

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MINUTES

JANUARY 21, 2002

PRESENT: Paul Connors, Chair
Councillor Sarto
Councillor Meade
Jane Cale
Peggy Brown
Betty MacDonald
Cynthia Street
Bob Venus
Joanne Coffey
Elsie Cholette
Anne Langille

ALSO PRESENT: Charla Williams, Diversity Program Coordinator
Lynne Le Boutillier, Assistant Municipal Clerk

REGRETS: Sally Campbell, Maureen Reynolds, Barbara LeGay, Mary
MacDonald and Kevin Hindle

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The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 4:00 p.m. The Chair introduced a new member to the Board, Joeanne Coffey.

1.0 **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The following items were added under 3.0, New Business:

- C Item 3.2 Closed Captioning - Special Events (Betty MacDonald)
- C Item 3.3 Playgrounds (Councillor Meade)
- C Item 3.4 Sidewalk Cafes - Update (Bob Venus)
- C Item 3.5 Pedestrian Signals - CNIB (Peggy Brown)

The agenda, as amended, was adopted on motion of Ms. Street and Ms. Brown.

2.0 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The November 19, 2001 minutes, previously circulated, and the December 17, 2001 minutes were approved, as circulated, on motion of Ms. Cholette and Mr. Venus.

3.0 **NEW BUSINESS**

3.1 **MOTORIZED WHEELCHAIRS - LACK OF REGULATIONS**

Councillor Meade referred to three accidents in Cape Breton involving motorized wheelchairs being hit by cars. Apparently there are no regulations pertaining to their use. It was felt that if there are any regulations they would fall under the Motor Vehicle Act. He wondered if there is anything the Committee can do regarding this situation, especially for motorized wheelchairs.

A discussion followed on how one can make oneself more visible. The Chair suggested wheelchairs be equipped with a retractable flag five feet in height. Mr. Venus reflected that he endeavours to make himself and his wheelchair visible when using it out-of-doors. He noted that he basically limits his wheelchair use out-of-doors to spring and summer. He could not recalled any regulations.

Peggy Brown noted that some of the new wheelchairs have flashers.

A member reflected that wheelchairs are only meant for sidewalk use and the users have to consider themselves pedestrians.

It was recognized that during bad weather, there is a tendency to use the roads, thereby traveling at risk.

The Chair recalled from his days working with the Municipality, that it was recognized that the height of a person in a wheelchair creates a similar situation related to visibility as for small children. Individuals at this height are not only harder for the motorist to see but there are obstructions to their line of sight, i.e. mail boxes, etc. He suggested that wheelchair users might want to voluntarily employ the use of a flag to make themselves more visible.

Drivers have to be more alert. Public awareness is important.

Referring to the situation in Cape Breton, Ms. Williams suggested that perhaps the individuals were travelling on the road because there were no sidewalks. Councillor Sarto recalled one of the incidents in Cape Breton took place in downtown Sydney. The wheelchair was travelling on the road not the sidewalk. It was felt that if you are going to travel on the road, they should be licensed. Ms. Williams suggested a complicating factor might be the sidewalk(s) were not ploughed, if there were sidewalks.

A discussion followed of the importance of clearing sidewalks by individuals abutting them. The public needs to be aware that it is not only wheelchairs that are impeded if sidewalks are not cleared but others affected by mobility problems.

The Chair recalled the Traffic Department sending out brochures a few years ago which dealt with the use of crosswalks and overhead crosswalk lights. He proposed a similar information program could be set up. He proposed, if it was the wish of the Committee to send a note to David McCusker, Traffic Authority to give some comments back to the Committee. If Mr. McCusker needed support, the Committee could write the Mayor.

It was suggested that perhaps a note could be included in the notice for re-registration of automobiles. The Chair felt broader circulation would be achieved by the use of the telephone bill, as not everyone owns a vehicle but almost everyone has a phone.

Ms. Williams lent her support of raising the issue with the business unit and providing suggestions on how to address.

The Chair or the Clerk will send a note to Mr. McCusker.

3.2 CLOSED CAPTIONING - SPECIAL EVENTS

Ms. MacDonald related to the Committee that the New Years Eve event broadcast by ATV, in partnership with HRM, had no closed captioning or signer. She felt this special event and others should be accessible to all individuals. Ms. MacDonald felt that funds for either closed captioning or a signer should be included in the budget of any special event. Mr. Connors reflected that it might be time for the criteria for special events to include an interpreter on stage. It was felt that in such instances closed captioning

would not be of any assistance to those actually attending the event, however.

A note will be sent off to Andrew Cox, HRM's Special Events Coordinator, asking for his comments on including the provision of an interpreter (signer) in the stipulations when setting up a special event. If Mr. Cox feels there is more to be addressed than can be contained in a written response, he could address at a future meeting.

It was once again observed that Regional Council sessions only have an interpreter until 8:00 p.m. It was reiterated that it is not a question of funding by HRM but the availability of interpreters. Apparently more people need to be trained. It was recognized that a very high standard for the interpreters is required. Ms. MacDonald offered to discuss the problem with the Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The Chair offered any support the Committee could lend in obtaining more interpreters. The Clerks Office should be tied into the discussions. Ms. MacDonald will pass along any information to the Clerk or Ms. Carmichael, the Municipal Clerk. The Chair will endeavour to take it the next step.

A discussion followed on the N.S. Community College's training program for interpreters. It was noted they follow very strict guidelines and it is not likely first year students could do any interpreting, but perhaps there could be negotiations with the Coordinator of the program for second year students to provide services.

3.3 **PLAYGROUNDS**

Councillor Meade referred to a conversation he had with Blair Blakeney, Regional Coordinator of Park Planning and Development regarding playgrounds, particularly accessibility. Mr. Blakeney indicated he was not aware of the existence of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

Mr. Blakeney's department installs playgrounds. Apparently there are no Canadian standards on what percentage of playgrounds should be accessible. The United States requires 25% of playground installations to be accessible, while school playgrounds must be 75% accessible.

It was noted that the new playground for Alderney Landing will be fully accessible. He noted that quite a few new playgrounds are going to be installed or old ones replaced in the near future, as they are unsafe. Councillor Meade felt at least a quarter of these should be accessible. Aspects which make them accessible is the use of rubber mats versus pea gravel and the use of ramps rather than ladders to reach play stations.

He felt if regulations are not in place, the accessible playgrounds will not likely be built. It was proposed that starting in 2003, there should be some component for wheelchair accessibility.

A question was posed regarding how many HRM residents use wheelchairs. Ms. Williams offered to obtain figures. She felt figures could be obtained from the School Board. Ms. Coffey suggested the Disabled Persons Commission also be contacted. It was noted that the Abilities Foundation might also be a source of information.

It was recalled that Recreation Nova Scotia was going to make sure playgrounds would be accessible for children with disabilities. Sharon Martin was identified as one of the programers involved with disabled sports.

Ms. Williams noted that while there are no regulations, the Municipality has stated that its services would be accessible to all residents, through the adoption of the Community and Race Relations Policy.

It was cautioned that the number of wheelchair users will change and will likely be under-represented. Ms. Williams referred to 20% of the population having a disability. It was also cautioned that accessible playgrounds don't just take into account wheelchair users but other forms of mobility impairment and other kinds of disabilities associated with sight and touch.

How to proceed was discussed at length. One suggestion was to send a letter to the Mayor asking him to have the Recreation Department investigate the issue. Ms. Williams offered to do some preliminary work. She did not feel it was the time to go through the Mayor or Regional Council. As time was of essence, the Chair will contact Ms. Williams in two weeks time. He will communicate directly to the Councillors. The Committee felt it was time to focus on this issue. It was noted that the two Councillors on the Committee to bring to Council's attention the need for 25% of playground apparatus to be accessible to those with disabilities.

3.4 SIDEWALK CAFES - UPDATE

It was recalled by the Councillors that there had been a report which dealt with sidewalk cafes. It was recalled that while they could be constructed, they could not obstruct traffic, etc. Councillor Meade felt there may be an inspection problem associated with sidewalk cafes.

Reference was made to Freeman's Cafe on Quinpool Road and its inaccessibility.

The Chair felt it may be an awareness issue. He hoped the associated application pointed out the need for accessibility.

3.5 PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS - CNIB

Peggy Brown explained to the Committee complaints associated with the crossing in

the vicinity of the CNIB at Almon. One individual has reported that while she can see the pole with the button at a distance, she can't find the pole when close up. Also contributing to the problem is the white paint associated with the crosswalk. The pole blends in.

The Chair made reference to an Information Report submitted to Regional Council, December 4, 2001, regarding Accessible Pedestrian Signals, which was provided in the agenda package.

The Chair will contact Mr. McCusker.

Ms. Williams asked if the complaint had been lodged with HRM staff prior to the meeting. She reminded the members that the Committee is not meant to act as a complaints department. The members were encouraged to direct individuals to register their concerns through the list of numbers previously provided or by the use of 490-4000. These numbers should be used even prior to bringing matters to the attention of Councillors. In the event the matter is not adequately addressed by staff, Councillors and the Committee could then become involved.

Reference was made to the benefits derived by staff when they have direct contact with the CNIB for instance. It was felt that CNIB should be given a copy of the list of numbers. Ms. Brown will discuss with the individual.

4.0 **BUSINESS ARISING FROM MINUTES**

4.1 **FEDERAL DISABILITY COMMISSIONER PROPOSAL**

Ms. Williams reported that she has not been able to find out anything more. It was noted that HRDC is creating a higher profile for persons with disabilities. It was recalled that at the time the information came to the Committee in March 2001, it was essentially an idea for creating such a position. She will continue to try to pull off any information from the web site.

Ms. Cholette advised that she has been in touch with the National Executive Director for further information. At the time the proposal was at a standstill. She has not heard back from the Executive Director. She will try to get in touch with this individual again and pass along any information to the members.

Ms. Williams asked the Clerk if she would pull out the minutes and see if the actual department is named.

It could not be recalled how the Committee had responded in March.

4.2 **BROCHURE - REGIONAL COUNCIL**

Peggy Brown was pleased to report that she has received a copy of the Regional Council brochure in braille and it appears perfect. She will bring her copy for next month's meeting.

Ms. Brown reported that Randy Harnish, CNIB had talked to Ed Goodhew about the problems being encountered with the braille. He had asked Peggy Brown to provide him with a copy of some of the braille produced by HRM. The Chair hoped that this will be resolved.

Circulated at the meeting was information from the Deafness Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia announcing their new text to braille service. The members were very pleased to hear of the service, as there is a demand for braille, above and beyond what the CNIB can do. A copy will be provided to Dorothy Cartledge, Production Manager, Marketing and Design. It was suggested by Ms. Williams that it might be worthwhile for the individual(s) who do the HRM braille printing to visit them. It was further suggested that Dorothy Cartledge be asked to contact the Association and to explore if there is any possibility of cooperation between HRM and them in this regard.

4.3 **AREA RATE FOR SNOW PLOWING - DISTRICT 15**

The Chair advised that he had spoken to Councillor Walker before the Christmas Season.

Councillor Meade referred to situations where a sidewalk runs along the back of a property which may be very difficult to get to, for example along Dunbrack, the Bedford Highway, etc. HRM will now plow. Two or three kilometers of plowing is involved.

Another aspect regarding snow removal related to snow removal supports for seniors and persons with disabilities. A copy of a report which went to Regional Council October 23, 2001 from Barb Nehiley, Special Project Advisory had been previously circulated in the agenda package. A small registration fee was proposed.

During discussion, it was noted that the City of Dartmouth and Bedford plow their sidewalks. An area rate offsets the costs. Councillors for Halifax can't come to agreement, whether to go this way. It was noted that the area rate charged only pays for a fraction of the actual cost of clearing sidewalks, however.

It was suggested to Ms. Langille and Ms. Cholette, who have concerns in this area, that they use the Community Council avenue to get them addressed. Ms. Williams briefly explained how the Community Councils fit into the process, emphasizing that they deal with local issues. It was noted that the Community Council for the area meets at the

Keshen Library.

The Clerk was asked to circulate the Community Council brochure with the February agenda package.

Councillor Meade also recalled there being a brochure on snow clearing, prepared by Barb Nehiley. It should be available at the storefronts.

4.4 **MEMBERSHIP - APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS**

In addition to two new members Ben Marston and Joanne Coffey being appointed to the Committee, it was noted that the terms of Don Mullins, Maureen Reynolds, Cythnia Street and Bob Venus were extended to November 2003. A membership list with expiry dates will be circulated with the next agenda package.

4.5 **COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM 2002-2003**

Reference had been made to a check list, during discussion of this item, at the November 19, 2001 meeting. The check list had been developed by the Community and Race Relations Policy Implementation Committee. Ms. Williams was to provide a copy. Ms. Cale had put forward a suggestion that the Committee consider applying for grants under the Community Grants Program related to making the HRM web site more accessible and to conduct a survey of HRM services which are accessible.

Ms. Williams advised the members the it has been found that the check list circulated to the HRM business units, while being checked off, does not motivate initiating activity. A meeting has been held of the Directors and Committee to discuss. She reported there was a positive reaction. Now she needs to address with the managers. She reflected that it appears the business units are doing a lot of things in this regard but not documenting.

It was felt that the issue of making the HRM web site more accessible has been dealt with. The Committee was advised of an equipment purchase which will help in achieving this goal. Ms. Cale confirmed this is being diligently worked on.

Given both these areas appear to have been addressed, there appeared to be nothing else the Committee could apply for under the Community Grants Program this year. The Chairman stressed that should something come to mind, over the course of the year, it be brought to the table. An application can be made under subsequent Community Grants Programs. The deadline for applications this year is January 31, 2002. Ms. Cale referred the members to pages 13 and 14 of the 2002/2003 brochure which refers to inclusion. Although copies of the brochure and application were previously provided, Ms. Williams noted that they are available on the HRM site and at

the HRM storefronts.

4.6 **ENDORSEMENT OF THE POLICY STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY AND RACE RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Ms. Cale advised that she has been told that the appropriate format to take the matter to Regional Council is through a background Information Report. She sent a draft to Ms. Williams for comment. Ms. Williams felt the draft was fine. The next step is for Ms. Cale to contact the representative on the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee, Shawn Lahey, who has been the liaison. Approval will be required of their Chair and a decision made upon a date to take to Regional Council. The Clerk was asked to circulate a copy at the February meeting of the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee.

4.7 **POLICE SERVICE - SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS FOR THE DEAF**

Ms. MacDonald asked this item be deferred to the February agenda.

4.8 **CRIME PREVENTION GUIDE**

The Clerk conveyed Karla Wigginton's thanks to Barb LeGay, Jane Cale, Elsie Cholette and Ann Langille for their input.

Ms. Langille reported that she had a call from Michael Landry, Police Services regarding her comments. She felt he had some good suggestions. She felt it would be worthwhile for the Committee to invite him to give a presentation as he had a lot of helpful hints to offer. The Chair suggested a decision on inviting him be made at the next meeting.

For the benefit of the new member, the Chair gave some background on this item noting that Police Services are working on a Crime Prevention Guide. Copies of the draft were provided to the members in October for their comment.

Ms. Coffey questioned whether people with disabilities are being targeted, as they are more vulnerable. This was not the impression left with Ms. Cale or Ms. Williams. The guidelines appear to aim at making people more confident.

4.9 **DRAFT CORRESPONDENCE TO MAYOR RE HOUSING CONCERNS OF THOSE WITH CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY**

Copies of Ms. Reynolds' draft letter were circulated in the agenda package. She had provided at the December meeting, but there had been no opportunity for discussion. Unfortunately she could not attend today's meeting.

Ms. Williams expressed concern that it is not apparent in the draft what is being asked for. It was felt it might be more appropriate for the draft to be developed as a report to Regional Council, with a recommendation. While a yes or no might not be immediately provided, at least Council will know where to refer it.

The Chair will contact Ms. Williams and follow-up with Ms. Reynolds.

Councillor Sarto displayed to the Committee a newspaper called "Update" in which there is an article on environmentally friendly housing. Maureen Reynolds is referred to in this article.

4.10 **REACH NOVA SCOTIA**

Ms. Cale had provided a copy of the newspaper notice that Councillor Sarto had referred to at the November meeting as background information for the Committee. The advertisement relates basically to individuals with disabilities seeking employment.

A discussion followed to help the members become more familiar with Reach Nova Scotia. Reference was made to its connections with Human Resources Development Canada. Ms. Coffey noted that Reach Nova Scotia usually deals with legal issues involving persons with disabilities. Ms. Cale noted that the session advertised was done in partnership with Human Resources.

Ms. Cholette referred to a monthly speakers corner put on by Reach Nova Scotia. The sessions usually take place at the Public Library, Spring Garden Road. Both she and Ms. Coffey reflected how wonderful and helpful these sessions are for people with disabilities. Last month's session was on the topic associated with deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Aspects of how individuals with disabilities can go about obtaining employment are also addressed. It was proposed that someone from TEAM work be invited to a Committee meeting to explain how they work with HRDC.

Ms. Brown referred to the work REACH Nova Scotia has done to make provincial courts more accessible. Ms. Cholette reflected on a tour she did with REACH of the law courts on Spring Garden Road. She observed that the majority are accessible. A couple don't have the microphones required for the deaf and hard of hearing, however. Areas for wheelchairs were observed in most of the court rooms. Ms. Coffey felt they had made real headway in the last short while.

4.11 **WEST END MALL TRAFFIC CONCERNS**

4.11.1 **TRAFFIC CALMING DEVICES IN VICINITY OF HALIFAX SHOPPING CENTRE**

The Chair had hoped that Mr. Hindle could have made today's meeting as he has a lot

of information regarding concerns associated with the West End Mall. He advised that he had not spoken to anyone associated with the shopping centres. He will contact Mr. Hindle and find out who he should be speaking with.

Ms. Brown noted that the bus stops have been moved again. The Chair referred to his discussion with the Traffic Authority. Apparently there is no regulation that shopping centres need to come to the Municipality to get approval to move stops on their site. In his experience he could not recall any problems associated with shopping centres in the past. He would like to find out more on how this is evolving.

Ms. Brown conveyed to the Committee observations that some people are being refused use of the washrooms associated with the Tim Hortons at the bus terminal location. If this is the case, it was felt they should contact Tim Hortons.

It was noted that the facilities are used as a depot for bus drivers to change, etc. Ms. Brown recalled there was a brochure indicating public washroom facilities would be available. She has raised at ATAC and Transit Services is looking into. If not solved by them, it was reiterated Tim Hortons should be contacted.

Ms. Williams referred to the fact that part of the West End Mall is owned by Sobeys, the other half by Walmart. This adds to the complications. This may have contributed to the difficulty observed moving from one section of the Mall to another.

Reflecting on the washrooms, she felt there must be some tie-in with Transit Services if the complex has a rest stop for drivers. She cautioned that one doesn't know why the individuals were denied access to the washrooms.

The Chair will call Kevin Hindle. The traffic concerns related to the West End Mall will be revisited, either through an information handout, Kevin Hindle or through contact with the mall representatives.

4.12 LOW FLOOR BUSES - UPDATE ON PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY BETTY MACDONALD AND NEED FOR WAY FOR DEAF TO COMMUNICATE WITH DRIVERS

The Chair indicated that he forgot to raise this matter with Mr. Hindle. The Chair made reference to a letter. The Chair will brief Mr. Hindle on the letter.

Ms. Brown indicated she felt the operation of low floor buses has been suspended with the arrival of snow.

Referring to the issue of numbers on buses, brought up previously, Ms. Brown indicated she should have something to report for the next meeting.

Due to the late hour the balance of the agenda was deferred to February:

- 4.13 Joint Meeting with Taxi and Limousine Committee - Follow-up
- 4.13.1 Draft Minutes
- 4.13.2 Transport Canada Airports Group
- 4.13.3 Subsidy for Access-a-Bus memo

5.0 Status Sheet

6.0 Accessible Transportation Advisory Committee

7.0 Next Meeting - February 18, 2002 - 4:00 p.m. Training Room, 3rd Floor Duke Tower

8.0 **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Lynne Le Boutillier
Assistant Municipal Clerk