirements must be followed beginning April 1, 2026: 17 for GNS and PPSBs; 9 of these apply to all organizations

Planning Requirements:

- Plans must be completed and made available to the public by April 1, 2026
- Snow and ice control standards, parking lot maintenance and accessible entrances apply to the Government of Nova Scotia, Prescribed Public Sector Bodies and all organizations
- An outdoor spaces plan applies to the Government of Nova Scotia

Throughout 2025, the Accessibility Directorate conducted outreach with awareness presentations that reached over 2,500 Nova Scotians. A technical guide will be shared with the public in summer 2026. The Compliance Framework requires any organization that is reported to be non-compliant to be documented as of April 1. Government's first approach with non-compliance is to support the organization with education and support about how to address the non-compliance. This could include clarifying interpretation of the *Accessibility Act* and the standard regulations, sharing information and tools such as the templates, and developing a compliance plan on how to achieve compliance in a reasonable timeframe.

b. Education:

Meghan Murphy provided an update on the proposed Education Standard reporting that it is being drafted and may be shared for public comment in 2026.

c. Goods and Services Standard:

Meghan Murphy provided an update. Government is drafting the Goods and Services Standard. Once it is ready, there will be a public review with the disability community, businesses and non-profit organizations, and other partners.

d. Employment Standard:

Bridget Beswick-Escanlar reported that government's review of the Board's recommendations for an Employment Standard was conducted in 2025, and the standard is being drafted. It is expected that the draft standard will be shared with the public for consultation in 2026 along with the proposed Goods and Services Standard.

5. Human Rights Remedy Update

Maria Medioli, Director for Executive Director, Disability Support Program, with the Department of Opportunities and Social Development shared a presentation focused on The Journey of Local Area Coordination as part of the ongoing work known as the Human Rights Remedy.

The current focus is to plan and provide support for persons with disabilities, leaving institutions and finding housing in communities. This phase is about navigating life transitions for persons with disabilities and connecting them with natural, community support and government services. By March 31, 2026, there will be 54 Local Area Coordinators across the province included designated positions for people with disabilities, indigenous, African Nova Scotians and other visibly racialized groups. Once hired, coordinators collaborate with service providers and community organizations to strengthen local networks of support. They work in communities of 12,000, along with up to 50 individuals.

In response to questions from the Board, Maria gave an update on government's Home Share program that partners with community organizations to support deinstitutionalization of individuals. People interested in becoming a Home Share provider can go on HomeShare.com to learn more about the program, the compensation for providing disability-related support to individuals in community.

Action: Members requested a website link to the current job openings across the province for Local Area Coordinator positions. <https://jobs.novascotia.ca/go/Entry-Level-Opportunities/503017/>

6. Business - Draft Recommendations for Standards

e. Information and Communication Services Standard Draft Recommendation:

Jeff Overmars, Chair of the Information and Communications Standard Development Committee informed members that he attended some of the public consultation sessions underway on the committee's draft recommendations. Committee Vice-Chair Dr. Linda Campbell also attended a consultation session and welcomed Lianne Sarson, Consultant from Thinkwell Research who is doing

the consultations on behalf of the Board. Lianne then facilitated a session with the Board on their specific feedback on the draft recommendations, including regulatory requirements for accessible formats, communication services, plain language, digital accessibility, and assistive technology.

f. Public Transportation Draft Recommendation:

Lianne also facilitated a consultation session with the Board on their specific feedback on the Public Transportation Draft Recommendations including the need for accessible door-to-door and fixed-route services, fare policies, trip planning, vehicle operations, and emergency procedures. The committee emphasized the importance of public consultation and the need for consistent standards across all transportation providers.

7. Roundtable and Work Plan 2026-27

a. Workplan

Chair Ellen Johnson led a discussion on the draft of the Board's Work Plan for 2026-2027. Members had read the plan and several felt it was thorough and as a living document and could be amended as the year unfolds. The Board discussed some of the work identified as not in progress yet as identified by the Government Response to the Act Review. They discussed including time during the upcoming year for team building at the next in-person meeting.

b. Roundtable

Louise Gillis updated the Board that she sits on the Cape Breton Regional Municipality Accessibility Committee that is going to meet in March. Shellene Sparks will be hosting a community presentation to promote the work of the Board in spring 2026. The roundtable discussion included updates on Engage Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey now open to all Nova Scotians and members thanked Dawn Stegen for her guidance and support of the Board over the last several years.

Meeting Adjourned 3:30 p.m.