



ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ACCESSIBILITY TOWN HALL MEETING
Minutes
May 15, 2017

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Patricia Gates, Chair
Gerry Post, Vice Chair
Sue Uteck
Mikiko Terashima
Kristine Webber
Johanna Stork
Zainib Almkhtar
Ryan Delehanty
Councillor Lisa Blackburn
Councillor Wayne Mason

STAFF PANEL: Darren Young, Project Manager, Corporate Facility Design & Construction, Corporate and Customer Service
Noreen Guptill, Inclusion & Accessibility Specialist, Parks & Recreation
Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation & Public Works
Trevor Harvie, Acting Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation & Public Works
Ahmad Kidwai, Manager, Accessible Transit, Halifax Transit
Sergio Grbac, Supervisor, Municipal Compliance, Planning & Development
Margaret Pike, Client Relationship & Process Lead, Citizen Contact Centres, Corporate and Customer Service

OTHERS PRESENT: Deputy Mayor Steve Craig
Councillor Richard Zurawski
Councillor Lindell Smith
Andrea MacDonald, License Services
Glenn Bannon, Manager, Operations, Metro Transit
Tracy Jones-Grant, Manager of Diversity & Inclusion, Government Relations & External Affairs
Heather
Laughlin Rutt, Diversity Consultant, Government Relations & External Affairs

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

The agenda, supporting documents, and information items circulated to the Advisory Committee for Accessibility in HRM are available online: <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/access/170515aac-agenda.php>

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. and adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Councillor Lisa Blackburn called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. in the Portia White Atrium, Citadel High School, 1855 Trollope St., Halifax.

Councillor Blackburn welcomed all in attendance. The panel members and other Councillors attending were introduced. The public were encouraged to share their feedback on what is working, what doesn't work and their suggestions for improvement. It was explained that panel members would be providing updates on recent accomplishments, current projects, successes and challenges in their area and then be available to answer any questions.

2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

- Darren Young, Project Manager, Corporate Facility Design & Construction, Corporate and Customer Service

Darren Young reviewed a list of projects completed this year: door operators, pool lifts, washroom upgrades and accessible playground components. They also attend the Advisory Committee for Accessibility each month. This year staff will continue to focus on ramps, doors and signage and install more handrails at Scotiabank Centre. HRM will partner with the Rick Hanson Foundation and their Accessibility Certification Program. Bill 59 will also provide opportunities for the municipality.

- Noreen Guptill, Inclusion & Accessibility Specialist, Parks & Recreation

Noreen Guptill noted that this is a new position for Parks and Recreation supporting their strategy framework of inclusivity. They have been working on building partnerships in the community and reviewing best practices across Canada along with inclusion policies. There is a display here tonight of some of the new equipment available at Parks and Recreation. There have also been improvements made to parking lots, ramps and pathways at various municipal parks as well as the installation of accessible playground components at three additional city playgrounds.

- Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation & Public Works

Taso Koutroulakis stated that a major focus has been the traffic signal project, upgrading "on street equipment", as well as the installation of 16 additional crosswalks and the upgrade of 97 others. They indicated that the province is considering a change in the workplace traffic and control manual. This year they will continue work on more crosswalks and pedestrian signals; looking at the use of a City Lights App which can detect upcoming traffic signals. New sidewalks will be installed and upgrades to existing sidewalks will also take place. Road Operations are installing accessible park benches and tables which will continue and expand in this coming year.

- Trevor Harvie, Acting Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation & Public Works

Trevor Harvie reviewed the various training sessions that took place: winter operations accessibility awareness workshops for managers, supervisors, operators and staff; a mobility workshop; a workshop from Nova Scotia Rehabilitation and CNIB workshops, again for various levels of staff. They have purchased 4 mechanical wheelchairs for use in future training programs. Accessibility requirements will be a part of the tendered contracts and include specifics about clearing at bus stops, on ramp areas and crosswalks. All successful contractors must attend a one day access workshop and a half day mobility workshop.

- Ahmad Kidwai, Manager, Accessible Transit, Halifax Transit

Ahmad Kidwai reviewed technology upgrades which aim to enhance the customer experience: next stop announcements and text display, external announcements at stops when doors open and LED destination display on 39 buses. There have also been upgrades at terminals with LCD screens and real-time information displayed. They have been testing the Quantum wheelchair securement system which allows greater independence for users and have received positive feedback. GTFS which is a Google transit App is being looked at. A review is taking place of Access a Bus where value stream mapping is matching existing needs to existing stock and determining gaps. They are also looking at an upgraded reservation system. A complete inventory of transit terminals and buildings will address accessible washrooms, sidewalks and parking areas. On June 8th, 2017, there will be an event at the Lacewood Terminal to celebrate 100% Accessible Fleet status.

- Sergio Grbac, Supervisor, Municipal Compliance, Planning & Development

Sergio Grbac reviewed how HRM enforces the Nova Scotia Building Code. Ease of use legislation is being developed to provide accessible ready housing and would apply to all residential units. On April 1st Nova Scotia adopted the National Building Code with some specific changes to meet Nova Scotia Building Code regulations. At that time, the ease of use launch was delayed but the goal is to have it included by the end of 2017. By 2020 there will be a new National Code with further regulations around accessibility.

- Margaret Pike, Client Relationship & Process Lead, Citizen Contact Centres, Corporate and Customer Service

Margaret Pike reviewed the hours of operations for the 311 Call Centre and the location of the Customer Service Centres as well as explaining the services provided. There has been a new telephony system installed which provides better messaging when calling in and by the end of 2017 a chat feature will be available along with the existing TTY service. There is also a translation service available covering 150 languages. These centres connect citizens to HRM departments, their Councillors and can answer questions and provide information, everyone is encouraged to use 311 or visit a centre.

At this time Councillor Blackburn acknowledged the Committee members and gave an overview of what the Committee works on. She reviewed the ground rules for this portion of the meeting and welcomed the public to speak and share their feedback

3. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Joanne Hill of Halifax, is concerned about the number of distracted drivers and the visibility and safety of pedestrians.

Taso Koutroulakis stated that twice a year a report on crosswalk safety is provided to Council. Staff are looking at cross walk design and presently studying the impact of alternate colours of signage at crosswalks.

Ellen Dodson, member of Walk and Roll Halifax, shared her personal experience from February 14, 2017 when there were no buses running. They felt that there was no plan for these type of snow events and suggested staff prioritize snow clearing that would accommodate pedestrians.

Trevor Harvie acknowledged the city was grid locked that day.

A representative of the Nova Scotia Fibromyalgia Facebook Group, remarked that Access a Bus is not accessible with the current booking procedures. There is a long lead time required and even then, it is

often not available when needed. They suggested that in other locales individuals are given free picture ID cards and priority seating on conventional transit. This shift in riders could free up spaces on Access a Bus. Accessibility of sidewalks, parks and challenges with crosswalk buttons were also of concern. They commented there are serious issues with accessible taxis and felt that stronger regulations were needed citing Ottawa as being an example for best practices and ideas. It was felt that there were not enough by-law officers to address complaints regarding buildings: doors, ramps and washrooms. Advocacy for change must come from all levels of government as well as the necessary funding for solutions.

Ahmad Kidwai stated that demand is outstripping availability. Staff are working on a strategy for accessible transit and will be reporting to the Transportation Standing Committee. An expression of interest on accessible taxis partnering with transit was sent out. There are no companies to partner with presently based on the business models utilized in the industry.

Paul Vinneau of Halifax, advocates for inclusion. They would like to have more details on the features and costs associated with the Quantum Securement System. The system used in Victoria B.C. has four straps and a lap belt in a bag on each bus and provides two key components: secures the chair to the floor and secures the rider to the chair. They felt this would be a cost-effective way to outfit all the buses.

Mohamed Harp of Halifax, noted that gas stations are not very accessible.

Tara Kneecamp of Dartmouth, thanked staff for addressing the lack of a crosswalk by their bus stop. It was installed within two months of their request. They asked why there was no requirement for cabs to provide car seats? They felt that crosswalks intersecting with two lanes of traffic should have audible signals for additional safety. The lack of sidewalks in commercial areas such as Dartmouth Crossing and Bayer's Lake were also of concern.

Taso Koutroulakis encouraged calls to 311 where there are specific concerns about the location of crosswalks. There have been many requests for the installation of sidewalks; schools, shopping areas and senior's homes are prioritized. Presently 28% of crosswalks have audible signals and they will be incorporated as a part of upgrading crosswalks moving forward.

Manir Hamad student at St Agnes School, stated that the doors at school are very difficult to open when in a wheelchair.

Maraha Hamad student at St Agnes School, stated that there was no ramp or elevator at school and that there was little accessibility in snowy times of year.

Trevor Harvie acknowledged that accessibility during snow events is high on HRM's radar. Schools are provincially regulated and do not unfortunately fall under HRM's influence.

Mr. Mohamad of Halifax, stated that residential sidewalks are too narrow for wheelchairs and that ramps are often not cleared of snow.

Trevor Harvie stated that sidewalks that do not meet "Redbook" standard have been identified and are a focus for improvement.

Nair Kadur of Halifax, shared that his family of six are all faced with accessibility issues.

Gerry Post of Halifax, emphasized how important the crosswalk flags are for wheelchair users particularly in winter. They acknowledged the improvements to the conventional transit service. Presently 3% of taxis in HRM are accessible as compared to 100% in London and 50% in New York City. They feel that the taxi industry should be viewed as a utility and should be incorporated into the accessible transit system.

Ahmad Kidwai noted that this issue will be included in the strategy report that will be presented to the Transportation Standing Committee.

Sarah Jamal student advocate from Hamilton, stated that Hamilton had the most accessible free transit system. They were disappointed in the yes/but responses and was eager to see what the next steps would be to these issues.

Councillor Lisa Blackburn noted that although some issues were outside of HRM's jurisdiction, Councillors can certainly pursue answers to concerns and follow up with residents.

Darrell MacDonald of Halifax, stated that accessible parking needs to improve: wider spots meeting the 11-foot standard, by-laws posted and side stripes. They noted that some newer buildings are not meeting these requirements.

Sergio Grbac noted that HRM can enforce the rules which are a part of the national and Nova Scotia building codes. Specific examples will be followed up on and they encouraged residents to contact HRM.

Franco Sullivan of Halifax, as a deaf citizen would like to be able to text access-a-bus. They appreciate the new LED displays on the buses. They commented that Parks and Recreation need to consider not only physical needs but also communication needs to ensure their programs are accessible.

Ahmad Kidwai stated that upgrades to the present system will allow online booking which may offer a solution to the concern.

Noreen Guptill commented that when residents share their needs with staff support can be provided, for example interpreters can be arranged.

Scott Guthrie of Brookside and Chair of Crosswalk Safety Society of Nova Scotia, stated that it is important to look at situations from their perspective to truly understand the daily challenges faced by people with disability. They feel that there is an abuse of registered blue card holders that needs to be addressed.

Councillor Lisa Blackburn noted that this is the key to this Committee. There is a broad representation on the Committee specifically to share that insight and guide staff.

Chair Patricia Gates shared her background and encouraged individuals to attend the Committee meetings which are open to the public. Citizens can also arrange to speak or present their concerns to the Committee.

Carolyn Simpson of Bedford, stated her challenges with curbs and steep ramps and suggested that hand rails may be a solution.

Elizabeth MacDonald of Dartmouth, acknowledged that sidewalk clearing has been improving but is concerned with melting snow which often re-freezes posing a hazard; in addition, bus stops and curbs are not consistently well cleared. They asked whether there are standards for automatic door openers and if this was monitored? They suggested that publicly recognizing businesses that do a good job with accessibility could raise the profile and encourage others.

Trevor Harvie shared that the winter operations accessibility awareness workshops have brought many of these issues to light and will continue to take place, helping staff focus on these areas.

Sergio Grbac stated that a change in the public culture will lead to better design and that making things more accessible provides useful tools for everyone. Changes to the National Building Code will raise the bar on this.

Darren Young agreed and mentioned that Bill 59 will also ensure accessible policies become mainstream. The accessible route of travel is looked at when choosing the location for door openers in Municipal Buildings.

Mohamed Ibrahim of Halifax, suggested that free passes for transit, recreation and museums provides the opportunity for citizens with accessibility needs to enjoy recreation and live a full life. They also indicated that public washrooms need attention.

Noreen Guptill reiterated Parks and Recreation's commitment to its inclusive mandate. Support will be arranged for individuals accessing programs as a part of the registration process.

Tami Sampson of Halifax, asked when wheelchair securements will be available on all buses? They noted that there is not enough room on some sidewalks for the transit driver's when deploying the ramps. They agreed that the crosswalk flags are marvelous.

Ahmad Kidwai shared that the Quantum System is being piloted until the fall and a decision will be made after this assessment.

Paul Vinneau of Halifax, stated that the Quantum System is too costly and the present one strap system is inadequate. They reiterated that the alternative system they described earlier would be a better solution. They also noted that crowd control at public concerts and events did not address accessibility needs.

Clayton Allain of Mount Uniacke, would like it on record that there is a huge opportunity for additional public education and awareness about these issues.

Ellen Dobson of Halifax, stated that equity discussions must be had and that the transportation focus is not just about vehicles. The existing infrastructure limits opportunity for jobs and general access for those without cars and on fixed incomes.

Tara Kneecamp of Dartmouth, stated that reduced transit services on weekends and holidays as well as the lack of car seats in taxicabs limits the access to municipal parks and recreation programs using Shubie Park as an example.

Scott Guthrie of Brookside, was concerned that the new health centre proposed for Bayer Lake did not consider the limited accessibility to this area. The lack of transit and sidewalks make it less than accessible.

4. CLOSING COMMENTS

Councillor Blackburn thanked the panel for addressing the public commentary. Many notes have been taken by staff and work will begin on the issues raised. The Councillor also thanked the staff and volunteers helping to organize this event.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Sharon Chase
Legislative Support