

# HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

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## ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

### MINUTES

MARCH 18, 2002

PRESENT: Mr. Paul Connors (Chair)  
Ms. Jane Cale (Vice-Chair)  
Mr. Ben Marston  
Councillor Sarto  
Councillor Meade  
Ms. Peggy Brown  
Ms. Cynthia Street  
Ms. Elsie Cholette  
Mr. Bob Venus  
Ms. Betty MacDonald  
Ms. Anne Langille  
Ms. Joanne Coffey  
Ms. Barbara LeGay

ALSO PRESENT: Charla Williams, Diversity Program Coordinator  
Kevin Hindle, Supervisor, Special Services, Metro Transit  
Lynne Le Boutillier, Assistant Municipal Clerk

REGRETS: Ms. Maureen Reynolds and Don Mullins

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The meeting commenced with a viewing of a Transport Canada Sensitivity Training tape.

Ms. Cale chaired the meeting, due to the late arrival of the Chair.

The members were introduced to new member Ben Marston.

Councillor Sarto, referring to concerns earlier expressed regarding the clearing of snow from sidewalks in Halifax, noted that there is a public meeting scheduled by Councillor Walker, District 15 this Wednesday evening at the Keshen Library on this subject.

### **1.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA, ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS**

Circulated at the meeting by the Clerk for information were the following items:

- C Revised membership list to reflect Paul Connor's e-mail address
  - C E-mail dated Feb. 28, 2002 from Laurie Elliot re a Person with Disabilities Focus Group and background information re Canadian Home Care Human Resources Study
- 1.02 A Customer Service Survey re the Municipal Clerk's Office.

The following items were added to the agenda:

Under New Business, item 4.2 - HRM Policy Curb Cuts (Barb LeGay)  
Item 4.3 - Local Travel for Persons with Disabilities - Easter Seals March of Dimes National Council

Items 5.8 and 5.6 were moved up on the agenda to become 5.0.1 and 5.0.2 respectively.

The agenda, as amended, was adopted by consensus.

### **2.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the February 18, 2002 meeting were adopted, as circulated, on motion of Ms. Brown and Ms. Cholette.

### **3.0 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

The Chair nominated Jane Cale for Vice-Chair. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Sarto. There being no further nominations, Ms. Cale was declared Vice-Chair.

### **4.0 NEW BUSINESS**

#### 4.1 UNIVERSAL DESIGN POLICY - CITY OF WINNIPEG

An information item from Darrell Robar, former member and Chair of the Committee, was circulated in the agenda package. The item was taken from the CPA National e-mail newsletter and related to the City of Winnipeg becoming the first Canadian municipality to adopt a Universal Design Policy. All new civic projects and major renovations in Winnipeg, must adhere to universal design principles.

A discussion followed on the definition of "universal design principles". Ms. Street noted that the use of these principles would result in designs which would allow those with disabilities and those without disabilities to use them. An example given was a ramp. Ms. Coffey noted that one would not be able to tell that a feature had been designed for those with disabilities, but it would be accessible.

Ms. Williams noted this was a step a bit beyond barrier free design. She felt further information should be available from the City of Winnipeg, which could be circulated to the members and HRM staff. Councillor Sarto agreed this would be good information for staff.

In response to a query from Ms. MacDonald, Ms. Williams felt the policy relates to actual building components versus services. Once a copy of the Policy is available, the Chair suggested there would be more clarity.

#### 4.2 HRM POLICY CURB CUTS

Ms. LeGay raised the subject of problems with curb cut design. The example used related to the intersection of Young and Kempt Road. The curb cuts are designed in such a fashion that a blind person using a cane or guide dog would find themselves directed to cross the intersection diagonally rather than directing the individual to cross the intersection in a straight line. She suggested that someone on HRM staff be invited to a meeting to discuss the HRM's policy. It was noted that Mr. McCusker had previously advised that this design is being used as HRM policy, as it was understood disabled individuals wanted this design. Clarification was sought. Mr. Connors will follow-up on this matter.

Ms. Cholette reflected on a site visit she had made to a curbcut associated with Victoria Road, Dartmouth. An individual in a wheelchair had fallen at this location. She asked the Inspector why curb cuts on a diagonal are used, versus direct corner to corner designs. He indicated it was related to drainage.

Councillor Meade referred to a \$2 million expenditure for sidewalk improvements which was approved by Regional Council in December. Changes are to be made to one

hundred (100) intersections, which consist of four corners or four hundred (400) curb cuts. This work will utilize the same curb cut design that is causing the problems identified by Ms. LeGay, thus there was some urgency to deal with the subject. It was noted that the Design Section has been relocated to the Eric Spicer Building. It was felt that Kulvinder Dhillon would be the contact person.

Ms. LeGay noted that when she was working on audible traffic signals, traffic staff did site visits. This worked well. In this instance, she suggested that a mobility instructor for the blind, as well as a wheelchair user, be involved to demonstrate the hazards.

Mr. Connors will contact staff by phone tomorrow.

Ms. Street referenced the CSA standards and National Building Code. To the best of her recollection, the path of travel has to go perpendicular to the street versus the angle cut.

#### **4.3 LOCAL TRAVEL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES - EASTER SEALS MARCH OF DIMES NATIONAL COUNCIL**

For information, copies of an e-mail dated March 8, 2002 from the Disability Card Coordinator, Easter Seals March of Dimes National Council, were circulated to the members. Reference was made to the use of the cards by VIA Rail, Greyhound, etc. and the Council's desire to extend the service to local transit. Further information on the travel cards is obtainable from their web site - [www.esmodnc.org](http://www.esmodnc.org).

#### **5.0 BUSINESS ARISING FROM MINUTES**

##### **5.0.1 JOINT MEETING WITH TAXI AND LIMOUSINE COMMITTEE** (formerly item 5.8 on agenda)

Previously circulated to the members were the draft minutes of the Joint meeting held December 17, 2001. The Vice-Chair had identified at the previous meeting, that some remarks had been incorrectly attributed to her. The Clerk confirmed that Sherryl Murphy, the Clerk who prepared the minutes, has been advised.

Also previously circulated was Transport Canada Airports Group's "Let's Listen and Talk - How to improve Communications with Persons with Disabilities- Participants Workbook". The video component, which was played prior to the regular meeting commencing.

A copy of a memo from Councillor Adams, Chair, Taxi and Limousine Committee dated December 18, 2001 re Subsidy for Access-a-Bus to George McLellan, CAO had been previously circulated. The correspondence asked that subsidy options, to allow for more

profitable operation of the service during evenings and weekends, be explored. Whether a response has been received will be checked into.

5.0.2 **WEST END MALL** (previously item 5.6)

At the February meeting, Mr. Hindle was questioned as to whether anyone associated with HRM Planning and Development would have approved the design of the facility. Mr. Hindle did not know. Ms. Williams advised that she subsequently spoke to a couple of staff regarding this business unit's involvement. She was advised that since the development was essentially just a change to an existing facility, specific permits for changes to layout were not required, therefore HRM did not have much opportunity for input or have authority to intervene. Councillor Meade confirmed this to be the case.

Mr. Hindle reflected that some of the issues were raised by Metro Transit passengers. As a result meetings were held with Halifax Shopping Centre representatives and a report is anticipated from Kenny Silver, Planning and Development Coordinator, Metro Transit shortly. Mr. Hindle will bring the report to the Committee. There appears to be movement on accessibility issues such as curb cuts. He noted that the Halifax Shopping Centre representatives have some concern regarding a reduction in customers to both the West End Mall and Halifax Shopping Centre. They are considering what they need to do to get their customers back. He felt Metro Transit users are inconvenienced the further bus stops are from their entrance doors. These individuals are finding alternative locations to shop which are more accessible and convenient.

5.1 **MOTORIZED WHEELCHAIRS - INFO PROGRAM**

At the January meeting the subject of accidents associated with motorized wheelchairs in the Sydney area was raised. No licensing is required for motorized wheelchairs, it was recalled. It was concluded that there is a need to educate the public. The matter was to be raised with David McCusker. The Chair had recalled the Traffic Department sent out brochures a few years ago which dealt with the use of crosswalks and overhead crosswalk lights and perhaps something similar could be developed re wheelchairs.

The Chair will follow-up with Mr. McCusker.

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

Jane Cale advised that the Community and Race Relations Advisory Committee has not addressed. Item deferred to April meeting.

### 5.3 POLICE SERVICE - SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS FOR THE DEAF

Ms. MacDonald noted that discussions continue with the HRP. Essentially the matter relates to the right of deaf people to proper communication. As an example, she referred to a recent incident, reported in the newspaper, of a baby being taken away from a single, deaf mother. The mother had no idea what was happening.

Ms. Williams reflected that in addition to the HRP, Ms. MacDonald may wish to involve Community Services in the discussions. She felt that in such instances, a Community Services or Childrens Aid worker would likely accompany the Police Officers.

Ms. MacDonald acknowledged that there are a number of factors which contribute to problems in communications, but nonetheless if a standard was developed, it would help.

Ms. Williams noted that the HRM is policed by both the RCMP and HRP. Both agencies are overseen by the Board of Police Commissioners. She proposed that the Police Commission be advised of the concern raised and they be asked to consider how the matter could be addressed. Councillor Sarto supported a follow up with the Police Commission on the subject of communicating with the deaf and the importance of having qualified interpreters.

Ms. Cale posed a question pertaining to whether there is accreditation for sign language interpreters. It was noted that this is somewhat different from receiving a certification. There are perhaps only ten accredited signers in Canada.

### 5.4 SIDEWALK CAFES POLICY

The Clerk advised that a date for a Public Hearing has yet to be selected. Mr. Barrett has indicated that as a result of the Public Information Meeting held, the Policy will likely be redrafted.

Both Ms. Williams and Ms. Coffey, who attended the Public Information Meeting, reported on their observations. Ms. Coffey noted that the disability issue did not generate a lot of discussion, although Mr. Rutt, Executive Director of the CPA made an eloquent presentation.

It was generally felt that the issue of concern was money and there was no general agreement on the design presented, i.e. satellite cafes and the use of parking spaces which are at a premium in the Downtown area. Ms. Williams noted that the business owners want to be able to utilize their whole frontage for this purpose. Very little concern was expressed re accessibility matters. The business owners appeared to think the status quo addressed these needs.

Ms. Williams felt there are likely to be more meetings held before the matter goes to Regional Council, as staff will desire some buy-in. As a result of the delay, the policy will not likely come into effect for this season.

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

This item was once again deferred in the absence of Ms. Reynolds. A follow-up will be made with Ms. Reynolds.

5.6 **WEST END MALL** (refer item 5.0.2)

5.7 **PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED WITH COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN BUS DRIVERS AND DEAF TRANSIT RIDERS**

Ms. MacDonald clarified her concerns did not relate to low floor buses, but the issue of communication between transit drivers and deaf passengers.

She reiterated, as an example, an incident whereby a low floor bus encountered technical problems when trying to get a person in a wheelchair on the bus. While the other passengers understood what was going on by comments made by the bus driver, the deaf individual did not know what was happening. Ms. MacDonald felt it would have been appropriate for the bus driver to hand a note to the deaf person.

Ms. Cale, referring to the video from Transport Canada on sensitivity training viewed earlier, suggested that perhaps it could be used as part of refresher courses at Metro Transit on how to interact with customers who have disabilities.

Ms. Langille noted that the bus driver may not have even been aware that there was a deaf person on the bus. As mentioned in the video, it is an invisible disability. Mr. Hindle noted that when the driver is dealing with a number of situations simultaneously, he may have missed this fact. Normally Metro Transit does not run into problems communicating with passengers.

It was proposed that the deaf passenger alert the bus driver of his/her disability when getting on the bus or approach the driver for an explanation, if a problem arises. Ms. MacDonald noted that the deaf often encounter bus drivers with a poor attitude, who are not receptive to the deaf person approaching them. Nevertheless, she will try to get the message out to the deaf and hard of hearing community of the need to be proactive in this regard. She noted that there is an initiative, at the national level, to develop something to identify an individual as being deaf.

Mr. Venus asked Mr. Hindle when low floor buses will be on Dartmouth routes. Mr. Hindle advised that they have operated on route 54 since August 2001. He noted that seventeen (17) new low floor buses have been ordered, with delivery expected this fall. An assessment will be made as to which routes they should be deployed to.

5.8 **JOINT MEETING WITH TAXI AND LIMOUSINE COMMITTEE (See Item 5.0.1)**

5.9 **BUS NUMBERS**

The subject of bus numbers, particularly their display on the back of buses, had been raised by Ms. Brown.

Mr. Hindle was pleased to report that a prototype was developed and is currently being tested on bus 1000 the last few weeks. Bus 1000 is being used on a variety of routes to obtain maximum exposure and needed feedback, plus different operators will be able to gauge how the system works in practice.

Ms. LeGay noted that she had previously raised the subject of incorporating technology on buses or at bus stop that provide an audible message identifying the bus number. She recalled that a system was tested in Ottawa. Mr. Hindle recollected that the technology is used or was tested on subway systems. He referred to an experiment whereby the blind person was provided with a handheld device for this purpose. Ms. LeGay expressed strong reservations about providing blind individuals with something else to hold. Mr. Hindle will check into what options are available in the industry.

While it was not only in response to the concerns expressed by the Committee re identification of bus numbers on the back of buses, the Committee felt a letter should be sent to Metro Transit acknowledging what they are doing. Mr. Hindle will be providing further updates. SS

5.10 **ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUNDS**

The subject was raised by Councillor Meade at the January meeting.

Ms. Williams has ascertained that there are no provincial standards for accessible playgrounds. Reference was made to a recreation group who are working on an initiative to develop guidelines for Nova Scotia.

Councillor Meade referred to the accessible playground associated with Alderney Gate, scheduled to open in May. He has put in his 'shopping list' a request for \$150,000 to construct an accessible playground on the Mainland Common. He reiterated that the United States requires that 75% of the playground area be accessible. No criteria exists

in HRM or the Province. He noted that he has discussed the subject with Annette Verge, Recreation Department. He referred to the standard to use 12 inches of peagravel, verses a couple of inches, to reduce the risk of injury. However, this depth makes the area even more inaccessible for those in wheelchairs. As an alternative, rubberized matts are proposed. He has also mentioned his concerns to Blair Blakeney, so they can be taken into consideration when playgrounds are updated.

#### **5.11 CROSSING AT ALMON - VICINITY OF CNIB**

Problems associated with this crossing had been raised by Ms. Brown at the January meeting. An individual could see the pole at a distance, but not the pole and button close up. The Chair apologized that he has not yet addressed with Mr. McCusker. He will update the Committee at the April meeting.

Ms. Brown advised that the individual who was experiencing the problem has raised the matter with her Councillor. She was not aware of the response, however.

Reflecting on the above, Councillor Meade reiterated that should the members become aware of similar situations, which pose a safety problem, they should contact their Councillor, not wait for the next regularly scheduled meeting.

#### **6.0 STATUS SHEET**

It was recognized that a lot of work needs to be done on the Status Sheet. Given the late hour and the need for a number of members to catch Access-a-Buses, Ms. Cale proposed this item be put at the top of the April agenda. There was also a discussion of the merit in members making their Access-a-Bus arrangement for 6:15 rather than 6:00 to allow a full two hours for the meeting. This might help the Committee in being able to complete its agenda and deal with the status sheet in future.

Ms. Coffey referred to the item regarding Regional Council's request that the Committee investigate the subject of crosswalks and curb cuts for wheelchairs to identify any that could be improved. A request was dealt with March 2001. The Chair noted that it was not felt practical for a volunteer committee to develop a list. Instead it was felt that areas the members come in contact with which are of concern should be reported. Councillor Meade noted that such situations would be recorded, but corrections are not likely to be made until the next budget year.

#### **SNOW REMOVAL PROGRAM**

Before the meeting adjourned, Mr. Venus advised the two Councillors that the snow removal service implemented this year had worked well for him.

7.0 **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 15, 2002, 4:00 p.m., Training Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Duke Tower.

8.0 **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

Lynne Le Boutillier  
Assistant Municipal Clerk