



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ACCESSIBILITY TOWN HALL
MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 10, 2021**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Andrew Taylor, Chair
Jacki Purcell, Vice Chair
Councillor Cathy Deagle Gammon
Councillor Paul Russell
Elizabeth Doull
Leslie Gates

REGRETS: Nicole McDonald
Samantha Horne
Rachele Manett
Aja Joshi

STAFF PANEL: Melissa Myers, Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office
Darren Young, Acting Director, Corporate Facility Design and Construction, Corporate & Customer Services
Kim Jollimore, Director, Customer Contact Centers, Corporate & Customer Services
Cheryl Chappel, Supervisor, Customer Support & Engagement, Halifax Transit
Steve York, Superintendent, Road Operations & Construction, Transportation and Public Works
Cassady Yochoff and Jennifer Fischer, Inclusion and Accessibility Specialists, Parks & Recreation
Dave Nantau, Supervisor, Bus Operations, Halifax Transit

OTHERS PRESENT: Annie Sherry, 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 6:30 p.m. and adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

Andrew Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in Paul O'Regan Hall, Halifax Central Library, 5440 Spring Garden Road, Halifax.

It was acknowledged that the meeting took place on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people, and that we are all treaty people.

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

2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

Melissa Myers, Accessibility Advisor, Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office

Myers spoke to the accessibility strategy indicating that a committee was struck to action the 30 action items identified in the strategy. New corporate accessibility training and accessibility related speakers are part of the Municipality's ongoing efforts to educate HRM staff.

Darren Young, Acting Director, Corporate Facility Design and Construction, Corporate & Customer Services

Young indicated that some of the recent successes include the completion of the St. Andrews Centre renovation, the Beazley Field House is ready for the Indigenous Games next year, the Penhorn Lake washrooms have been completed, accessible beach mats are available at Chocolate Lake, the Woodside Ferry Terminal is under renovation, modernized elevators have been installed at the Zatzman Sportsplex and access ramps have been installed at the Chocolate Lake Community Centre. Some challenges include renovating existing buildings to meet CSA standards, the capacity to deliver, as well as COVID-19 limitations. Audits of facilities are underway to identify accessible needs.

Kim Jollimore, Director, Customer Contact Centers, Corporate & Customer Services

Jollimore gave an overview of the customer contact centres and spoke to the number of calls and emails the centres respond to. Services are provided seven days a week and afterhours urgent calls for things such as safety issues are outsourced to an answering service. The centres support customers in over 150 different languages and offer TTY services. Services such as video relay and chat are being researched.

Cheryl Chappel, Supervisor, Customer Support & Engagement, Halifax Transit

Chappel indicated ways to improve accessibility for customers and public engagement are always being explored, and that bus stop accessibility is an ongoing priority. In 2020 there were 125 bus stop landing pads installed and 80 so far in 2021. Approximately 68% of all bus stops are accessible and new buses will be added to the access-a-bus fleet next year. Chappel further spoke to the Woodside Ferry Terminal renovation and indicated the first phase of the West Bedford park and ride is opening soon. It was noted that the number of accessible taxis in HRM has gone from 56 to 11 since 2015, and on February 23, 2021 Halifax Regional Council directed Transit to contract an accessible taxi-style service with the Municipality contributing to the cost.

Steven York, Superintendent, Road Operations & Construction, Transportation and Public Works

York indicated that funding is provided to the senior snow program and that new applications are being accepted. It was also noted that the winter maintenance service standards for bus stops have been reduced from 48 hours to 24 hours after a snow fall has stopped. Accessibility training with contractors and employees is ongoing.

Jennifer Fischer, Inclusion and Accessibility Specialist, Parks & Recreation

Fischer noted some successes include increased accessibility for newcomers, signage in various languages, decreased financial barriers for families and interpreters to assist children in programs with language barriers. Fischer further spoke to some of the projects being worked on with community groups. Staffing was identified as the biggest challenge.

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

Andrew Taylor opened up the floor and invited the public to share their feedback.

Rhonda Moulton stated that taking groceries home on regular buses poses challenges such as not being able to have bags on the back of your wheelchair and wanted to know why.

Nantau stated that due to the type of tie-downs, some buses do not allow for a bag on the back of wheelchair as it would not be safe, and noted that Access-A-Bus can be used for groceries.

Melanie Gaunt asked if the City could have some of its pools not heated as most of the pools are heated to a temperature that tends to be too hot for a person with autoimmune issues.

Staff indicated that this question would be best deferred to the Manager of Aquatics and a follow up response could be provided to the speaker.

Mary MacDonald asked what concrete steps the HRM will commit to in order to improve Access-A-Bus service.

Nantau noted that Transit makes over 600 Access-A-Bus trips per day and that new buses are coming which will have more space and shoulder straps. Mobile data terminals are being explored to provide real-time data to enhance performance and scheduling.

Jacki Purcell asked if there were any plans to extend Access-A-Bus services to more rural areas.

Nantau noted that as of now Access-A-Bus covers anywhere within 1000 meters of an existing bus stop.

Carole Arsenault asked how Transit decided 10 new accessible taxis were sufficient.

Nantau responded that an RFP was put out and the successful bidder has 10 accessible taxis available.

Janet Donville was looking for information on accessibility at various pools.

Yochoff spoke to accessibility options available at pools and beaches and directed the speaker to the website.

Mary MacDonald followed up about concrete steps on improving Access-A-Bus.

Nantau answered that anyone having mobility issues with steps can bring a companion to assist them.

An audience member asked about modular homes being purchased and what steps will be taken to make them accessible.

Young indicated that modular homes the speaker is referring to are not the ones being purchased by HRM.

Tammy Sampson asked if there is an email address to contact 311.

Jollimore noted the email address for 311 is contactus@311.halifax.ca

Darryl MacDonald noted there are lot of accessible parking spaces that cannot be used as they don't have the access stripes and that there should be a standard implemented.

Young indicated that there was no standard previously with respect to accessible spaces but this is now a part of the building standard.

Carole Arsenault asked if options for access-a-bus to use debit or pull-down accounts are being explored.

Nantau stated there are no plans for that in the immediate future, but Halifax Transit is looking for a fair management system that could be expanded into Access-A-Bus.

Melanie Gaunt asked why the City does not use universal design principles when constructing buildings.

Young indicated the City now uses universal design principles for all new construction.

Shaun Clark noted the decentralization of hospital services and asked if children can accompany a parent on the Access-A-Bus.

Nantau answered that Access-A-Bus provides door to door service anywhere in HRM and all passengers can have one companion, additional children can accompany parents so long as there is room on the bus.

Rhonda Moulton noted a lot of the sidewalks are bumpy which make it hard for people with accessibility challenges.

York outlined ongoing efforts to repair sidewalks in the North End and encouraged citizens to report issues with sidewalks so they can be investigated.

Bill Jordan asked about maintenance with respect to accessible parking spaces and sidewalks, and why it is difficult to trace responsibility for a particular disabled service.

York indicated that accessible parking spaces have standards for maintenance and encouraged residents to report any issues.

Yochoff indicated that the contact for inclusion and accessibility specialists at Parks and Recreation is inclusion@halifax.ca.

Janet Donville asked if there is a set standard for accessibility for hotel rooms.

Young agreed that accessibility continues to be an issue in hotels, but that this building code is not within HRM jurisdiction.

Milena Khazanavicius asked what was in place to make sure blind and partially sighted people are safe on transit buses.

Nantau indicated that operators go through 7 weeks of training when they start which includes educational training with respect to things such as diversity and inclusion training as well as accessibility. Bus stops are also announced on the bus.

Milena Khazanavicius asked if HRM plans to extend 311 services.

Jollimore indicated that 311 is working on trying to implement video relay and chat services.

Melanie Gaunt asked for clarification with respect to tripping hazards.

York provided examples of tripping hazards.

Milena Khazanavicius asked what the plan is for consultation with the disabled community in the future.

Young stated that the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Clerk's Office are avenues to bring accessibility concerns forward.

Chappel indicated that Transit is doing engagement with various organizations serving the community.

Yochoff stated they are also reaching out to community groups for feedback.

Anna Quon asked what kinds of things are being done to improve accessibility to programs and services for people living with mental health challenges.

Yochoff answered ongoing engagement with community organizations and training staff in mental health support.

Shaun Clark asked what happens when a bus goes on detour and visually impaired persons misses their stop.

Nantau indicated that the operator is there to help and should be engaged in this situation and that bus stops are also announced.

Gerry Post noted that Transit has come a long way with accessibility and feels Transit should offer access-a-bus users with a one-year free pass to use conventional buses as a lot are able to but are just nervous. Post would also like to see a seasonal service to places like Peggy's Cove and various beaches.

Nantau agreed that accessible transit has come a long way and highlighted ongoing and future efforts to improve it.

Bill Jordan inquired as to the apron maintenance for Mount Edward Road, Spring Garden Road, Martello Street and Fenwick Street.

York stated that they will look into the status of the service request.

Rhonda Moulton noted that a lot of the push buttons for sidewalks are not in accessible areas.

York spoke to the new standards for the location of push buttons.

Tammy Sampson stated that the wheelchair spots on Transit buses should not be directly beside each other as it poses mobility issues.

Nantau stated that unfortunately that is the standard retrofit of the buses.

Lisa Snider asked why videos with text transcript captions and sign language that show people transit options are not available.

Nantau stated that is a great suggestion and that they would follow up with them.

Shaun Clark asked if there are any plans to be able to access beaches via Transit.

Nantau noted that Council needs to approve changes to Transit routes.

Young responded that Penhorn Lake, Chocolate Lake and Albro Lake are all accessible via bus.

Janet Donville asked if the beaches at Penhorn Lake, Chocolate Lake and Albro Lake are also serviced by access a bus.

Nantau answered yes.

Bill Jordan asked about enforcement with respect to the safe passage policy.

York indicated that sidewalks are not to be blocked and that developers provide a construction mitigation plan.

Jen Powley asked why all crosswalk lights are not automatic.

Young and York noted that they are in the downtown core and are not outside of the core.

Liz Doull asked if something could be done about the intersection at Brunswick and Duke as it is quite steep.

York noted that section of Brunswick Street is going through a planning process to look at options to revitalize street.

Carole Arsenault inquired about rent being raised for building improvements.

Young indicated that the provincial building code and rent control are Provincial mandates and therefore could not comment.

Anna Quon asked how many people working for HRM have disabilities and would have an idea of what accessibility means from a lived experience.

Jollimore stated that a recent job posting for 311 operators was designated and 30 successful applicants have been identified.

Elizabeth MacCormick wanted to know what HRM is doing to actively recruit persons with disabilities and gave kudos to HRM for implementing the Rick Hansen Standards.

Young noted that HRM supports diversity and inclusion hiring policies but cannot speak to specific numbers.

Jen Powley wanted to know why crosswalk signals are not all automatic.

York noted in the downtown core they are automatic but outside of the core they are not.

4. CLOSING COMMENTS

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Andrew Taylor 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 8:20 p.m.

Alicia Wall
Legislative Support