



ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ACCESSIBILITY TOWN HALL MEETING
Minutes
September 25, 2018

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Patricia Gates, Chair
Ryan Delehanty, Vice Chair
Councillor Lisa Blackburn
Julia Bremner
Kristine Webber
Johanna Stork
Zainib Almkhtar

REGRETS: Jillian Banfield

STAFF PANEL: Darren Young, Senior Project Manager, Corporate Facility Design and Construction, Corporate and Customer Service
Tracey Jones-Grant, Managing Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion
Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation and Public Works
Trevor Harvie, Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation and Public Works
Mike Spicer, Operations Manager, Halifax Transit
Penny Henneberry, Manager of Buildings and Compliance, Planning and Development
Brenda Adams, Manager, Citizen Contact Centres, Corporate and Customer Services
Sharon Martin, Manager of Youth Programs, Parks and Recreation

OTHERS PRESENT: Councillor Steve Craig
Councillor Richard Zurawski
Councillor Lindell Smith
Councillor Sam Austin
Councillor Tony Mancini
Kevin Arjoon, Municipal Clerk
Liam MacSween, Legislative Assistant
Alicia Wall, Legislative Support

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 <https://www.halifax.ca/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/2018-advisory-committee-accessibility-hrm-town-hall-meeting>

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. and adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Councillor Lisa Blackburn called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. in the Dartmouth North Community Centre (Gymnasium), 105 Highfield Park Drive, Dartmouth.

Councillor Blackburn welcomed all in attendance and encouraged attendees to share their feedback. The Councillor advised that the panel members would be providing updates on current projects and sharing successes and challenges faced by the Municipality with respect to accessibility.

Pat Gates welcomed everyone and apologized for being unable to provide meeting agendas and minutes in braille and spoke to some of the accessible features incorporated into the meeting. Currently there is only one person in the City who does braille and their braille broke prior to the meeting.

The Chair advised there were vacancies on the Advisory Committee for Accessibility in HRM and encouraged attendees to volunteer.

Councillor Blackburn introduced the staff panel.

2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

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

Darren Young announced they were the lead Business Unit working on the development of a Universal Access Policy that will dictate all new buildings in HRM must have universal access and was pleased to confirm their registration in the upcoming Rick Hansen Training Program sponsored by CSA. Young provided an overview of current projects and advised that the Cole Harbour Turf now has universal washrooms, adult change tables have been installed at the Canada Games Centre, the Dartmouth Sportsplex will have a pool pod pool lift, an accessible canoe launch was installed at Birch Cove and the work on St. Andrews Community Centre is going to tender in approximately 2 weeks and renovations will include adult change tables and barrier free washrooms.

One of the challenges encountered this year was being unable to launch the accessible beach mats. This will be completed next year.

Tracey Jones-Grant, Managing Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion

Tracey Jones-Grant explained their goal is to work with the community and Business Units in the area of diversity and inclusion, and to support the Business Units in identifying issues and initiatives. Accessibility framework is being developed for HRM and public consultation was completed in February and March of 2017. Review of the feedback suggested timing was not ideal and that communities such as the immigrant community and the African Nova Scotia community had not been consulted. The plan is to go back out to the public before the end of fiscal year and ensure the consultation is more inclusive.

The 3 main areas of concern identified were transportation, recreation and facilities. The public would like to see HRM improve accessible transportation and maintain sidewalks like roads. The ability to access nature parks and playgrounds independently was expressed. Residents would also like to see support/training for recreation staff concerning accessible issues. Feedback suggested HRM having the ability to enforce and ensure buildings meet CSA standards as well as having a tracking system in place for repairs to ensure they are completed quickly.

Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation and Public Works

Taso Koutroulakis confirmed there are now 83 locations around the City with accessible pedestrian signals which is up from about 60 last year. There are approximately 200 sidewalk tactile warning strips installed, 100 sidewalk ramps now exist where none existed previously, wheel chair accessible picnic tables have been put down in Cornwallis and Hydrostone Park and there is an ongoing program to install concrete between sidewalks and bus stops to aid with wheel chair accessibility. Work is also being done with the CNIB to test new cell phone technology.

The RFP for new parking technology has closed. The RFP includes increased payment options, ability to purchase permits from pay stations, ability to pay online and accessible pay stations.

Staff are conducting inspections and receiving training from NS Rehab and CNIB to gain a better understanding of accessible issues.

Trevor Harvie, Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation and Public Works

Consultation with CNIB and NS Rehab took place in the fall of 2017, and TPW would like to create an accessibility awareness training program for winter ops which would help identify issues with snow removal such as clearing full widths of sidewalks, height elevations and obstructions. Harvie took part in tours with CNIB which entailed having their vision obstructed and the use of visual aids for navigation in an attempt to gain a better understanding of challenges faced by people with impairments.

Tenders for sidewalk clearing have gone out and there is a new provision in the Tender that all service providers attend a mandatory accessibility awareness training workshop.

Mike Spicer, Operations Manager, Halifax Transit

Mike Spicer indicated one of Transit's biggest goals is to improve accessible transportation and recognizes the need for improvement in the operation of the Access a Bus. Research and consultation suggest that the Access a Bus service is not meeting the needs of the community and a continuous improvement service plan is being developed.

Some of the issues noted were missed pick-up times, long wait times and the need to schedule trips 7 days in advance. Additional Access a Bus trips have been added in an attempt to decrease wait times and the purchase of new scheduling software was approved this year. An alternative to the Access a Bus is the conventional bus however, there are 4 different types of securements being used which makes some riders uneasy as to what to expect. New securements are being installed in the conventional buses and drivers will receive appropriate training.

Transit is currently looking at extending the Access a Bus hours and public engagement will take place.

Penny Henneberry, Manager of Buildings and Compliance, Planning and Development

Penny Henneberry confirmed Planning and Development is responsible for the licensing of taxis and that a review of the taxi service is underway. Currently there is a cap on the number of regular taxi licenses that are issued however, there is no cap for accessible licenses. There has been a decrease in the number of accessible taxi licenses being issued which may be due to the termination of the provincial grant. Sensitivity training for taxi drivers is being explored as well as increasing technologies for safety in taxis. HRM may recommend that a special committee be struck with improving accessible taxi service and would like the Province to reinstate the grant.

There is currently a questionnaire on www.halifax.ca that is open until October 11, 2018 for public to provide their comments on the taxi service in HRM. To date about 6000 replies have been received.

Brenda Adams, Manager, Citizen Contact Centres, Corporate and Customer Services

Brenda Adams provided the call centre hours and advised of the after-hours service. In addition to the call centre there are 4 customer service locations in which financial transactions can be completed. The call centre handled roughly 430,000 calls last fiscal year and the customer service centres completed about 94,000 financial transactions. TTY service is currently offered by 311 and the Municipality is hoping to roll out a new service in 2019. 311 along with the customer service centres have access to translation services for about 150 languages.

Sharon Martin, Manager of Youth Programs, Parks and Recreation

Sharon Martin works with youth and their families in the community to help make them productive members of society. The Youth Live program is a 21 week work program, responsible for green cart repair and is offered to youth ages 16-24 who may have dropped out of school or are having difficulties holding down a job.

HRM is one of the largest employers of youth, employing over 3,170 last year. Youth also sit on internal committees within HRM and are involved in the decision making process through the recreation centres. Some of the other tools used to obtain feedback are focus groups and online surveys.

The Youth Services Plan was developed after consultation with about 1,400 youth and overall youth were pleased. Some areas identified as needing improvement were inclusion training for staff, better marketing, more no cost or low cost services and youth friendly places with respect to access and staff, as youth feel staff are not always welcoming. HRM currently offers some free drop in programs as well as no cost equipment rental for the public through its recreation centres.

A Youth Advisory Committee is being implemented by staff. Youth between the ages of 15-24 are being recruited for membership. Another project in the works is a multi-service centre for youth in Sackville that will offer programs and services.

Sharon Martin was happy to announce they are moving into a new space on Bell road which will also serve as a drop in centre for youth with workshops and programming.

3. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Councillor Blackburn opened up the floor and invited the public to share their feedback.

Ann of Dartmouth is looking forward to the Dartmouth Sportsplex re-opening and asked if accessible gym equipment will be available.

Darren Young does believe there is accessible equipment being added, but will check and have it added if need be.

Logan Young of Halifax is happy overall with customer service centre and feels most items are actioned in a timely fashion. They asked how many calls are actioned by the call takers versus the number that are passed off and asked if the city should have inspectors on the ground to be proactive in identifying issues.

Brenda Adams answered about 1% of the calls are sent outside of the organization to be actioned. 40% of calls are referred to as Tier 2 and are transferred to other departments within HRM to be actioned.

Taso Koutroulakis responded that there are on street supervisors and part of their responsibility is to inspect buildings and streets to identify hazards.

Betty MacDonald tried to contact 311 using a new video relay service and was disappointed it was not compatible with the TTY. They would like to see this new video relay service on 311's radar and feel it is an amazing service.

Councillor Blackburn asked if the video relay service is something like Skype.

Betty MacDonald explained it was established in 2016 by the CRTC and allows those who use sign language to connect to an operator who places a call and relays the conversation from sign language to voice.

Bhanu of Halifax is upset that transit stopped 3 bus routes on Harlington Crescent and now needs to walk 20 minutes with their daughter to get the bus.

Mike Spicer stated the manager of planning can give Bhanu a call to discuss.

Sara Abdou of Halifax indicated there are working the Immigrants Services Association and thanked Mike Spicer for offering to take Bhanu's contact information and advised interpretation may be an issue. They feel one of the biggest barriers facing newcomers to HRM with being able to engage is the lack of interpretation and thanked 311 for offering translation services.

Tracey Jones-Grant extended an offer to Mike Spicer to provide any assistance that may be required and acknowledged the lack of translation services available in HRM.

Mohammed of Dartmouth feels there are areas in the City that need curb improvements and would like to see snow removal improved. They would also like to see bus shelters installed where none exist.

Trevor Harvie reassured snow clearing efforts are continually being improved and understands the need for better snow clearing around bus shelters.

Stella from Halifax sent email correspondence and would like to see the town hall meetings held in more than one location, more accessible parking spots in the downtown area, bus service up and down Duke and/or Prince Street and has concerns about navigating high snowbanks at parking meters.

Taso Koutroulakis confirmed there are a number of accessible parking spots downtown and that specific areas can be reviewed, upon request, to see if additional spots can be added.

Trevor Harvie indicated pay stations will be a good alternative to parking meters in the event they become inaccessible for any reason.

An **Attendee** asked if there is a map online showing the accessible parking spots in HRM.

Taso Koutroulakis believes there is and will make sure it is available on the website.

Paul Veinot of Halifax thanked staff for being open to working with their community. They feel the taxi service does not want to serve the accessible community as most taxis are not equipped to do so and they would like to see Transit supervisors use their vehicles for accessible purposes if required. The location of accessible spaces is important as the location in itself can be a barrier if it is too far from the destination. Veinot commended staff for the new curb corners.

Councillor Zurawski responded by saying Council is trying to view issues through a social justice lens rather than just a fiscal responsibility lens and be mindful of moral effects decisions can have as well.

Mariette Macdonald of Halifax would like to see accessible apartments with more bedrooms, as the majority appear to be 1 bedroom only.

Darren Young doesn't believe the code speaks to number of bedrooms in the unit just the number of units per building. They recognize this is an issue.

Logan Young would like to see signs at crosswalks indicating the button needs to be activated and is concerned with the lack of time to cross as some intersections.

Taso Koutroulakis explained the location of the push buttons and signage. They further advised some traffic lights are on sensors and some are fixed which creates time differences.

Betty Macdonald is with The Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians and expressed communication concerns when dealing with Casino Taxi with respect to pertinent information concerning the pick-up not being relayed from dispatch to the driver.

Penny Henneberry confirmed they are working on communication issues and can pass these concerns on to the taxi operators to be addressed immediately.

4. CLOSING COMMENTS

Councillor Blackburn thanked the panel for addressing the public commentary. Concerns have been heard by staff and work will begin on the issues raised.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Alicia Wall
Legislative Support