

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
MINUTES
July 20, 2009

PRESENT: Ms. Helen McFadyen, Chair
Mr. Tom Boyd
Ms. Joanne Coffey
Mr. Gary Russell
Ms. Johanne Caron
Ms. Theresa Horwill
Councillor Jerry Blumenthal
Councillor Mary Wile

REGRETS: Ms. Mary Newcombe
Mr. Sid Sodhi

STAFF: Mr. Phil Townsend, Director, Infrastructure and Asset Management
Mr. Laughlin Rutt, HRM Diversity Consultant, Organizational
Development, Human Resources
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 p.m. in the Councillor's Lounge, 4th Floor City Hall, 1841 Argyle Street.

The Chair welcomed new member Ms. Theresa Horwill. Members of the Committee and staff introduced themselves for the record.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - June 15, 2009

MOVED by Ms. Joanne Coffey, seconded by Councillor Mary Wile that the minutes of June 15, 2009, as presented, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

- Additions:**
- 4.3.1 Copy of Letter re: Accessibility Seating at Commons Concert - Joanne Coffey
 - 4.3.2 Information Item 2 - Memo to Chair of the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee - Helen McFadyen
 - 8.1 Public Attendance at Meetings/Volunteer Recruitment - Laughie Rutt

MOVED BY Councillor Wile, seconded by Mr. Tom Boyd that the order of business, as amended, be approved. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

The Committee agreed to deal with Item 8.1 at this time.

8.1 Public Attendance at Meetings/Volunteer Recruitment

The Legislative Assistant clarified that all HRM Board and Committee meetings were open to members of the public who were welcome to attend as observers. Persons interested in volunteering with a Board or Committee are to contact the Municipal Clerk's Office for an application form or complete the form online at www.halifax.ca

4. BUSINESS ARISING/DEFERRED ITEMS

4.1 Update on Disbursement of Funds - Phil Townsend

Mr. Phil Townsend, Director, Infrastructure and Asset Management, provided an update on projects completed or proposed from the Accessibility Fund for the years 2008/09 and 2009/10. He will forward the information in PDF format to the Chair.

In regard to the issues with the Service Dog Park, Mr. Townsend advised that the fence height had been increased, the gates locked and signage ordered. He suggested a Grand Opening announcement be made in August.

Ms. McFadyen inquired whether something could be done with the Cogswell Street/Rainnie Drive intersection located near the Service Dog Park as it was extremely difficult to navigate independently.

In regard to making City Hall more accessible, the Committee agreed that improvements to the entrance on Argyle Street would include: better positioning of the main door operators and speaker button; addressing issues with the wooden door swelling and sticking in humid weather; rounding off lift at bottom of door for easier manoeuvrability of manual wheelchairs and permitting door to open automatically when button is pushed.

Mr. Townsend noted that there was a security/safety issue with having the Argyle Street door open automatically, therefore; there was a need to have someone vetting the operation to ensure that the person on the other side was the one granted access and that the person was ready for the door to open. He also noted the challenges with City Hall being a heritage building. Mr. Townsend explained that getting a ramp up to the front of the building was a huge challenge due to the significant elevation change and the fact that the entrance was the ceremonial entrance to the building. A ramp would end by the flag pole which would impede any vehicles that may need to utilize the circle area.

Mr. Laughie Rutt, HRM's Diversity Consultant, Organizational Development, Human Resources, volunteered to assist staff in identifying issues with the Argyle Street entrance and possible solutions.

Councillor Jerry Blumenthal requested that funding be considered to make the St. Andrew's Centre, Bayers Road, more accessible particularly in accessing the upper floors. Ms. McFadyen also noted the lack of a sidewalk from the main road to the main door of the building.

In response to Councillor Blumenthal's request for consideration of funding for accessibility improvements to the Needham Centre, Mr. Townsend advised that staff were working on the figures for the work that would be required.

Mr. Rutt noted that the Needham Centre was in a prime location and that there would be significant work needed to address issues such as: need for power door operators; lower counter in reception area; size of reception area is too small; exterior ramp is too steep; an elevator would be required to access the gym upstairs as the same elevator cannot be used to service the pool area due to safety concerns. \$200,000 would be used very quickly for this project.

Mr. Townsend commented that the Needham Centre project was big enough that it would be outside the accessibility fund.

Discussion ensued concerning the Spryfield Lions Centre and accessibility improvements required such as: accessible washrooms; accessible entrance to building; ramps to seating area and door tags. Mr. Townsend noted that other work would include addressing water issues and paving the parking area.

Mr. Townsend announced that the following work was being done to the Centennial Pool but would not be funded from the Accessible Fund: increasing width of entry doors; push button operation; improvements to locker rooms and pool deck.

Ms. McFadyen noted that more access was required at the Halifax Public Library.

Following discussion on the proposed projects, the following motions were placed:

MOVED by Councillor Mary Wile, seconded by Councillor Jerry Blumenthal that the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities recommend the installation of audible signals at the three Halifax Ferry Terminals. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

MOVED BY Ms. Joanne Coffey, seconded by Councillor Jerry Blumenthal that the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities recommend that staff investigate problems with the Argyle Street accessible entrance to City Hall and await direction for distribution of funds. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

MOVED BY Ms. Joanne Coffey, seconded by Councillor Mary Wile that the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities recommend the Accessibility Fund produce funds for the wheelchair pool lift at the Captain William Spry Centre, Spryfield. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

In response to Ms. McFadyen, Mr. Rutt advised that he was not certain if there was a policy in regard to braille or tactile signage for HRM buildings as contractors would follow whatever codes were in existence at the time.

Mr. Tom Boyd noted that the Captain William Spry Centre needed braille or tactile indicators for the washrooms and elevators.

MOVED BY Ms. Joanne Coffey, seconded by Mr. Gary Russell that the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities request that staff extend \$50,000 to the Lions Centre in Spryfield, according to the direction of HRM staff, to increase accessibility. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Mr. Townsend advised that a more detailed update on the projects funded/to be funded

will be provided for the September meeting.

In response to Mr. Rutt, Mr. Townsend advised that staff would hold off on the issues with the Visitors Centre at the Old Moirs Mill property in Bedford as HRM's Service Review program has just commenced. The issue of the Information Centres would be addressed as part of that review.

4.2 Draft Committee Report on Metro Transit Accessibility for Approval

- A draft of the proposed report to Regional Council was before the Committee.

Ms. McFadyen provided a brief background on the issue and reviewed highlights of the report intended for the August 4th session of Regional Council. She noted that background information from 2002 had been circulated with the agenda packages.

Following discussion on the draft report, the following motion was placed:

MOVED BY Ms. Theresa Horwill, seconded by Ms. Johanne Caron that the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities recommend that the report on Metro Transit Accessibility be forwarded to Regional Council with the following amendments:

1. The insertion of the following paragraph in the Discussion section of the Information Report:

The following report has been created to identify some of the deficiencies which impact persons who are blind or partially sighted in regard to the transit system. There has been input from numerous focus groups, Committees and individuals who are concerned with issues of the blind. The information contained herein will identify some possible solutions.

2. Change the word "*Recommendation*" in the Information Report section to "*Solution*"

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

Councillor Blumenthal and Ms. Theresa Horwill retired from the meeting at 5:27 p.m.

The Committee agreed to deal with Item 5.1 at this time.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1 Google Transit Information

Mr. Dayalan Pillay, Manager, Web Services and E-Commerce, Business Planning and Information Management, advised that it is easier to make a website accessible while it is being developed and that the current website was 98% accessible five years ago when it was developed. He requested the assistance of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities in designing a new website that would be more accessible. He suggested a test group with a maximum of twenty persons to look at the site and provide feedback.

Ms. McFadyen offered to assist Mr. Pillay in organizing the test group.

Mr. Pillay explained that GOOGLE has built a link into their product to an accessible version including a mapping tool. A motion will be going forward to Regional Council requesting permission for staff to provide street information for free to the company that sells the information to GOOGLE in order to ensure that the HRM street information is accurate. He noted that the timeframe for the new accessible website would be December 2009 with testing in September.

In response to Ms. McFadyen, Mr. Pillay advised that:

- There were text spots in the HRM website page WHOSE JOB IS IT; the user would simply need to scroll down to view those tags.
- A list of screen readers compatible with the HRM website could be provided on the new website, however; HRM cannot promote products.
- In regard to the electronic voting system, HRM cannot do anything with that product as the requirement to descramble to gain access to the site was part of the security requirements.
- Bus schedules will be in a completely accessible format on the new website for those who are blind/hearing impaired.
- A disclaimer can be placed on the HRM website advising that accessible trips may not be identified on the GOOGLE website. Mr. Pillay offered to investigate the possibility of identifying continuous accessible trips.
- Certain files, sometimes due to size, will not pass through HRM's Firewalls.

The Committee thanked Mr. Pillay for his presentation.

4.3 2009 Work Plan

4.3.1 Letter re: Accessibility Seating at Commons Concert

Ms. Joanne Coffey advised that she had copies of a letter recently submitted to the Chronicle-Herald in regard to issues with accessibility seating at the Concert on the Commons. She suggested that the Committee discuss this matter further at the next meeting and consider the possibility of an Accessible Audit Tool or checklist, similar to one

in use by Hamilton, ON, that could be used by HRM in the planning of all future special events. Ms. Coffey noted, for example, that an increase in Metro Transit service had been provided for the concerts but that there had been no increase to Access-a-Bus service.

In response to Ms. McFadyen on whether or not HRM leased the property to promoters, and; ensuring accessibility issues were included in future contracts for special events, Councillor Wile offered to follow-up on the issue and suggested the matter also be forwarded to the Chief Administrative Officer for comment.

Due to time constraints, this matter was deferred to the August meeting.

4.3.2 Information Item 2 - Memo to Chair of the Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee

Ms. McFadyen advised that a Memo had been sent to Councillor Steve Adams, Chair, Taxi and Limousine Advisory Committee, in regard to the guide for drivers entitled "*Important Information for Taxi Drivers in HRM About Passengers with Disabilities*". She inquired how the guide was being distributed to ensure that each driver would be familiar with the document and also have a copy in their vehicle. She noted that posting the information was not sufficient for wide distribution of the information. She requested that the information be provided to the Taxi Commission and that the information also be posted on the website.

Mr. Gary Russell noted that the taxi drivers for Yellow Cab were provided a copy when they paid their bills (each Monday) at the Yellow Cab office. He was uncertain how Casino was distributing the information to their drivers.

During the ensuing discussion on the issue, members of the Committee suggested that:

- A Focus Group be held every five years with the drivers to inquire if they had read the guide and to obtain feedback from them.
- That the guide be available in other languages as many drivers have English as their second language.
- That MISA be approached in regard to providing translations of the guide.
- That the guide become part of the orientation for drivers when applying for their Taxi License.

Councillor Wile offered to follow-up with Councillor Adams on this issue.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1 Google Transit Information

This item was dealt with earlier in the meeting. See page 6.

5.2 Sidewalk Closures and Obstructions: Impact for Persons with Disabilities

Ms. McFadyen noted the issue of sandwich boards on sidewalks and the arrival of the sidewalk cafés which impede pedestrian/wheelchair traffic. She noted that staff have attended the Committee meetings and the issue is one of enforcement of the By-Laws.

In regard to road/sidewalk closures, Ms. McFadyen suggested that E-alerts be sent to a subscribers list, similar to the system used by the Halifax Dartmouth Bridge Commission, to alert people of road construction/sidewalk closures so that they may plan alternate routes.

In response to Mr. Tom Boyd, Councillor Wile advised that she would inquire about the software for advising of street closures/road construction that may be in use by Emergency personnel. She noted that Emergency Personnel would be automatically notified of road/sidewalk obstructions and or closures.

Ms. McFadyen requested that the information also be sent to the Information Management department for comment.

Mr. Gary Russell retired from the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Quorum was lost at this time.

6. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS AND DELEGATIONS - NONE

7. REPORTS - NONE

8. ADDED ITEMS

8.1 Public Attendance at Meetings/Volunteer Recruitment

This item was dealt with earlier in the meeting. See page 3.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting is scheduled for August 17, 2009

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:03 p.m.

Chris Newson
Legislative Assistant