

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

March 19, 2012

PRESENT: Theresa Horwill, Chair
Tom Boyd, Vice Chair
Troy Nauffts
Mary Newcombe
Councillor Mary Wile

REGRETS: Councillor Jerry Blumenthal
Brian Aird
Cynthia Bryant

ABSENT: David MacLean

STAFF: Laughlin Rutt, Diversity Consultant, Human Resources
Supt. Cliff Falkenham, Halifax Regional Police
Darren Young, Project Manager, Infrastructure & Asset
Management
Jenny Benson, Legislative Support

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00pm on the 3rd Floor of Duke Tower, 5251 Duke Street, Halifax.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 20, 2012

MOVED by Councillor Mary Wile, seconded by Tom Boyd, that the minutes of February 20, 2012 be approved as circulated. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

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

Additions:

- 8.1 Town Hall Meeting Logistics
- 8.2 Service Dog Park

MOVED by Councillor Mary Wile, seconded by Mary Newcombe, that the agenda be approved, as amended. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

4. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES

4.1 Disability Training (continuation) – *Laughlin Rutt, Human Resources*

While this agenda item was deferred to the next meeting, Mr. Rutt requested that Committee members consider this difference between the terms equity and equality when it comes to working with persons with disabilities.

4.2 Accessibility Focus Issues for Educational Awareness – *Shaune MacKinlay, Corporate Communications*

The List of Accessibility Focus Issues for Educational Awareness was before the Committee. Ms. MacKinlay and the Committee agreed that the best use of her time would be to go through the List of Accessibility Focus Issues that they developed the last time that she presented.

It was agreed that public service announcements relating to yard waste cleanup will be developed for spring and that they can have a focus on the importance of individuals with disabilities having clear sidewalks. Mr. Nauffts requested that the By-law regarding branches impeding sidewalks be summarized in the announcement to encourage individuals to cut back their branches. Ms. MacKinlay noted that this would also be an opportunity to help people realize the difference between their property and municipal property.

Mr. Boyd asked if Communications do anything to promote the community gardens – Ms. MacKinlay explained that establishing community gardens is a citizen driven process and that information and tips on starting a community garden are included in municipal publications and on the website.

Ms. MacKinlay offered to work with the solid waste contractors to discuss garbage and green bins that may block sidewalks on pickup days. The Committee discussed the fact that this would also create an opportunity to raise awareness about keeping sidewalks clear during curb side giveaways.

The Committee was informed that it is illegal for bicycles that are locked up to block the sidewalk; however, Committee members noted that bicycles which are locked to parking metres often do. Ms. MacKinlay discussed the fact that every year HRM provides more bicycle racks and hopefully this will encourage individuals to use the racks instead of parking metres. She made the point that the municipality wants to encourage individuals to ride their bikes so they have to be careful around the messaging in this regard. She also offered to add some information about this to the active transportation website.

A number of areas in HRM have sidewalk clearing but most residential areas on the peninsula do not. Ms. MacKinlay explained that they are currently in the process of reviewing their snow communications and told the Committee that she will ensure that their concerns in this regard are raised as part of the review process. She noted that HRM has a large following on Twitter especially around snow events and snow removal so they could also take advantage of that means of communication.

Ms. MacKinlay suggested that perhaps HRM could work with police to help re-iterate issues that individuals with disabilities face at crosswalks. Supt. Falkenham made the point that the rules for individuals with disabilities at crosswalks are no different than they would be for anyone else, they have to make sure that they are seen and that vehicles have stopped before crossing the street.

Mr. Koutroulakis will provide the Committee with copies of the HRM crosswalk safety pamphlet for the next meeting.

It was clarified that it is against the law for vehicles to park on the sidewalk and they can be ticketed for doing so.

The Committee was informed that there is a by-law in existence relating to the obstruction of sidewalks with sandwich board signs; however, it cannot be enforced at this time because it is being revised and placed into the Streets By-law. The Committee noted that Spring Garden seems to be where this issue is the most prominent. Ms. MacKinlay offered to work with the Spring Garden Business Association to help them to better understand the kinds of challenges that sandwich board signs pose to individuals with disabilities. She also offered to do a public service campaign to raise awareness about the challenges that the signs pose especially when there are many on one block to encourage vendors to be more aware of their surroundings. Mr. Nauffts asked if there

would be an opportunity for the Committee to offer recommendations on the By-law that is being revised. Ms. Mellett offered to alert the Committee when the By-law was going through First Reading so that they could send in their comments.

With regard to idling cars and buses affecting people with breathing difficulties, Ms. MacKinlay noted that there are a number of organizations that the Committee could connect with, such as Clean Nova Scotia. It was noted, however, that there are a number of vehicles that have to keep their engines running for mechanical reasons, such as buses.

The Committee had raised concerns about the obstruction and interruption of sidewalks by patios at cafés and bars in Halifax. It was noted that there is an issue with this because HRM actively encourages businesses to have patios which create more business for restaurants and bars. Supt. Falkenham and Mr. Koutroulakis went through the rules already in place in this regard and noted that the police communicate with restaurant owners and managers when establishments appear to be breaking those rules.

Mr. Nauffts believes that individuals should be better informed about the “do’s and don’ts” of service dogs. Mr. Boyd suggested to Ms. MacKinlay that she contact the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) since they have a lot of educational information that would be useful when looking at advertising options. It would be outside of HRM’s scope to deal with this through a public awareness campaign but Ms. MacKinlay thought it would be good to raise awareness in municipal areas such as parks and recreation centres.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1 Pedestrian Signals – *Taso Koutroulakis, A/Manager, Traffic & Right of Way Services*

Mr. Boyd noted that the Committee discussed this issue the last time that Mr. Koutroulakis came before the Accessibility Committee. Mr. Koutroulakis stated that the 1.2 metre/second standard time for crossing is taken from a manual published in the United States that is used to determine average walking speed. At locations where there is a high number of seniors or individuals with mobility impairments the average is generally dropped to 1.0m/s as they had done at Spring Garden and Robie. Mr. Boyd stated that he did not think the average had been dropped to 1.0m/s at this intersection because it is at least 80m and you are given 20 seconds to get across.

Canadian practitioners are currently analyzing the average walking speeds across Canada. Mr. Koutroulakis is working on this project at a national level which is seeking to drop the average walking speed to 1.1 metre/second.

5.1.1 Pedestrian walk Signals – Robie & Spring Garden; Robie & Quinpool; North Park/Cogswell/Rainnie intersections

When discussing these three intersections, Mr. Koutroulakis agreed with the Committee in thinking that there is not enough time for individuals to cross at these three locations. He shared that Traffic & Right of Way Services are working through the complexities of changing walking times to make them more adequate. He discussed some of the challenges that they are facing because of the old technology they are currently using. At the same time, he noted that they will be upgrading the signal controllers throughout the peninsula which will allow the crossing time to be adjusted more easily. These changes are being processed and should be implemented over the next few weeks.

Mr. Boyd noted that HRM has to take into better consideration the surrounding of each intersection, for example intersections surrounded by doctors' offices and hospitals where people are more likely to be impeded in some way. Mr. Koutroulakis provided the Committee with some examples where they have already done this but also expressed his understanding of the various challenges.

5.1.2 Audible Pedestrian Signals – Windsor & North; Robie & North

The Chair noted that after speaking with several residents that attend the CNIB on Gladstone Street in Halifax, there should be audible pedestrian signals at the intersections of Windsor and North Streets and Robie and North Streets. Mr. Koutroulakis advised that he would take a look at these intersections.

5.2 Emera Oval – Accessible Parking – Taso Koutroulakis, A/Manager, Traffic & Right of Way Services

The Chair noted concern with the handicap bathroom at the Oval because shale was installed in front of it which causes a great deal of challenge for individuals with disabilities. She also noted that accessible parking was not available at the Oval this season. Mr. Koutroulakis said that they are planning to put in accessible parking. Mr. Rutt volunteered to go out to the Oval to help him pick an appropriate area for parking. Mr. Young and Mr. Koutroulakis said that there would be accessible parking and an access-a-bus stop when the Oval opens next winter.

On a separate matter, Mr. Boyd commented that there are two poles on Agricola for parking signs between Charles and West Streets, although there have been no parking signs on these poles for many months. Mr. Koutroulakis ensured the Committee that he would look into this.

5.3 Emergency Preparedness for Persons with Disabilities – Emergency Management Office (EMO) publication

The publication “Are you ready? Nova Scotia’s Guide to Disaster Preparedness: Tips for Persons with Disabilities; Tips for Frail or Older Seniors” was circulated to the Committee. Mr. Barry Manual, EMO Coordinator, will attend the April 16, 2012 meeting to review the publication with the Committee.

6. CORRESPONDENCE, PETITIONS & PRESENTATIONS

6.1 Correspondence – None

6.2 Petitions - None

6.3 Presentations

6.3.1 HRM Municipal Election 2012 – *Cathy Mellett, Municipal Clerk*

A document from the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities (NSLEO) to HRM entitled “How HRM Elections addresses Equal Opportunity for Voters with Disabilities” was before the Committee.

This is the first of two meetings that Ms. Mellett is planning to have with the Accessibility Committee in preparing for the 2012 HRM municipal election. NSLEO have been working with HRM to ensure that their municipal elections are fully accessible. Their concerns were three-fold and related to transportation, communications and individuals with disabilities running for office and volunteering or working for the election. Ms. Mellett noted that her office is very excited to make this election as accessible as possible.

Accessibility concerns are being addressed through an e-voting initiative which will allow individuals to vote via phone or internet. This election residents will be able to cast ballots by phone, online or in person on advanced polling days, or in person on election day. The internet voting firm that HRM will be using, Scytl, has the highest accessibility in the world, and have conducted elections in Sweden and Spain. They are currently going through a number of format tests.

NSLEO requested that HRM provide transportation for election workers to get to work, however, the municipality would not be able to afford the cost of transportation for the one thousand individuals who will be working. HRM does, however, encourage everyone to get involved in the election including individuals with disabilities.

When it comes to candidates’ meetings being accessible, HRM will be providing candidates with information packages reminding the candidates to keep individuals with disabilities in mind when choosing meeting locations and the formatting of their campaign materials.

An accessibility checklist will be used as polling locations are being selected. Not all polling locations will be fully accessible; however, they will choose locations based on the ones with the most accessibility features. The features of each location will be in the election materials. The election office will be fully accessible. Mr. Boyd noted that many of these polls will be located in HRM buildings that the Committee has not surveyed yet. He asked whether or not the locations could be brought before the Committee to expand its list of evaluated building. Mr. Young informed the Committee that he has already been working on this initiative in partnership with Ms. Mellett.

In all communications relating to the election, accessibility will be taken into account, starting with the use of plain language in communications. Ms. Mellett noted that accessibility standards for the website are not perfect but they are working to make improvements. Advertising will be done through a variety of means. There will be two campaign workshops run by HRM for individuals interested in running, and Ms. Mellett suggested that an organization like NSLEO find funding to run a campaign school specifically for individuals with disabilities who are looking to run.

Ms. Mellett informed the Committee that diversity training is always provided for election workers to make them aware that all individuals have different literacy and ability levels. She said that she would bring this module to the attention of the Committee when it is complete in September.

Councillor Wile asked if there would be bilingual individuals at the polls and Ms. Mellett said that they will have bilingual individuals at the polls if they are running elections for CSAP. Councillor Wile noted that French is a prominent language for individuals from Middle Eastern countries and there are many such individuals in her District (Clayton Park) who will be voting for the first time this election. Councillor Wile also noted that it is very difficult to find a location in Halifax West that is fully accessible.

Ms. Mellett indicated she plans to contact Halifax Regional Library administration to discuss having the software required for the polling website functions downloaded onto computers at all public libraries, to make the process more user-friendly.

Ms. Mellett is planning on coming back to the Committee in September to share some more information.

Councillor Wile left at 5:36 pm at which time the Committee lost quorum.

7. REPORTS

7.1 Update on accessibility assessment of HRM owned/operated buildings

7.1.1 Staff Update – Needham Centre – Estimates for First Floor/Pool Accessibility

The Chair shared with the Committee that Councillor Blumenthal emailed her to inform her that he is dedicating capital money from his budget to make accessibility improvements to the first floor of the Needham Centre.

Mr. Young identified five main categories that would make the site and the first floor more accessible. The ramp is currently too steep so he is planning on converting the upper area and putting in two accessible parking spaces. The building requires six door operators to accommodate this. The family washroom requires a few adjustments such as lowering the paper towel and toilet paper dispensers. The pool access will be modified in a number of ways such as inserting a pool lift and putting a few lockers in at the pool level along with the shower. There will be some lever handles inserted along with some tactile signage. Mr. Young will be looking into the timeline around this project.

The Chair asked that the door operators be a priority in this project after discussions that she has had with staff.

At the suggestion of Mr. Boyd, Mr. Young added modifying the reception desk to make it accessible to his list of things to do at the Centre.

7.1.2 Committee Member Update – Halifax Central Library

It was noted that the Chair, Mr. Boyd, and Supt. Falkenham attended the technology presentation by staff at the library. The design is planned to include motion-sensor signage which will give audio directions to library users. The library was unaware of a number of options available and concerns relating to individuals with hearing impairment. The library is going to have capabilities in this regard on each floor of the library. The library was unaware of how their placements of certain things would greatly inconvenience individuals with disabilities, such as putting a scanner in a corner instead of in the centre of a room.

Mr. Young is concerned about the motion detector signage because it is going to be a very busy library so the signs will constantly be going off. He has been doing some research on directional matting that helps to channel individuals. When asked about tactile signage at the meeting, the Chair suggested that they get in contact with Mr. Young who has presented tactile signage samples at previous meetings.

The Committee noted that one of the major issues in terms of accessibility for the library was that there was no place for the Access-A-Bus to stop. Mr. Koutroukalis advised that they are already working on solving this issue.

8. ADDED ITEMS

8.1 Town Hall Meeting Logistics

Mr. Boyd commented that at the previous meeting the Committee committed to hold a town hall meeting on behalf of the Disability Rights Coalition. With the bus strike now

over the Committee thought it would be a good idea to hold the Town Hall Meeting in May. Mr. Nauffts indicated that he had some follow up questions to forward to the presenters and requested their contact information, which the Chair will forward. Councillor Wile offered to assist with organizing the event. This matter will be added to the next meeting agenda for further discussion.

8.2 Service Dog Park

Mr. Nauffts asked if anyone had any further details on a potential development adjacent to the service dog park next to the Centennial Pool. Mr. Koutroulakis indicated that while he understands the proposed development is not moving forward at this time, there are no plans for the service dog park to be sold or altered regardless of any adjacent development.

9. NEXT MEETING DATE – April 16, 2012

9.1 April 16, 2012 – discuss meeting location and time

The next meeting is booked at one of the libraries, however, at this point in the meeting there was no quorum to make a decision on this issue. The library is closed on Mondays so the Committee would have to meet 2-4pm if it was to take place on a Monday. The Legislative Assistant will send out an email to Committee members to find out if they could meet earlier on a Monday or on a different day.

Mr. Boyd forwarded regrets for the April meeting.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Jenny Benson
Legislative Support

INFORMATION ITEMS

1. Approved Revised Terms of Reference