COUNTY *of* ANNAPOLIS

NATURALLY ROOTED

Annapolis County Accessibility Plan 2022

Municipality of the County of Annapolis

Approved by Council - February 15, 2022

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Annapolis County - Let's Talk Accessibility (Public Meetings)

Municipality of the County of Annapolis – The Commitment

The Province of Nova Scotia has legislated that all municipal units must have an Accessibility Advisory Committee made of over 50 % of persons with disabilities, and a Municipal Accessibility Plan, which provides a process for implementation and evaluation toward their mandated timeline of achieving accessibility within the province by 2030.

The original deadline of that plan was April 2021; however, due to COVID 19 and the Pandemic, the Municipality of the County of Annapolis requested, and was granted an extension to April 1, 2022.

In March 2021 municipal council approved a report dated March 9th, 2021 entitled NS Accessibility Act and Impacts on Municipalities, which included recommendations for: the creation of a Municipal Accessibility Plan; advertising for members of an Accessible Advisory Committee; creation of a budget; and action plan to achieve the April 1, 2022 provincial deadline.

The Municipality of the County of Annapolis approved the Accessibility Advisory Committee Policy AM – 1.3.6.17 in April 2021**.**

The County's Accessibility Advisory Committee Policy AM- 1.3.6.17, says "The Accessibility Advisory Committee provides advice to Municipal Council on identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee plays a pivotal role in helping the Municipality of the County of Annapolis become an accessible community and meet its obligations under Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act."

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, known as Bill No. 59, was passed in April 2017. The legislation aims to make Nova Scotia inclusive and barrier-free by 2030.

The Annapolis County eight member committee was appointed in June 2021. Their first task at hand was to work with staff to create a Municipal Accessibility Plan. The approved plan was sent to the province in February, 2022.

Members of the Annapolis County Accessibility Advisory Committee

John Smith - Chair

Christine Garde- Vice Chair

Caelin Lloyd

Brenda MacDonald

Lester Bartson

Catherine (Jean) Voysey

Timothy Atkins

Christina (Tina) Hiltz

Debra Ryan - Project Lead (Manager of Community Outreach and Tourism)

Warden Alan Parish - Ex Officio

Background

Nova Scotia was the third province in Canada to enact accessibility legislation, after Ontario in 2005 and Manitoba in 2013. The goal of the NS Accessibility Act, Bill 59 Act is to prevent and remove barriers that restrict people with disabilities from fully participating in society. It enables the government to develop standards for accessibility and outlines responsibilities from some public sector bodies, including municipalities. As such they required that all municipalities must have accessibility plans.

In September 2018, the province released the Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan outlining specific actions for achieving an inclusive, responsive, and accessible workplace for NS public servants and ensuring services are accessible to all.

The province created the Accessibility Directorate, which has responsibility for administering the Accessibility Act and advancing disability issues within the Government. The Government's strategy for achieving an accessible province by 2030 is described in Access by Design 2030.

They have created a number of tools that can be used by municipalities which include, "The Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Municipalities. Interim Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces".

The Town of Wolfville piloted Nova Scotia's first municipal accessibility plan (2018) and many municipalities created or have been working on plans to meet the April 1, 2022 extended deadline that was given due to COVID 19.

The province created the Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces , NS Accessibility Directorate, April 2020 and released a draft (January 2021) Accessibility Standards. When approved those standards must be integrated into Municipal Accessibility Plans. In the meantime, those guidelines are meant to influence municipalities in future accessibility planning related to the built environment both inside and outside.

A disability is defined as "a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society."

A barrier is defined as "anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information barrier or communication barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy, or a practice."

Nova Scotia has the highest rate of disabilities in Canada at 30% versus the Canada-wide rate of 22%, so it's time to make a change. To be successful there has to be a cultural shift and understanding at the political, staff and community levels.

Annapolis County Accessibility Plan - Vision

"We envision Annapolis County as a place where the rights, dignity and independence of all persons is valued; a place free of racism and prejudice where both visible and invisible disabilities are respected; a place where all persons have access to community facilities, programs and services to live, work and play to experience their full potential. "

The County is committed to meeting the needs of individuals who face barriers to accessibility in our communities.

Areas of Focus That Form the Foundation of the Plan

The five areas of focus that all municipalities have to address in their accessibility plans must include:

Information and Communication - ensuring all people can receive, understand, and share the information they need. To increase awareness and education about accessibility rights and opportunities that can benefit the whole community.

Goods and Services - ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to goods and services provided by the municipality.

Built Environment - making public buildings, streets, sidewalks, and shared spaces accessible to all.

Employment - (equitable access) - making workplaces accessible, and supporting people with disabilities in finding meaningful employment**.**

Transportation - making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go.

Implementation – including a section on the plan implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Methodology

The Annapolis County Accessibility Plan is based on public consultation feedback, review of provincial documents prepared by the NS Accessibility Directorate, and best practices to form a comprehensive plan.

The Advisory Committee hosted three public meetings; four focus group sessions [included schools]; events; met with stakeholders; distributed large scale emails; and had direct contact with groups and/organizations. Feedback received formed the foundation of the plan.

Public meetings were held on these dates and at these locations: August 31, 2021, Bridgetown Volunteer Fire Department, 31 Bay Road, Bridgetown, NS; September 8, 2021, Felker Hall Community Centre, Cornwallis Park, NS ; and September 23, 2021, Nictaux and District Volunteer Fire Department, 9349 Highway #10, Nictaux, NS.

Focus Group sessions took place on these dates and at these locations: August 27, 2021, Mountains and Meadows Care Group, Mountain Lea Lodge, Bridgetown, NS; September 27, 2021 Bridgetown Regional Community School, Bridgetown, NS; October 20, 2021 CORAH, Middleton, NS; October 25, 2021 Annapolis West Education Centre, Annapolis Royal, NS.

All facilities were chosen for ease of access by wheelchair and to washrooms, and had to include low ramps or flat entrances and accessible washrooms.

All meetings followed a process of small group discussions centered on five questions to address the five focus areas: Information and Communication; Goods and Services; Built Environment; Employment; and Transportation.

Each table had a facilitator and a recorder.

Overall, living in a COVID reality did impact on the process; however, we were fortunate to complete both the public meetings and focus group sessions in person following NS Health protocols.

On Line Survey that was offered was open to the public for approximately two months and advertised in a variety of ways. It gave residents and visitors to the county an opportunity to share feedback.

Promotion took the form of advertisements, and general promotion. Featured stories and/or events were planned to provide greater awareness around the accessibility plan and to encourage feedback.

The Accessibility Advisory committee wanted to create a special event to mark the United Nations International Day for Persons with Disabilities on December 3, 2021, to focus attention on disabilities and to provide another avenue for promoting the accessibility plan. The committee teamed up with Annapolis County Recreation Services, and that event was held at the Bridgetown Regional Outdoor Sport Hub.

The public process and on-line survey were conducted from August to December 2021.

Facility assessments were conducted at 27 indoor and outdoor spaces owned and operated by the Municipality so as to understand the overall state of the facilities. The assessments were **not** intended to be formal audits, and not all county-owned facilities were assessed. All public spaces, indoors and out, were assessed.

A research scan of documents offered by the Province through the NS Accessibility Directorate and other municipalities were reviewed where available.

Annapolis County Facility Assessments Overview

The accessibility planning process has chosen to do assessments rather than official audits. We have used the criteria listed below in our general assessments, which are part of "Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces" April 2020 NS Accessibility Directorate.

The assessments give a general overview of the state of the Municipality's infrastructure; however, more in-depth audits with an accessibility lens must be created when planning new infrastructure toward 2030 and beyond. They will be shared with municipal staff and many recommendations are included that relate to those 27 facility assessments used by the general public.

Other sites like the Municipal Operations (Public Works) work sites, storage areas, and the dog pound were not included in this assessment as they are not open to the public. These facilities will need to be considered in the future for assessments and/or audits.

There were general principals used when doing the assessments and they are listed below.

The interim guidelines give some common measurements to be included in the general assessments, which include, but are not limited to the following:

Ramp slope 1:12 (8.3 %) or less is the minimum standard required by CSA. The 1:20 ratio (5 %) recommended when doing new installs. Typical width for crutches (900-950 mm wide) and a standard doorway is 800 mm. A minimum turning radius for a manual wheelchair is 1500 mm. The minimum height of the reach for a person in a wheelchair is 400 mm, maximum 1200 mm.

Very few meet these criteria but they did meet the building code requirements of the day.

New upgrades will require municipalities to adhere to the "Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces" April 2020 NS Accessibility Directorate.

The NS Interim guidelines are grounded in the following three core principles that are key to all accessible planning and future training:

Whole Journey Approach
All parts of the journey are interlinked and equally important. A single obstacle can make it impossible to complete the journey, even if the rest of the way is accessible.

Universal Design
Any environment should be designed to meet the needs of anyone wishing to use it, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Seasonal Maintenance
Seasonal conditions, such as snow and ice, can create barriers to accessibility; seasonal maintenance can help to ensure that public spaces are accessible at all times.

There are three principals to follow in audits: does the feature follow the whole journey approach; does this feature reflect the concept of universal design; and is there an adequate seasonal maintenance program for this feature?

In addition, signage, wayfinding, ramps, stairs, handrails are to be strategically located to allow individuals of different size, age, and ability to manage a journey. Wide ramps (1500mm, or 59 in. minimum) are placed in all pathway points that are not level, to allow people with a companion, service animal, or mobility aid to complete the journey. Accessible parking spaces are located close to the accessibility entrances – usually no more than 30 metres, or 98 feet.

In newer facilities, exterior pathways and entrances must be designed with minimum level changes so that people of all abilities may easily enter or leave. Doors should be avoided wherever possible or are as easy as possible to open.

Actions and Recommendations

Information and Communication

Ensuring all people can receive, understand, and share the information they need.

The Municipality of the County of Annapolis will communicate with persons with disabilities regarding the nature of barriers in a respectful and understanding manner. The Municipality will be clear and accessible to people of all ages and abilities, and recognizes the definition of accessibility has a broad scope. (NS Accessibility Act, Bill 59 was created to ensure all Nova Scotian's can receive and share the same information). The Municipality will increase awareness and provide education about accessibility rights and opportunities that can benefit the whole community.

Information and Communication Actions and Recommendations: The Plan

Delivery of Communications
Improve overall communications regarding municipal programs, services and events to ensure they are accessible to all persons with disabilities by:

- ensuring the county's digital presence (website and social media) and information technology systems are designed for people of all ages and abilities, and written in plain language;
- creating a web presence that meets the latest Web Content Accessibility guidelines (WCAG) (Presently some features has been added and will be assessed accordingly);
- working to provide American Sign Language (ASL) and/or communication Access Real-Time Translation- there are limited interpreters in the region so development and training opportunities should be encouraged;
- understanding CART and making it available where possible. (See definitions in Glossary);
- including braille on council and employee business cards;
- ensuring that photos and videos used in branding and/or promoting the municipality, include persons with some type of mobility device, wheelchair

and/or persons with a disability in order to be more representative of the population and inclusive; and

- ensuring that live streaming of council sessions and other council activities are fully accessible, and the audio can be heard.

Provide Training

The Municipality will provide customer training to employees and volunteers in regard to accessibility concerns, understanding plain language and inclusive communication. The Accessibility Advisory committee will work in collaboration to develop a training manual that is inclusive by nature. Training will include:

- The NS Accessibility Act, Bill 59 and the requirements under that act and its links to the Human Rights Code and the rights of individuals;
- the role of the Annapolis County Accessibility Committee;
- awareness of the Annapolis County Accessibility Plan and a commitment to follow the intent, vision, and outcomes to meet NS legislated targets of being accessible by 2030;
- how to interact and communicate effectively with persons with disabilities and understanding the use of respectful language and body language;
- understanding the whole journey approach and what universal design means to persons with disabilities and the community as a whole;
- sensitivity training for staff regarding the needs of persons with disabilities that is inclusive of service dogs;
- assessing service delivery through an accessibility lens across the municipality in regard to emergency evacuation planning; municipal elections planning; recreation programs and events offerings; ensuring tax/utility billing processes meet accessibility needs, and new plans are written through an accessibility lens that are easy to read and understand; and
- any new additions where outside consultants, architects are used are required to know that the upgrades and/or retrofits are to be designed using the NS Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces or latest version. The accessibility committee will be consulted on any upgrades to

ensure better communication to follow the intent of the Accessibility Advisory Committee Policy AM-1.3.6.17

Publications
As new publications get created they are to include "this publication available in alternate formats upon request" (newsletters, reports of council).

Phone System
Add in TTY or RIT (Real time text) A TTY (teletype) to phone systems and cells. A TTY (teletypewriter) is a device that helps people who are deaf, speech-impaired, or hard-of-hearing use a phone to communicate.

Interpretative Signs
New interpretive signs in public areas such as municipal parks and trails, need to have a QR code that can incorporate the translation.

Signage and/or Wayfinding
Signage for municipally-owned facilities to include the following sign guidelines when replacing signs or adding new.

Accessible signs should be provided for any feature of any building that would normally be given a sign that needs to be placed for the general public and staff. The most common is Braille, raised print and raised pictograms.

Communication Font Type
Reporting style needs to have standard text i.e. Ariel or Calibri or other types that meet standards. Create easy to read letters, reports and communications using plain language for persons with disabilities to read and understand. Communications also need to be available in large print if requested. The following is included as a general guideline:

- **Readability for blind, visually impaired, partially sighted guidelines**
    - Use a sans serif typeface. Suitable type faces are Ariel, Calibri, and Helvetica; others can be used
    - Avoid the use of italics, underlining and block capitals
    - Lettering should be in title case and/or sentence case

- o Signs need to have Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3) as per CSA B651-18 (4.R.3a)
  - o Ensure the background contrasts with the print. Clear combinations include black text on a white background, white on black, yellow on black
  - o Do not print information over pictures or patterns
  - o The size of the text should be related to distance at which the information will be viewed.
- **Readability by Touch**
  - o Letters should be raised from the surface.
- **Pictograms**
  - o Use internationally recognized symbols (refer to manual or other NS documents)
- **Braille and High-Tactile signs shall be provided in the following places:**
  - o Washrooms
  - o Elevators if they are added in any of our buildings
  - o Numbers on stair landing handrail to allow identification of floors (nice to have buildings all on one floor)
  - o Emergency doors and exits
  - o Emergency evacuation instructions
  - o Cautionary signage
  - o Floor plans at building entrances
  - o Identification signs for rooms, titles, names
- **Placement**
  - o They should be consistently located height and location around a building as per CSA B651-18 (4.5.1.a) and they should be positioned to avoid shadow and/ or glare
  - o Ensure tactile signs can be reached easily
  - o Place signs logically as close as possible to the object they are indicating
  - o Sign heights in NS Guidelines
  - o Avoid suspended signs as they are too high to be read by a low vision person

- Although sandwich boards are popular, they need to be placed carefully or eliminated as they can be a safety hazard for persons with a disability
- **Contrast**
    - Avoid placing signs on busy backgrounds and/or areas with visual clutter
    - Ensure the sign contrasts with its background so it can be seen. For example, on a light coloured wall, use a sign with a dark background and a light print
    - Ensure there is good lighting
    - Use non-reflective surfaces and ensure there is no glare
- **Layout**
    - All text and Braille on signs should be left-aligned and set horizontally
    - Where print and Braille appear on the same sign, place Braille at least one inch below the print
    - Always check NS guidelines for latest updates
    - Braille signage details are available through CSA

Service Animals Signage

The Municipality welcomes persons with disabilities and their service animals. Service animals are allowed on parts of municipal premises that are open to the public and include municipal signage.

Notice of Temporary Disruption

Notices will be posted in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption or closure for all customers. For person with disabilities the signs should be posted at the bottom of the ramp or walkway. Postings also include signage in doorways, website and Facebook.

Accessible Service Feedback

The Municipality will provide methods for public feedback on accessible customer service. This will assist in modifying service delivery and provide valuable service. (See Plan Implementation).

Public meetings and events
The Municipality coordinates many public meetings, open houses, programs and events. Every effort will be made to assess those events through an accessibility lens to ensure materials are offered in various formats, accessible signage, parking, washroom, and venue access, and/or equipment availability, and that it is communicated accordingly in advance.

Creating recreation opportunities that encourage participation by persons with disabilities for programs and/or social gatherings. Is there easy access? Are there resting areas for people with disabilities? Are there accessible picnic tables on site? Are there quiet areas for those with sensory concerns, and accessible signage that can be shared in advance on social media and other communications?

Awareness and Education
Work with partners locally, regionally, and provincially to communicate and create awareness around the rights of persons with disabilities. Create a county-wide awareness and education campaign that is welcoming and eliminates the stigma of having a disability.

Proclamations
Create municipal policy additions to recognize **National AccessAbility Week (NAAW)** the end of May annually and **International Day of Persons with Disabilities** in December in any given year.

Outreach
Assess the possibility of creating and defining an information hub in Annapolis County for accessibility concerns that creates open dialogue and accessible opportunities for information. Linked with a disability website and other communication links.

Information Inventory
Create an inventory of opportunities in the county showcasing the type of accessible opportunities that exist at the municipal and community level, and

include an "Accessible Map" that shows places of interest with accessibility designated information.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Work with regional and provincial partners, agencies, non-profits, and businesses to creating a culture shift for ensuring accessible communities, i.e. evaluate possibilities for subsidizing internet and phone costs and devices to benefit persons with disabilities, etc.

Goods and Services

Ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to goods and services provided by the Municipality of the County of Annapolis.

Good and Services Actions and Recommendations: The Plan

Municipal Policy

Apply an accessibility lens to all policy, procedures, practices and program offerings**.**

Training

Provide inclusion, accessibility training and awareness for all staff that work with the general public in providing goods and services. This will include common accessibility language that is fair and equitable. **(**Refer to Information and Communication training).

Physical Space

Upon entering a municipal building, physical spaces should be conducive to a positive customer service experience. For example, provide a welcoming, calming entry, i.e. chairs to rest in and/or wait.

Procurement

Research best practices and apply an accessibility lens to procurement processes.

Service delivery recreation programs

Provide program assessments with an accessibility lens. Continue to provide and expand loan programs that include adaptive recreational equipment. Ensure that

sound and sensory is included in program assessments ie provide headphones that can cancel reduce noise in program offerings, ie fireworks and events.

Education
Create an annual abilities fair to showcase the benefits and opportunities available in our community and use it as an awareness and educational opportunity.

Social
Create recreation and social programs directed at persons with disabilities, including those with mental health concerns. Persons with intellectual disabilities have no opportunity to gather in a programmed activity and more informal social opportunities with other agencies and partners would be beneficial.

Housing
Explore housing support opportunities and work in partnership with others to look at creative and affordable solutions to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

Youth
Supports to family with disabled youth are often overlooked and often not considered a municipal responsibility. Create partnerships and collaborations with agencies and levels of government to resolve gaps at the local level that will lead to inclusive communities.

Partnerships
Work with local agencies and businesses to share concerns of persons with disabilities as information is gathered and collected, ie assistance with shopping and /or errand delivery from businesses for persons with disabilities. When there is more awareness and understanding, creative solutions are often found.

Built Environment
Ensuring public buildings, streets, sidewalks, and shared outdoor spaces are accessible to all.

The NS Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces, April 2020 NS Accessibility Directorate are the existing guidelines. Once approved they will be the standard that municipalities must follow in regard to upgrades and new additions to the built environment.

The guidelines recommend that three main streams be followed when creating and planning for the built environment.

Whole Journey Approach
All parts of the journey are interlinked and equally important. A single obstacle can make it impossible to complete the journey, even if the rest of the way is accessible.

Universal Design
Any environment should be designed to meet the needs of anyone wishing to use it, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Seasonal Maintenance
Seasonal conditions, such as snow and ice, can create barriers to accessibility; seasonal maintenance can help to ensure that public spaces are accessible at all times.

Built Environment Actions and Recommendations: The Plan

Barrier Free Access and Timelines
Ensure that all county-owned buildings and infrastructure have been assessed with timelines to achieve the Province of NS deadline of 2030 for meeting NS Accessibility Standards that meet the whole journey approach.

Ensure that renovated buildings meet the NS Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces, April 2020 NS Accessibility Directorate and/ or the most current design specifications as approved by the Province of Nova Scotia.

Ensure new parking areas, sidewalks, crosswalks, curbs, streetscapes, ramps, parks, open spaces are planned include integrated accessible design plans, taking

into account all accessibilities, i.e. hearing, sensory, mental, physical and include adequate seating areas with benches and lighting.

Municipal buildings in Annapolis Royal and Lawrencetown do require improvements as per the general facility assessments. When renovations and upgrades are planned they need to be assessed with the latest provincial guidelines and/or adopted standards referenced above.

The wheelchair ramp in Lawrenctown is the most pending improvement required, as well as the development of an accessible paved parking space in front of the building (Highway #1) that has easy access from the parking spaces to the new building ramp and building itself. The upper level washroom is not accessible and would require rethinking the space. Other improvement suggestions are included in the general assessments.

The Bridgetown Library building owned by the Municipality has had a number of accessible upgrades; however, an accessible parking reassessment is required.

Maintain Barrier Free Access to Buildings and Facilities
The County of Annapolis will maintain barrier free access in a variety of ways, for example:

- Providing wayfinding signage to building in a consistent manner and not in excess;
- Keeping entrance ways cleared of snow and ice;
- Keeping hallways and waiting rooms free of clutter i.e. boxes; and
- Ensuring placement of standing signage (i.e. sandwich boards and caution signs for wet floors) is not a tripping hazard for person with canes, mobility supports and/or wheelchairs.

Maintenance
Create work plans and standards for the ongoing repair, maintenance and accessibility of sidewalks, crosswalks to meet NS design guidelines on accessibility.

Improve snow removal capabilities
Create winter maintenance plans for sidewalks and other pathways.

Park Maintenance
Pathways at many of the parks are becoming overgrown; clumps of weeds impede flow for persons with mobility issues. Proper maintenance to include weed control, erosion control, and keeping pathways flat and clear of debris is required. In some circumstances the pathways have become completely overgrown with grass - Hebb's Landing Park and Boat Launch.

Parking
Lack of accessible parking is a huge issue throughout Annapolis County. Throughout the public process, this was a repeated issue as parking is often not central to services, lacks good signage, few areas are paved and provide ease of access to the intended building or buildings. Many accessible sites are planned for single use and not for side use for vans with a side entrance wheelchair entry and exit.

Ramps
Most ramps in the county do not meet the guidelines and are either too steep or too narrow. They do not provide the turnaround zone platform to easily access a building safely. They are often an afterthought and not planned well with the intended environment and for ease of access.

Sidewalks and crosswalks
The condition of sidewalks and crosswalks can cause limited access to persons with disabilities. Well-designed sidewalks that are flat, even, and free of obstructions with truncated domes at intersections, lighting and benches, all help to create an environment for all users.

The Paradise sidewalks are in overall good condition. The Bridgetown sidewalks are in need of major assessments and improvements. Granville Ferry sidewalks are new, very few improvements are suggested. The Bear River sidewalks are in need of upgrades and will require collaboration and discussion with NS

Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and NS Power for that to be improved. Cornwallis sidewalks need attention and there is no consistency in linking to crosswalks.

Sidewalks are often key active transportation routes, are used by all age groups, and should include benches. In particular, benches should be added along Church Street to Granville Street in Bridgetown for older adults walking from Adult Residential Centre, Group Home and/or Mountain Lea Lodge.

Outdoor Public Spaces
Improve accessibility access to outdoor public spaces such as parks, trails, lakes, beaches and playgrounds and create spaces for social gatherings.

Universal Washroom Design
Ensure universal design for the public to guarantee that accessible and gender-neutral washroom facilities are built at public parks and trails, and retrofit existing washrooms where possible.

Many washrooms do not have change stations (child or adult) and/or emergency buttons and proper spacing for wheelchair turning and general accessible access, and have not been planned for visual or sensory needs.

The Bridgetown Regional Outdoor Sports Hub requires universal design accessible washrooms that meet the needs of a facility that large.

Assess the need to have an accessible universal design washroom near the downtown core of Bridgetown that is open to the public year round, good lighting and benches.

Bear River has plans for a comfort station (washrooms). Ensure that it has universal design to meet accessibility needs with lighting and benches.

The washrooms at Jubilee Park in Bridgetown do require assessments and flow modifications for accessibility in the park overall.

Emergencies
Ensure emergency evacuation plans are reviewed accordingly with accessibility in mind.

Parks and Recreation
Provide assessments of higher profile heavily used parks in more urban settings to include paved pathways and adjustments for grades for accessibility, i.e. Sports Hub, Jubilee Park and the Annapolis River Causeway Park. Other municipal pathways require packed crusher dust aggregate to provide proper drainage and compaction and erosion control. All parks and trails should have accessible parking and easy flow to picnic areas, washrooms and other amenities.

Public floating docks need to be assessed to add in modifications for wheelchair accessibility for boat launching and/or fishing.

The Bridgetown tennis courts should be accessible to wheelchair users and have easy flow from parking lot to the site.

Planning for parks should include sensory rest areas for persons with autism and other sensory concerns.

All parks should include wheelchair accessible picnic tables.

Trails
Due to the nature of some municipal trails such as the Delaps Cove Wilderness Trail which has a single uneven path along the Bay of Fundy, the natural landscape is not suited to building accessible trail on the entire trail system. The Municipality could look at creating an accessible pathway on property they own adjacent to the parking lot /trailhead area region with switchbacks to allow for viewing on the shore and make the parking area, picnic area and washroom accessible.

Rest Areas
Provide methods to improve seating along County-owned sidewalks and along pathways, trails and parks settings. Parks require rest areas with benches to be

planned for parents, caregivers and users so proper care of placement needs to be considered for individual families and small groups. Plan sensory quiet places away from main equipment and be creative with designs at not only playgrounds but parks as well.

Accessible Picnic Tables
Provide accessible picnic tables at all public venues owned by the County.

Playgrounds
Create accessible playground equipment at the Nictaux Park and Playground. Create accessible playground equipment at Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Park. Replace the pea gravel on the pathway with aggregate that supports persons with mobility concerns.

Arena and Pool
The Bridgetown pool and arena require upgrades to meet accessibility guidelines. Canteen areas need to be modified for persons with disabilities, for volunteers, and/or staff to work on site. Bridgetown pool needs a lift and ability for easy flow of person with disabilities to access the site, park, use a washroom and get into the pool.

The Bridgetown arena washrooms are the biggest impediments as are the change rooms. Easy access and viewing improvements are required, as well as strobe lights for persons with hearing impairments, to name only a few.

Assess the pool and the arena and implement the changes to make both facilities accessible.

Raven Haven Beachside Family Park
Create an accessible parking space closer to the beach and keep the flat hard packed pathway free of erosion, branches and picnic tables for connectivity to the Mobi Mat (accessibility mat that provides stability for persons with disability to travel over the sandy beach to the water).

Create a landing area for fishing opportunities, and flat, easy connective areas to the designated fishing area from the parking area. The canteen area needs to be assessed for serving persons in wheelchairs and small children.

Cornwallis Park Beach
The tidal beach at Cornwallis Park borders municipally-owned lands and has been an informal destination for residents of all ages. There have been many requests to create accessible opportunities here. Assess and create accessible opportunities to the tidal beach at Cornwallis Park in cooperation with other stakeholders.

Access the potential of other beaches in the region from parking, access to the beach, and landing areas to benefit folks with disabilities, and for the benefit of the whole population for viewing sunsets and water bodies, having a picnic with family and/or friends.

Signage
Signage is covered under information and communications; however, once established, signs need to be at a height that is easily seen for persons with disabilities.

Funding
The built environment has the highest price tag for creating barrier free designs in communities and at municipally-owned facilities. Both federal and provincial governments have funding supports for improving accessible opportunities in the community. Creative linkage with accessible grants, age-friendly funding and funding for active transportation can be used to assist with costs in creating whole community designs that benefit all.

Business Opportunities
The study showed gaps in accessible opportunities in many communities in the region for accessing services such as stores, restaurants, dental services, vet services, churches, museums, to name only a few. Although this is not under the

Municipality's jurisdiction, municipal units can assist in sharing information on accessibility resources, i.e. design standards, funding, etc.

Housing
Lack of affordable housing, shortages in housing options, and need for more independent living were seen as barriers for people living with disabilities. Often housing is not on the municipal agenda; however, the creation of partnerships and collaborations can go a long way to look at opportunities that address this gap. There are many agencies and support organizations that can assist with this, and the volunteer sector that can make a difference.

Employment

Creating opportunities to make workplaces accessible, and support people with disabilities to find meaningful employment.

Provide equitable access to jobs with the Municipality.

Employment: Actions and Recommendations: The Plan

Leadership
Provide the leadership and role modeling to create meaningful employment opportunities and share the learned experiences.

Community Outreach/ Navigator
Create a position with the Municipality dedicated to promoting inclusion, training staff, and creating opportunities for community outreach, with a goal of creating a culture shift of inclusion, promoting equitable opportunities, working to break down barriers throughout the region. Work in partnership with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and local, regional and provincial representatives including community and business stakeholders.

Culture of Inclusion
Build capacity with municipal staff to cultivate a culture of inclusion that supports, retains, and provides opportunities for career growth for persons with disabilities and provide the necessary training needed to be successful.

Job Opportunities

Improve opportunities for persons with disabilities to gain employment with the Municipality by ensuring job postings clearly state they are open to people with disabilities and to assess other ways to reach persons with disabilities, i.e. larger print.

Hiring

Improve processes, policies, and practices to facilitate and encourage the recruitment, selection, transition, and advancement of persons with disabilities in their employment at the Municipality. Provide opportunities for youth with disabilities to apply for summer positions.

Flexibility

Improve support and flexibility in the workplace by ensuring municipal staff and council members with disabilities have access to adaptive technologies in the workplace, supportive structure, and a flexible work environment i.e. ability to work from home, flex hours, and other supports.

Recognition

Create internal and external recognition programs recognizing those who support the hiring of persons with disabilities and promote role models for the community.

Transportation

 Making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go.

Transportation Actions and Recommendations: The Plan

Transit Infrastructure and supports-
Explore existing (Kings Transit and Annapolis County Trans County Transportation) and alternative transportation that is affordable to persons with disabilities, ie

smaller buses, taxis opportunities and /or improving public transportation through the lens of persons with disabilities.

Affordability
Explore a subsidized transit fares and/or transit passes for persons with disabilities and low income in partnerships with other municipal units, levels of government and agencies.

Training
Influence and encourage the training of staff who transport persons with disabilities to understand their needs and concerns.

Transit Stops
Create shelters when and where possible, and have benches at bus stops in the County.

Snow Removal
Improve snow clearance at transit stops and collaborate with partners accordingly.

Active Transportation and Pedestrian Infrastructure
Improve connectivity in communities by improving pedestrian infrastructure where possible and link the needs of persons with disabilities to the County's Active Transportation Plan and planning for Age-Friendly Communities targeted at walkers, cyclists, persons in wheelchairs, etc.

Create paved shoulders, pathways and improved safe sidewalks in communities to benefit walkers, cyclist and persons with disabilities. See Built Environments section for other supports, i.e. parking and sidewalks.

Funding Supports
Explore creative funding supports to create age-friendly communities and active transportation networks that benefit the whole community.

Implementation Actions and Recommendations: The Plan

The Accessibility Advisory Committee and County staff were tasked with the responsibility of creating the first Accessibility Plan that was mandated by the Province of Nova Scotia to ensure that the province is fully accessible by 2030.

The plan will be submitted to the Province in March 2022 to meet the deadline that was extended due to COVID 19.

As with any plan it needs to be operationalized and have an integrated approach to dealing with accessibility in the Municipality across all service groups.

Responsibilities

Municipal Council is responsible for adopting and overseeing the Annapolis County Accessibility Plan.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is responsible for implementing the plan, assigning staff to work on accessibility who will work with senior staff for the ongoing implementation of the plan.

The CAO accessibility-designated staff person shall coordinate efforts and liaise with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for giving feedback and providing recommendations to municipal council as per the municipal policy.

All parties recognize the significant cost of implementation. Operational plans and all parties need to seek funding support from various levels of government to assist in creating an accessible and inclusive municipality.

Monitoring

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will prepare an annual accessibility report card for council at the end of each fiscal year starting in March 2023. The report card will measure the performance of the actions in this plan in cooperation with the accessibility staff person. The advisory committee can also make recommendations to improve the plan.

The Accessibility Report Card is a public document and will be posted on the County website once accepted by municipal council.

Evaluating
The plan needs to be reviewed at least every three years as required by the Province and the Accessibility Act, Bill 59.

The Council and CAO are responsible to lead the public review and evaluation of the Accessibility Plan before April 2025 in consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Responding to Questions, Concerns and/or Complaints
Anyone can lodge a complaint, pose a question, or express a concern about accessibility in the Municipality of the County of Annapolis. These should be directed to the CAO.

The CAO or designate will respond within a reasonable time. Before responding, the CAO will consult with the person(s) responsible for the area of inquiry. The response will include reasons for the decision and will share information and/or consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee if required.

The CAO or designate shall keep all records of complaints, questions, and concerns submitted to them, and will provide summary updates to the Accessibility Advisory committee on a regular basis.

These updates will become part of the advisory committee's continual review of the Accessibility Plan, and may form the foundation of future changes.

Anyone can appeal to Council if they are not satisfied with the response from the CAO. CAO or Council may refer appeal to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for additional review and recommendations before issuing a final response to the complainant.

Glossary of Terms

Understanding the words in the document

ACAAC: Annapolis County Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Accessibility Assessment: Not an official audit but an overview assessments to allow for more informed decisions when making recommendations in the County of Annapolis Accessibility Plan.

Active Transportation: Active transportation refers to all human-powered forms of transportation, in particular walking and cycling. It includes the use of mobility aids such as wheelchairs, and can also encompass other active transport variations such as in-line skating, skateboarding, cross-country skiing, and even kayaking. Active transportation can also be combined with other modes, such as public transit. (Definition adopted in Annapolis County Active Transportation Plan 2015)

Active transportation encourages governments of all levels to plan well to engage more residents and visitors in creating active communities to work, to school and to play.

Age-Friendly Communities: In an age friendly community, the polices , services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help seniors " age actively " many of the age friendly recommendations and funding programs support sidewalks that are well lit and building with automatic door openers and elevators so it is complementary to providing accessible communities.

Appeal: Make a formal request to clarify or change a decision.

ASL: American Sign Language: Related to hearing or sensing sound. Requires translators that interpret through facial expression as well as movements and motions with the hands. It serves as the predominate sign language of Deaf communities.

Assistive listening devices: An assistive listening device is part of a system used to improve hearing ability for people in a variety of situations where they are unable to distinguish speech in noisy environments.

Audits: An accessibility audit is an inspection of indoor and outdoor public spaces to systematically evaluate their accessibility for people of all ages and abilities. The key findings should inform commitments for the built environment when new retrofits are planned or built.

Barrier: Something that makes it harder for some people to participate. Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act defines a barrier as "anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice."

Braille: A reading and writing system for people who are blind or visually impaired.

CSA: Canadian Standards Association. The B651HB-18 specifications may be adopted by NS in terms of Accessibility in the Built Environment.

CART: Communication Access Real-time Translation. Delivers captions remotely to any screen in real time, also known as live captioning. It is live, word for word transcription of speech to text so that individuals can read what is being said in group settings and at personal appointments on a laptop or a large screen. CART services can be provided on site or remotely. It enables culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people to have visual access to the spoken word. (Source Canadian Hearing Services)

Council: Municipality of the County of Annapolis Council.

Disability: Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act, Bill 59 defines Disability as the following: "a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an

individual's full and effective participation in society." It can be a condition that makes it harder for a person to participate.

EMO: Emergency Management Office.

Equitable/equity: A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same; equity means everybody is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.

FCM: Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Infrastructure: The "underlying structure" that makes a place liveable and keeps its systems working (e.g., roads, sewers, clean water, electricity, parks and more).

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD): This is a UN day that is celebrated every year on 3 December. The day is about promoting the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities at every level of society and development, and to raise awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of political, social, economic, and cultural life. World Health Organization joins the UN in observing this day each year, reinforcing the importance of securing the rights of people with disabilities, so they can participate fully, equally and effectively in society with others, and face no barriers in all aspects of their lives.

NS Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces: A document created by the NS Accessibility Directorate in April 2020 and when completed will be the provincial accessibility standards for the built environment. The guidelines are not mandatory, but they can help public sector bodies begin their accessibility planning and be better prepared to meet the provincial standard when it is enacted.

National AccessAbility Week (NAAW): Every year, starting on the last Sunday in May, Canadians celebrate National AccessAbility Week (NAAW). Founded as 'National Access Awareness Week' in 1988 and inspired by Rick Hansen's Man In Motion World Tour, this week is an opportunity to celebrate Canadians with

disabilities and raise awareness of the critical need for accessibility and inclusion for all in our communities and workplaces.

NSBC: Nova Scotia Building Code: "Building Code Act" or "Act" means Chapter 46 of the Revised Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1989, the Building Code Act.

NBC: National Building Code: A collection of rules and regulations adopted by authorities having appropriate Jurisdiction to control the design and construction of buildings, alternation, repair, quality of materials, use and occupancy, and related factors of buildings within their jurisdiction; contains minimum architectural, structural and mechanical standards for sanitization, public health, welfare, safety , and the provision of light and air.

NSFM: Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. Represents the provincial interest of local government.

Pedestrian: A person walking outside or using an assistive device outside to travel at a walking speed.

Plain language: Language a reader or listener can understand easily and completely.

QR Code: A type of Matric barcode. A barcode is a machine- readable optical lapel that can contain information about an item to read and/or to hear in some circumstances.

Real Time Text: Telecommunication device on phone systems and cells. A TTY (teletypewriter or text telephone) is a device that helps people who are deaf, speech-impaired, or hard-of-hearing use a phone to communicate. The device translate words into text.

Retrofit: To add features that were not included in the original design.

RHF: Rick Hansen Foundation.

RHFAC: Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification. (Learn more at www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification)

Tactile: Related to the sense of touch. The word "tactile" refers to the sense of touch.

Tactile signs: A tactile sign is any sign that can be read by touch. Braille, raised print and raised symbols or pictograms are examples of tactile elements used on signs. Doors and openings that lead to public spaces should be identified by tactile signage including stairways.

Truncated domes: (AKA detectable warnings, tactile paving, detectable warning surfaces) are ground surface indicators designed to assist and warn pedestrians who are blind or visually Impaired. Truncated domes feature a unique pattern of cones that are easily detected by a cane or foot, alerting the visually impaired to the presence of a street or sudden drop - off.

WCAG: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

(Learn more at www. w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag)

Conclusion

The Annapolis County Accessibility Advisory Committee took six months to create the Annapolis County Accessibility Plan.

The plan is grounded in public input and collaborations and was presented in draft form in January 2022 to the Municipality of the County of Annapolis Council. That draft January document included the public consultation results in the Appendix section. Due to its length, the Appendix is not included in the final report.

Facility Accessibility Assessments - Buildings, Parks, Trails Sidewalks, etc.