



ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ACCESSIBILITY TOWN HALL MEETING
Minutes
November 19, 2019

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Councillor Lisa Blackburn
Julia Bremner, Chair
Victoria Levack, Vice Chair
Elizabeth Doull
Jacki Purcell

STAFF PANEL: Melissa Myers, Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion
Darren Young, Senior Project Manager, Corporate Facility Design and Construction, Corporate and Customer Service
Patricia Hughes, Manager, Planning & Scheduling, Halifax Transit
Hilary Hayes, Supervisor, Licensing & Ticket Information, Planning & Development
Steve York, Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation & Public Works
Rhonda Dea, Acting Manager, Aquatics, Leisure & Inclusion Services, Parks & Recreation and Noreen Guptill, Inclusion & Accessibility Specialist, Parks & Recreation
Kim Jollimore, Acting Manager Customer Contact Centres, Corporate & Customer Services
Paul Vienneau, Accessibility Advisor to the CAO

OTHERS PRESENT: Councillor David Hendsbee
Councillor Lorelei Nicoll
Councillor Paul Russell
Darren Hirtle, Community Developer, Recreation Programming
Liam MacSween, Acting Deputy Clerk
Judith Ng'ethe, 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.

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 p.m. and adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Councillor Lisa Blackburn called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m. in the multi-purpose room, Cole Harbour Place, 51 Forest Hills Parkway, 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.

Councillor Blackburn advised of vacancies on the Committee and the deadline by which to apply. Councillor Blackburn also advised that Halifax Public Libraries was in attendance to display some of the accessible features available at the library and provide information.

Councillor Blackburn acknowledged that the land on which we are gathering is unceded Mi'kmaw territory.

Darren Hirtle introduced the staff panel.

2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

Melissa Myers, Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion

Melissa stated they are fairly new to this position and is in the process of creating an Accessibility Strategy for HRM that will align with the provincial *Accessibility Act*. Feedback is currently being gathered for the framework.

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

Darren Young confirmed that the St. Andrews Centre is currently under construction to install universal washrooms/change rooms and automatic doors. Work continues at the Scotiabank Centre, a new pool pod (which is essentially an elevator for the pool), has been installed at the Zatzman Sportsplex and the first season with the accessible dock at Birch Cove was this summer. One of the challenges for last year was deploying the beach mats and modifications to existing buildings, which are always a challenge.

Young also announced his involvement in the Rick Hansen Certification Program and confirmed attendance at the first conference.

Patricia Hughes, Manager, Planning & Scheduling, Halifax Transit

Patricia Hughes stated that there are a lot of accessibility initiatives happening. Council has approved a Continuous Improvement Plan for the Access-a-Bus service with the goal being efficiency and providing more trips. One step taken to ensure efficiency has been a software upgrade which has aided in providing more trips and has made the scheduling system more efficient. Access-a-Bus provides roughly 15,000 rides a month. One of the challenges is that about 100 trips a day are being cancelled. Halifax Transit is looking at installing mobile data computers which will help with real time booking and scheduling. The entire fleet is now accessible, and Halifax Transit is now looking at improving bus stop accessibility. The biggest push this year has been in the Sackville area. Another big project in the works is the Woodside Ferry Terminal which has an elevator and escalator that are about 40 years and are always breaking down. Upgrades will include going from one elevator to two larger elevators and adding an additional set of escalators.

Work is being done to put out more/better information on the transit system and providing the information in various accessible forms.

Hilary Hayes, Supervisor, Licensing & Ticket Information, Planning & Development

Hilary Hayes stated they represent the taxi group and that there are 14 accessible taxis currently in the fleet. They are working closely with taxi drivers to provide additional accessible service. HRM is currently working with the Province to amend the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* in hopes of being able to assist with funding for taxi drivers who wish to make their taxi accessible.

Steve York, Superintendent, Winter Operations, Transportation & Public Works

Steve York reported that an accessibility training program has been created and launched for contractors. The training is mandatory for all contractors that clear sidewalks. The contractors who have taken it so far said they find it eye-opening and it really helped them get a sense of the challenges faced by those with accessible needs. Frozen snow and ice on sidewalks are one of the big challenges. However, an ice breaker has been purchased to aid in clearing frozen material. Winter Operations Service Standards are in the process of being reviewed and they hope to have findings by 2020.

Rhonda Dea, Acting Manager, Aquatics, Leisure & Inclusion Services, Parks & Recreation

Rhonda Dea works with the inclusion services unit and has been able to accommodate a growing number of children each summer with recreational programming. A couple of new employment positions have been offered mostly in the summer and an Inclusion Support Coordinator has been hired. Increased training for all recreation staff is a priority. One of the successes has been a lift installed at the Oval to assist people with getting in and out of sledges. The Affordable Access Program is being offered to help people partake in programs if there is a financial barrier.

Noreen Guptill, Inclusion & Accessibility Specialist, Parks & Recreation

Noreen Guptill indicated that the number of children using the summer camp program has increased by 150% over the last few years. They have been able to support youth with participation in programs with more support than typically offered previously. During the winter LeMarchant School will be used to offer active play and programs. The use of the aquatic programs has also increased, more people are the using pools than ever before.

Challenges for the year have been looking for and securing qualified staff during the summer months. So far about 52 people have been hired in inclusion support but they are still short. They also noted that the level of need is also higher than ever seen before. The Ready for Rec Program has been a very important tool for providing extra support.

Kim Jollimore, Acting Manager Customer Contact Centres, Corporate & Customer Services

Kim Jollimore informed that 311 supports all of the Business Units and that they are only closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. There is an afterhours service for emergencies and they are working on implementing a live chat service and hope to possibly have this in place by May or June of 2020.

Paul Vienneau, Accessibility Advisor to the CAO

Paul Vienneau was happy to report they met with the organizer of the New Year's concert and that the concert will be completely accessible this year and will have a section for people in chairs. They are also trying to get heaters. The entrances to Parade Square are being looked at for accessibility. Vienneau has been contacted by members of the public regarding contractors blocking both sides of the road and has spoken to Brad Anguish regarding this.

3. FEEDBACK, INPUT, QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Darren Hirtle opened up the floor and invited the public to share their feedback.

Vicky Levack asked Melissa Myers about the feedback for the accessibility framework and whether or not there are any best practices for HRM employing people with disabilities.

Melissa Myers informed that there are several recommendations in the strategy with respect to employing people with disabilities.

Stephanie inquired as to whether there was any thought around property managers getting subsidies to assist with tenants who have disabilities, so they are able to view any apartment they choose barrier free.

Myers responded not to their knowledge at this point, but they can take Stephanie's information and get back to them.

An audience member asked if they do public consultation with respect to programming input and asked if the recreational centre on Devonshire is being looked at. They further questioned the best way to report clear-cutting issues.

Darren Young responded that public consultation will take place with respect to the centres and that they have a few on the list for the next 10 years. Devonshire is on list as well as Sheet Harbour and Beechville.

Kim Jollimore confirmed that the best way to report clear-cutting issues would be to contact 311 and they will put a service request through to Transportation and Public Works and it would be reviewed and followed up on.

Jill asked if there has been an assessment done on all of HRM's facilities with respect to accessibility and whether or not there is a report available to the public to know what is currently underway.

Darren Young advised that in 2015 there was an informal survey of about 15 centres and updates were provided at the Accessibility Committee meetings. For the upcoming budgets they are proposing to do an audit of all facilities which would be roughly 325 buildings and a big undertaking.

Vicky Levack asked Patricia Hughes if same day bookings are going to be available soon.

Patricia Hughes advised that same day service is one of the visions for Access-a-Bus and that they are working towards it but have no target date as of yet. A lot of changes need take place prior to same day service being offered.

Hannah asked if there is an etiquette/sensitivity training plan.

Patricia Hughes indicated there is a monthly survey on Talk Transit and that they did recently have one concerning etiquette. Based on results, they have engaged a marketing firm to help tackle issues.

An attendee stated they like the new wheelchair pods on some of the buses although there have been instances where the driver did not secure the tie-down in the back. They further commented that the new Access-a-Bus tie downs are too close together and questioned whether or not the drivers are being consulted when changes are implemented.

A Transit Supervisor in the audience responded that the tie-downs are standard and they have received six new buses with the tie-downs in a different location and on a go forward basis they will be requesting that the tie-downs be located in the same spot as on the older buses.

Liz Doull questioned bus stop locations with respect to convenience, in particular having stops close to shopping/grocery stores and why the stop by the Lord Nelson was changed.

Patricia Hughes encouraged people to call 311 to report issues with bus stops and that they can always take a look at them. The Lord Nelson stop was moved due to congestion on the sidewalk and that the public was consulted.

Gerrie commented they would like to see the Access-a-Bus be free for riders and have the cost covered under the general tax rate. They would also like to have a bus exclusively dedicated to those with accessibility needs other than the Access-a-Bus.

Liz Doull questioned if taxi meters can be above the dash for visibility purposes.

Hilary Hayes stated that taxis do have visible meters and it is probably just a matter of asking the taxi driver to tip it up.

Vicki Levack expressed concern regarding the availability of accessible taxis and if it is possible to mandate that an accessible taxi be on the road at all times and if it is possible to make it mandatory for all taxis to be accessible.

Hilary Hayes responded that unfortunately HRM is unable to mandate that an accessible taxi be on the roads at all times. They further stated that HRM no longer has zones which should assist in getting an accessible cab as they are not limited to a certain pick up area. HRM is working to change the number of accessible taxis and ideally all taxis would be accessible. However, it is up to the driver to purchase the equipment which is costly. HRM is promoting and putting out the positives in making all taxis accessible.

Stephanie asked how HRM envisions the education in terms of helping children with disabilities for swimming lessons.

Rhonda Dea confirmed there is a program for swimming instructors called Angel Fish to train instructors on working with people with disabilities.

Jacki Purcell wanted to bring the training program MANDT to the panel's attention and indicated they just wanted to pass this on.

Vicki Levack questioned the availability of day camps for children and whether or not adults could participate in the programs.

Rhonda Dea advised that they ask children registrants for their three priority weeks first and then if there is enough staff, they can register children for additional weeks. They also confirmed that there are also programs for adult participants.

Liz Doull questioned though there are parks that are accessible in the city, sometimes trails have stairs with no rails.

Darren Young indicated they have met with Parks & Recreation staff and went through some of the accessibility options to improve the trails.

An audience member sought clarification on the attendance in day camps with respect to the children that were registered without their special needs having been disclosed.

Noreen Guptill stated that this last summer, there were 80 children registered that did not have their special needs disclosed but they worked with the 80 to make it work. This was also the first time they used a deadline for registration.

An audience member asked if training for sensitivity was received by staff answering phones and who has been approached to provide the training.

Kim Jollimore advised that they are looking into the issue and that they are working with an organizational development team to identify training needs. They are looking at accessibility and diversity and inclusion training.

Vicki Levack asked if there is a live chat option for 311.

Kim Jollimore stated that currently there is no live chat option and that they are working on it and hope to have it in place in 2020. User testing is currently being completed.

Stephanie asked if there is data available to the public regarding the challenges people face when calling in and if any pressure points be pin pointed.

Kim Jollimore confirmed they have a Quality Improvement Analyst on staff and they can go on and listen to calls and pull the service request. They cannot pin point any exact pressure points at this moment.

Vicki Levack commented that it can take a long time to get an email response and that live chat would be better.

Kim Jollimore confirmed there is a 24-hour response time for responding to email requests.

An audience member questioned if there are standards for accessible housing.

Darren Young indicated that is a provincial mandate not an HRM mandate. Currently it is not in the building code. There is only a requirement for a small number of units/areas to be accessible.

Vicky Levack questioned how much power HRM has to change things.

Councillor Blackburn responded that their powers are limited by the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*. Councillor Blackburn further stated that Council is in support of giving grants to taxis and charter amendments are being worked on. The Province has been asked for permission to give grants to taxi drivers.

Jacki Purcell wanted to reiterate that accessible issues are more than just mobility issues.

Liz Doull commended HRM for providing interpreter services for the Town Hall and a few other events. However this is not always the case, for example for the Remembrance Day events. They would like to see all HRM events include interpreter services so that the deaf and hard of hearing community can be on equal footing with the rest of the community.

4. CLOSING COMMENTS

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

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Alicia Wall
Legislative Support