

**Nova Scotia Accessibility Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 9, 2026 – 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
In-Person Four Points Sheraton Hotel**

Board Members: Ellen Johnson (Chair), Rob Patey (Vice Chair), Earl Muise, Louise Gillis, Thomas Jollota, Birgit Elssner, Shellene Sparks, Amy Lays, Elizabeth Lahey, Nina Bernard-Tran

Regrets: Sarah Moore, Denise Pictou Maloney

Accessibility Directorate: Michelle Harris, Sumona Sonda, Jenny Thornhill, Amy Middleton, Sherri Aikenhead

Guests: Hon. Scott Armstrong, Justice Minister

1. Welcome and Introductions

Board Chair Ellen Johnson welcomed two new members, Nina Bernard-Tran and Elizabeth (Betty) Lahey as well as all attending the in-person Accessibility Advisory Board (Board). She opened with a Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian land acknowledgement. June is National Indigenous History Month.

Nova Scotia celebrated the 40th Anniversary of Access Awareness Week in June. This year's theme was Disability Justice: Stronger Together, First Voice Leading Change.

Chair Ellen also welcomed the new Executive Director of the Accessibility Directorate, Michelle Harris, who reviewed the meeting protocols and introduced the Accessibility Directorate staff attending the Board meeting.

2. Board Operations

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

b) Minutes Review: The February 2026 minutes were reviewed and approved with changes submitted by Member Birgit Elssner.

c. Outstanding Board Business

Chair Ellen noted that with the appointment of two new members, the board is at full complement. She updated members about the response they received from the Justice Minister after providing feedback about the impact of the Provincial

Budget for 2026-2027 on persons with disabilities. The Minister said program funding that was reinstated should help persons with disabilities.

Chair Ellen updated the members on the board's website. In the first quarter, three letters from the public were received. As chair, she responded to one on the impact of the provincial budget, one on barriers to access regarding an individual's driveway and a third from someone eager to join the Board.

3. Meeting with Justice Minister

After members introduced themselves to Minister Scott Armstrong, he thanked them for their important work. He shared some of his background as a former educator who served in 11 schools so was able to see firsthand how important it is for people with disabilities to access education. He praised the members for their work developing recommendations for accessibility standards for Nova Scotia and their input on the province's first accessibility regulation for the built environment which came into effect April 1, 2026. He also recognized the Board's work with the disability community.

Chair Ellen emphasized the Board's commitment to bring forward recommendations for standards in a timely manner so that government can develop and implement accessibility regulations by 2030. She encouraged the government to remain committed to this work.

During a follow up discussion with all members, Minister Armstrong said it is expected that there will be a budget consultation this year and government will share the details with the Board when they can. Minister Armstrong welcomed the Board to share any opportunities or concerns proactively at any time. A member who is deaf advised the Minister that while there is support for students in public education, there are challenges faced by people with disabilities, including support after high school graduation. Another member shared with Minister Armstrong the value of an in-person meeting once a year rather than virtual to better understand one another's disabilities and to form a cohesive relationship.

Executive Director Michelle Harris gave a brief update on the Accessibility Directorate's work in terms of drafting accessibility regulations and efforts to promote Access Awareness Week through workshops and other events. She also talked about the role of the Accessibility Directorate in compliance and enforcement of the Accessibility Act and regulations, including the new built environment regulation.

4. Communications and Engagement Working Group Update

Board Vice Chair Rob Patey shared that the Working Group met in May to select members for the First Voice Youth Advisory Panel that will help provide the board with a perspective from young Nova Scotians with disabilities. The Co-Chairs, Jenna Keddy and Van Bernard, were selected by the Working Group following a consultation with youth in the Fall of 2025.

In total, 21 youth aged 25 and under applied to an Expression of Interest for the Youth Panel (there were eight positions available). Board Members considered the region and the types of disabilities as part of the selection process.

In addition to the Co-Chairs, Board Vice Chair Patey shared the names of the eight panel members from across Nova Scotia:

1. Brayden Cream
 2. Amber Kaur
 3. Shayla Spencer
 4. Reema Abdelghani
 5. Mia Hamilton
 6. Wesley Stefura
 7. Gabriele Sims
 8. Janiya Sparks
- Alternate: August Duquette

Vice-Chair Patey also reported the working group would support members who want to host a community engagement session in their region during fall or winter. Members discussed the target audience and logistics, and several said they would like to follow up with planning.

Action: Individual members can explore options for locations and guests in their community. Board members should then reach out to the Chair of the Communications and Engagement Working Group for guidance and support. Board members should use the toolkit and associated materials that have been developed for engagement sessions. Final approvals for sessions, including budget needs, will be made by the Accessibility Directorate in consultation with the Chair of the Working Group and Chair of the Board.

5. Business – Accessibility Standards Updates

a) Amy Middleton, Director of Policy and Standards with the Accessibility Directorate, gave a brief update on the recommendations submitted by the Board to the Minister of Justice for Education, Employment, and Service Delivery (previously named Goods and Services). She said staff are seeking internal input from various government departments to prepare regulations for each of those areas. In terms of the two remaining accessibility standards, Board members will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the draft recommendations for Public Transportation and Information and Communications Standards at their August meeting.

b. Compliance and Enforcement Update

Seamus McGreal, the Accessibility Directorate Built Environment Program Lead, joined the meeting to discuss the Compliance Framework that can be found online [Accessibility Act Compliance - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada](#). The Accessibility Directorate (AD) is responsible for compliance and enforcement of the *Accessibility Act* and regulations.

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.

The Accessibility Directorate is working with the Department of Cybersecurity and Digital Solutions to develop a database for tracking compliance. Staff are also collaborating with other provinces on the development of policies. McGreal said he is meeting with various organizations including the design and construction industry to educate and inform them of the built environment compliance requirements.

Members raised issues they've heard about accessibility of buildings including elevator access during emergencies.

c. Standard Development Next Steps

Jenny Thornhill, Senior Policy Analyst with the Accessibility Directorate, gave an overview of how standards are developed in a step-by-step process (infographic novascotia.ca/accessibility). She explained how the recommendations submitted by the Board to the Minister contribute to the development of the regulations, which are legally binding rules with legal consequences if not followed. It sets out what must be done, who must do it, what rights and responsibilities people have. She summarized the background work completed so far on the two draft

recommendations the Standard Development Committees will present to the Board for input in August.

6. Work Plan 2026-27 Update

Board Coordinator, Sherri Aikenhead, shared a presentation on the Board's development of the annual workplan. Chair Ellen Johnson led a discussion on any new agenda items that should be added to upcoming meetings. Board Members suggested inviting the Department of Public Works, a future meet with the Justice Minister ahead of the next budget, a presentation on the 2nd review of the Accessibility Act and receiving an update on the government's Remedy Plan at the beginning of 2027.

Meeting Adjourned 2:00 p.m.

Members ended their meeting so they could attend a joint meeting with the Accessibility Standards Canada Board who were in Halifax also holding a meeting. The two boards wanted to share best practices and information on their work and determine how they could collaborate in the future.