

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

JULY 17, 2000

MINUTES

PRESENT: Darrell Robar, Chair
Peggy Brown
Cynthia Street
Betty MacDonald
Anne Langille
Jane Cale
Maureen Reynolds
Barbara LeGay
Paul Connors

ALSO PRESENT: Roel Vis, Schedule Planner, Transit Services
Charla Williams, Diversity Coordinator
Lynne Le Boutillier, Assistant Municipal Clerk

REGRETS: Margaret Hiltz, Donald Mullins, Bob Venus, Donald MacDonald

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0.1 **INTRODUCTION**

Freda Duchan, a new interpreter, was introduced to the members.

4.4 **ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR (CO-CHAIR)**

It was noted by Ms. Williams that this will be the first election under the new terms of reference. Elections are required annually.

Ms. Williams assumed the Chair and called for nominations for the position of Chair three times. Nominations ceased on motion of Ms. Langille. **Mr. Paul Connors was declared Chair by acclamation.**

Nominations were called for Vice-Chair (Co-Chair). Jane Cale was nominated for this position. There being no further nominations, Peggy Brown moved nominations cease. **Ms. Jane Cale was declared Vice-Chair (Co-Chair).**

Mr. Connors will take over the role of Chair at the September meeting.

1.0 **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Ms. Brown requested that an item be added under New Business - Item 4.5 - Royal Bank Renovations Spring Garden Road - Safety Issue.

2.0 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the May 15, 2000 meeting were adopted, as circulated, on motion of Peggy Brown and Barb LeGay.

3.0 **BUSINESS ARISING FROM MINUTES**

3.1 **2000-2001 WORK PLAN - SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE**

Ms. Cale advised that she had met with Charla Williams. They concluded that there needed to be a discussion of Activity 2, drafting of the Policy Statement, i.e.:

- What is a Policy Statement?
- Does the Committee need one? Want one?
- Does the Committee have the time and resources?

During discussion, it was noted that the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee developed their policy, with the help of an outside consultant, over the

course of 2 or 3 years. It was suggested that the Committee's time might be better spent coming up with Guidelines for the community it represents and their issues.

Ms. Cale gave some history as to why she had brought the matter to the Committee's attention, ie. she had visited the Web site for the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee and noted that in comparison to the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities' Web site, there was very little on this Committee's Web site. Ms. Cale noted that the C & RR's Web site had definitions, a Mission/Policy Statement and their Goals and Objectives.

A discussion followed on the advantages and disadvantages of not having a Policy Statement. Ms. Cale suggested that perhaps all the information the Web page needs to contain should relate to who we are and what we (the Committee) do.

Ms. Williams had a copy of the Community and Race Relations Policy brochure. She recalled that the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee first developed their Policy and then their Terms of Reference from the Policy. She stressed that the Policy is inclusive and includes persons with disabilities as one of the diverse communities. She felt developing a second policy might, therefore, be somewhat redundant.

Referring to discussions about developing Accessibility Guidelines, she felt these were not Policy but a practice the Municipality should adopt and to some degree is adopting. Ms. Williams felt the Committee needs to find out where the Municipality is in this regard.

She suggested that the members may wish to review the Community and Race Relations Policy to see if it is sufficiently inclusive. She quoted from the Mission Statement, which appears to reflect the Committee being covered.

Mr. Robar questioned whether there was any requirement by Regional Council that the Committee has a Policy. Ms. Williams assured the members Council does not get involved in these matters.

Referring to the Community and Race Relations Policy, Ms. LeGay asked Ms. Williams if the Policy was the advisory committee's or Council's? Ms. Williams indicated it was Council's Policy.

Ms. Williams questioned what Guidelines the Committee would like to impose on the Municipality pertaining to issues of persons with disabilities. Ms. MacDonald felt a generally worded, broad statement should suffice. A statement for each disability would not be required, ie. the Municipality will endeavour to make the HRM accessible

to all individuals. Ms. Cale reflected on the C & RR Policy referring to all diverse communities, as being very general.

Mr. Connors felt the matter was probably covered in the terms of reference.

Reference was made to an internal HRM Committee looking into Business Units to identify what needs to be done to ensure that the HRM is a truly inclusive municipality. A week has been identified in September for business units to identify what they have done in the past and what needs to be done in future. Ms. Williams felt there will be certain areas, where the advice from this Committee will be very useful. She referred to the acquisition of the braille printer and the request regarding curb cuts, as examples of progress. The HRM is endeavouring to do the right thing and looks to this Committee for advice.

Ms. Williams was of the opinion that the time required to develop a Policy would be a waste.

Ms. LeGay expressed reservations about the C & RR Policy covering off this matter. She felt they would likely assume it is mainly Community and Race Relations. She felt that the Committee needs to put its stamp on the Policy and proposed that perhaps a letter could be written to Council acknowledging that the Policy exists and the Committee fully endorses the Policy as it applies to persons with disabilities. Along with this letter, Ms. Cale suggested something to this effect be put on the Committee's Web page.

In addition to the Committee reviewing the C & RR Policy to ensure nothing is missing, it was proposed by Ms. Williams that the Chair of the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee be invited to an upcoming meeting to discuss the possibility of going to Council jointly endorsing the Disabilities Community being included under the Policy. Ms. Williams noted that the two Web pages could be linked.

Mr. Connors supported having a meeting with Ms. Thomas, Chair, Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee. He also proposed coming up with a basic statement, i.e. the intent of the HRM is to make all things accessible to all residents, in accordance or concert with Policy Statements contained in the C & RR Policy, therefore making the need to rewrite unnecessary.

Ms. Williams felt that it would be more appropriate that further discussion of this matter be held with the larger group, the Main Committee versus the Sub-committee, unless the Committee is prepared to give clear direction to the sub-committee.

Ms. Street questioned whether the proposed scenario would give HRM more teeth to

pursue. Ms. Williams reflected that the piece about accessibility of buildings, for instance, is more administrative than for Council. Administrative matters go through the CAO and these are the pieces that the business units would welcome advice and assistance from the Committee on. She noted that the CAO and Deputy CAOs and Directors have endorsed the Policy. Everything is in place and the Committee just has to decide where it wishes to focus, in concert with staff. Some of things the Committee is interested in, may have already been developed by staff.

Paul Connors reflected that it may be a disservice to bring in a simple statement, but better to bring the C & RR Policy before Council again and advise Council of the implications/connection with the disabilities community and suggest it be run by staff again from this perspective.

Ms. LeGay proposed some sort of addendum, as the Policy does not make you think automatically of persons with disabilities. Ms. Williams agreed with this suggestion and felt that by inviting the Chair of the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee, work on the addendum could be done jointly. Ms. MacDonald supported keeping it simple.

Ms. Cale suggested that the sub-committee could work on wording re Activity 2 to reflect what has been stated today.

While Paul Connors, Barb LeGay, Cynthia Street, Jane Cale were initially asked to submit drafts for the sub-committee's review, submissions from other members would be welcomed. Drafts to be submitted through the Clerk. Deadline for drafts the end of July. The final version to be fine-tuned by the whole Committee. It was noted that the sub-committee consists of Darrell Robar, Jane Cale, Cynthia Street and Charla Williams. Darrell Robar was not sure whether he was included by virtue of being Chair at the time. Both Mr. Robar and Mr. Connors were encouraged to participate.

3.2 ACCOMMODATIONS WORKING GROUP

Ms. Street reflected on a recent trip to rural France and the fact that accessibility is terrible.

Ms. Brown had nothing to report but wished to commend Maureen Reynolds on the success of the campaign to have a Pesticide By-law adopted by HRM. Ms. Brown will be working with Ms. Reynolds on accommodations and will have something to report for the next meeting.

3.3 ROSE FACILITY MANAGEMENT'S MANDATE

Ms. Williams noted that Rose Facility Management is now known as Vestar. She distributed to the members a description of services to be provided by the General Manager of Building Management Services which she read.

She noted that while two people will be employees of Vestar, the rest of the Business Unit will be HRM employees.

Ms. Reynolds wondered if the firm is aware of issues regarding chemical sensitivity. Ms. Williams expressed confidence that this large firm is likely aware of such issues, even if HRM has not directly discussed with them. It was felt important to alert Mr. Lebreque of these concerns early in the process. Mr. Connors offered to speak with Mr. Lebreque, the General Manager informally and mention the Committee's desire to meet with him, not for a presentation but discussion. He will refer to the need to adopt practices which take into account people with sensitivities. Ms. Reynolds will endeavour to acquire a packet of materials used by the School Board from Karen Robinson and information from the Environmental Clinic. She will provide to Paul Connors. She requested information on how to reach him. Ms. Williams suggested that questions the Committee wishes to raise with Mr. Lebreque be provided in advance of a meeting with the Committee, for his consideration.

It was noted that there are some limits to the influence Mr. Lebreque can assert, as many of the properties are not owned but rented by HRM. Ms. Williams suggested that most of the facilities the HRM owns are not public. If the Committee is interested in such a breakdown, Mr. Lebreque could likely provide.

At this casual meeting, Mr. Connors will endeavour to determine where in the process Mr. Lebreque is, to determine the timing for input by the Committee. If he fears the Committee may miss an opportunity for input, he will alert the members.

3.4 CROSSWALK UPDATE RE MS. BEAVER'S DEAF DAUGHTER

Ms. MacDonald had raised this issue some months previous. Ms. Williams recalled a conversation she had with the Police Officer in charge of crosswalk guards. In this conversation the officer had raised some interesting points regarding trying to accommodate one individual in an area which is already difficult to manage. Not only is the deaf student having difficulty getting to school safely but other students. As a result, he had been working with a committee of concerned parents on safety issues. Ms. Beaver is one of many parents feeling obliged to drive their child to school. Ms. Williams concluded this to be more a School Board than HRM issue.

Ms. Williams will contact Ms. Beaver again, to determine if anything has transpired in the last few months regarding this matter.

3.5 IDENTIFICATION OF SPEAKERS AND DISTRICTS AT COUNCIL

It was noted that signing is limited to two hours for Regional Council meetings, i.e. 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. It is quite challenging for the signers given the speed at which the sessions proceed. Nevertheless, Ms. MacDonald felt the service to be great.

It was suggested that the time might be expanded if enough viewers are using the service. It was indicated that a survey is being conducted and the numbers of viewers should be available for the next meeting. Paul Connors expressed caution about the response, as the numbers are not likely to be large until the availability of the service is widely known in the deaf community.

The pros and cons of closed captioning versus signing were discussed.

Concern was expressed by Ms. Brown that she could hardly hear the last Council session. It was felt that the remote microphones should be used more routinely. Ms. Williams felt that it would be appropriate to remind staff and Council that the service is not 100% and modest amounts for improvement to the technology of Council Chambers should be budgeted for routinely.

Referring to the subject of identification of speakers at Council, Mr. Vis felt the Committee was remiss in not doing likewise. At the commencement of future meetings, as item 0.1, attendees at meetings should identify themselves.

3.6 VON TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Brown recalled the VON had been looking for volunteers when they started their pilot project. She had obtained an information sheet, which she could provide for the next meeting.

Some concern was expressed by Ms. Williams regarding whether this item fell within the Committee's mandate. Mr. Vis noted that he had originally included information on this service in a mail out to Access-a-Bus users, during the lead up to the Annual General Meeting.

Ms. Williams noted that the Community and Race Relations Committee has adopted a practice of keeping their mandate in mind, so as to remain focused. She felt that once the Committee has adopted their Work Plan this will be easier to do.

3.7 PEDWAYS - SCOTIA SQUARE

Mr. Robar advised that he had followed up his initial letter to Terry Duran with a voice

mail. Neither has yet been responded to.

The limitations to making the pedway accessible, given an almost full storey drop, were again reviewed. Cynthia Street suggested the use of a chairlift, but it was felt at this location it would be the subject of vandalism.

It was generally felt that the property owners would be supportive of taking out the steps to make their Brunswick Street building accessible, if it could be done.

Ms. Brown noted that the subject of the steep slope of the pedway by Scotia Square should also be addressed.

Mr. Robar will continue to follow-up on this matter.

3.8 **REGIONAL COUNCIL REQUEST THAT THE COMMITTEE INVESTIGATE THE MATTER OF CROSSWALKS AND CURB CUTS TO IDENTIFY ANY THAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

Circulated in the agenda package was a letter to the Chair dated June 12, 2000 from Drew Lawrence, A/Director of Public Works and Transportation Services, in response to a request for information.

Also circulated in today's package, as item 3.9, were UN Urban Design Considerations which also deal with curb cuts.

Mr. Vis felt that Regional Council's request made at the March 21st meeting, that the Committee investigate the matter of crosswalks and curb cuts for wheelchairs to identify any that could be improved, should be responded to. Mr. Robar noted that he responded to Councillor Read, who originated the request and offered to meet with him, but he never heard back.

It was felt that although the Committee or staff do not have the resources to conduct such a survey, during discussions of this matter several items have been raised which could be forwarded to Council in a report ie.:

- Identify a standard to be used for curbcuts which could be used when making new ones or replacing old ones.
- In the event of a particularly difficult installation, the Committee could offer their assistance.
- Cite examples of well designed curb-cuts for those in wheelchairs, etc.

- Cite examples of poorly designed curb-cuts (photos useful) - Barrington and Duke, for example.
- The use of a single curb cut for an intersection is terrible for both the blind and wheelchair users as they force you into traffic. Curb cuts should only be made in direction of travel.

It was noted by Mr. Connors that they are likely constructed this way to expedite snow removal. For this purpose, the smoother and flatter the surfaces, the better. He noted that staff relies on suggestions from the community, which they try to adopt where possible.

- Two directional ramps are needed at intersections.
- It was noted that the Municipality follows the N.S. Building Code Regulations. It should be reviewed to determine if it is sufficient. Perhaps it is simply not being followed.

It should be determined if the standard being used by HRM is the same as the Provincial one. If it is not, and the Provincial one is better, a recommendation be made to Council that the HRM adopt the Provincial standard.

It was suggested that when the initial installation is made it is probably constructed to standard, but as the area is re-paved or a change is made in the use of the building, the design gets changed.

- Council should look at the subject of curb cuts not just from the perspective of those in wheelchairs, but for the blind, etc.
- Inclusion of a tactile device in curb cuts to alert the blind.
- The response to Council does not have to include an exhaustive study.

Mr. Vis noted that the Committee would not be required to do any research in this area, staff is there for that purpose.

Ms. LeGay suggested that the Mobility Instructors from the CNIB would be a good resource on what works at crossings and what does not.

Mr. Robar will immediately contact Mr. McCusker to see what can be done to get a

response to Council recognizing the initial request would have lead to an overwhelming task.

Staff noted that the budget process begins September/October, so it is important to have a recommendation adopted, so the process of revamping two or three curb cuts a year can be commenced. It is more likely that the Municipality would adopt a program to improve curb cuts on an incremental basis.

3.9 **DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

As requested at the previous meeting, circulated in the agenda package were UN Urban Design Considerations for Accessibility for the Disabled.

3.10 **CORRESPONDENCE HRM TAXI AND LIMOUSINE COMMITTEE**

In his update, Mr. Robar advised that he had spoken to Mr. Mathers. Mr. Mathers indicated that if the volume of business dictates longer hours, accessible taxis will remain longer on the road. Mr. Mathers noted that this is left to the drivers' discretion.

Ms. Williams related to the Committee an occasion when she called a taxi and got an accessible van. She questioned the driver and was told that there is not enough business to sustain the van, without taking regular passengers. Mr. Connors suggested that it is likely they are busy during peak hours. Mr. Robar reflected that a lot of potential clients could not afford the fare.

4.0 **NEW BUSINESS**

4.5 **ROYAL BANK RENOVATIONS SPRING GARDEN ROAD - SAFETY ISSUE**

Before Peggy Brown's departure for another meeting, the above item was briefly addressed. While it was considered good for information purposes, Ms. Williams noted that it really isn't a HRM matter.

4.1 **CORRESPONDENCE FROM CANADIAN PARAPLEGIC ASSOCIATION RE TIE DOWN FOR WHEELCHAIR CONSUMERS UTILIZING METRO TRANSIT**

A letter had been received from the Canadian Paraplegic Association by the Chair and circulated to the members in February. One of the items pertained to the subject of tie downs for wheelchair consumers. Cities in other provinces don't require tie downs. The CPA would like wheelchair users to have a choice.

The Canadian Paraplegic Association takes exception to this requirement, citing that

this regulation is only in Nova Scotia. They anticipate such a procedure will lessen wheelchair ridership on the transit system. Their Executive Director, Mr. Rutt, was looking for feedback.

Mr. Vis noted that under the Provincial regulations D-409, a person in a wheelchair getting on a low floor bus is required to use a four point tie down and lap belt. He noted that a fully accessible service is commencing August 27 on Routes 3 and 7.

During discussion of the matter, aspects of safety for the wheelchair user and others on the bus were considered. The issue of all passengers being treated equally was also raised, ie. why should only wheelchair users be forced to use restraint systems.

Mr. Vis emphasized this is a provincial regulation and if HRM gave wheelchair users a choice and something happened, HRM would find itself liable. Their regulations are very strict with respect to specialized transportation.

Concern was expressed that able-bodied passengers might complain about the time it takes to secure a wheelchair and thus prompt a negative public image. It was suggested by Ms. Reynolds that a system that the wheelchair user could engage themselves, would speed things up. Of course, this would depend on the individual.

Ms. Williams suggested a proactive approach, i.e. meet with members of the Utility and Review Board and perhaps representatives of the N.S. Human Rights Commission, rather than waiting for complaints about the service before taking action. It could be emphasized that while the HRM is bound by law to follow provincial regulations, it is open to changes in the policy.

She wondered if there is any information on the number of people injured in cities that don't require tie downs. It was noted that there isn't even information available yet on the number of individuals who will use the service when available. It was noted that CPA could not assist, as their clients' addresses are considered confidential. However, Access-a-Bus files revealed that the highest volume of use came from the area served by Routes 3 and 7.

A discussion followed on things the public don't like about the low floor buses and it was noted that what will happen in the event of a side impact accident has yet to be determined.

It was suggested that Mr. Dave White, Manager, N.S. Utility and Review Board be invited to the September meeting.

4.3 **AUDIBLE TRAFFIC SIGNALS**

Once again, due to time constraints, this item had to be deferred. Ms. LeGay requested that it be made the first item of new business on the next agenda.

It was decided that in future New Business should appear before Business Arising.

5.0 **ACCESS-A-BUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Copies of the Access-a-Bus Advisory Committee minutes for May were previously circulated. Minutes of their June meeting were circulated.

When he sent his regrets, Mr. MacDonald requested that he be provided with copies of the Annual General Meeting minutes of May. The Clerk determined that they are not ready.

6.0 **NEXT MEETING**

The next regular meeting will be Monday, August 21 or September 18.

7.0 **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned around 6:05 p.m.

Before closing, Ms. Williams thanked Mr. Robar for his efforts on behalf of the Committee as Chair.

Paul Connors
Chair

Lynne Le Boutillier
Assistant Municipal Clerk