

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

MINUTES

MAY 27, 2002

PRESENT: Mr. Paul Connors, Chair
Councillor Sarto
Councillor Meade
Ms. Elsie Cholette
Ms. Betty MacDonald
Ms. Anne Langille
Ms. Maureen Reynolds
Ms. Barb LeGay
Ms. Sally Campbell
Ms. Joanne Coffey

ABSENT: Mr. Ben Marston
Mr. Don Mullins
Ms. Peggy Brown (regrets)
Ms. Cynthia Street (regrets)
Ms. Jane Cale (regrets)
Ms. Mary MacDonald
Mr. Kevin Hindle (regrets)
Mr. Ken Hines

ALSO PRESENT: Ms. Charla Williams, Diversity Program Coordinator
Ms. Lynne Le Boutillier, Assistant Municipal Clerk
Bonnie Lynn Baker, Interpreter
Sandra Spears, Interpreter

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The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 4:10 p.m., Training Room, 3rd Floor Duke Tower.

As there was no quorum at the start of the meeting and Inspector Cliff Falkenham, Halifax Regional Police was in attendance re item 4.3, this item was dealt with first.

4.3 POLICE SERVICE - SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS FOR THE DEAF

Inspector Falkenham had been invited to the meeting to discuss concerns raised by Betty MacDonald regarding the availability of certified interpreters (signers for the deaf) through Police Services.

Betty MacDonald wanted to know what the rights are of a deaf person with regards to communication when dealing with the Police. She described three incidents to illustrate why she had a concern. One incident involved her daughter, who was over the age of 18 at the time. She did not feel she was adequately apprised of what was transpiring. Cst. Falkenham explained the constraints the police are under when dealing with an individual over the age of eighteen (18). They can't consult with parents unless the child asks them to.

He assured Ms. MacDonald and the Committee that police officers have access to certified interpreters through the Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and will avail these services as required.

Inspector Falkenham offered to sit down with Ms. MacDonald to clarify what actually took place. He will check into the incidents further, as obviously there was a miscommunication.

The Inspector encouraged the members to report problems they might encounter with police officers the very next day. Follow up is then easier.

The Chair sought general information on what services the Police Service can provide the deaf. Inspector Falkenham noted there are police officers on the force who have gone through sign language courses. These individuals can be called in twenty-four hours a day. It was acknowledged that there is a delay associated with bringing in these officers or placing a call to the Society of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing when a statement has to be taken, for example.

Ms. Campbell citing a personal example, questioned who she should have contacted. Inspector Falkenham explained that there are three Divisions. Under such circumstances, she could have contacted her Division and requested a Community Constable come out to address the problem.

The telephone numbers and locations of the divisions are listed below:

West Division (Bedford and Mainland Halifax) - 490-5200/15 Convoy Run, Bedford
Dartmouth Division - 490-5171/Eric Spicer Building, 21 Mount Hope Avenue; Caledonia
Road and Wyse Road
North Division (Peninsula Halifax) - 490-5686/Halifax Shopping Centre

Councillor Sarto also referred to the 24 hour, non-emergency number - 490-5020. The information number is 490-5016.

The Chair asked Inspector Falkenham whether it would be appropriate to direct such issues which arise at the Committee to him. Inspector Falkenham indicated it would be appropriate and offered to attend upcoming meetings. He will be added to the mailing list. Ms. Williams reflected this would be an opportunity for Police Services to gain knowledge.

Ms. LeGay referring to problems the blind and visually impaired have in obtaining telephone numbers, questioned when the "Crime Prevention Guide for Persons with Disabilities" will be available.

It was recalled that Karla Wigginton had been involved in this initiative. The Chair referred to an e-mail from Ms. Cale updating the Committee on this matter. She had spoken to Sgt. McNeil and was advised the Guide is only in draft form at this time. When it is updated, it will be a pamphlet with an accompanying training guide developed for presentation purposes. Sgt. McNeil will keep Ms. Cale informed on the availability of the pamphlet and who the contact person will be for the presentations.

Inspector Falkenham was thanked for his comments. They were considered very informative.

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

The agenda was adopted, as circulated, on motion of Ms. MacDonald and Councillor Sarto.

2.0 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of April 15, 2002 were adopted, as circulated, on motion of Councillor Meade and Ms. Cholette.

3.0 **STATUS SHEET**

Included in the agenda package was a copy of an e-mail response from Brian Taylor to a query if there is anything in the Transit Strategy Report which addresses **bus passes for the blind** and disabled. He advised there was nothing in the study. Mr. Taylor understood the Committee was going to write to him requesting discontinuance of the passes for the blind. Mr. Taylor was advised this was not the case. The Committee was simply responding to the possibility they might be discontinued. As a result, a small committee consisting of the Chair, Ms. Williams and Mr. Vis was struck to gather information. The committee soon recognized the complexity of the task. In the meantime, Metro Transit indicated they were giving discontinuance of the passes more thought.

A lengthy discussion ensued which highlighted how complex the matter is. Some of issues raised were:

- C Should free bus passes be provided to individuals with other disabilities to be fair and equitable.
- C The effect on the budget of expanding coverage must be considered.
- C Low floor buses are more difficult for blind and visually impaired persons to use. Reasons given by Ms. LeGay, i.e. high step if ramp not down, distance from driver and flip up seats not being put back down.
- C Only thirty-five (35) individuals registered with the CNIB use the passes on a monthly basis.
- C Since the Transit Study does not address, it can't be a major concern.
- C The Committee is not interested in taking services away from individuals but winning concessions.
- C The reasons for the blind receiving the bus passes was that it was recognized they did not have the option to drive and bus passes would encourage mobility.

It was decided to postpone dealing with the subject further, until the original motion of Council is provided. The issue was originally raised in January 2001 and Council must be responded to. Ms. Langille felt Councillors Meade and Sarto should be provided with copies of the reasons given by the CNIB why the practice of free bus passes should continue. The Clerk will try to locate and provide to the Councillors.

Given the complexity of the issue, the Chair suggested a recommendation to Council may be that a staff committee is required to work on the issue to which the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities could provide input.

Crosswalks and Curb Cuts for Wheelchairs - In his update, the Chair noted that the report is not finalized.

Stairs and Ramp between Alderney Gate and the School Board - When giving his regrets, Mr. Venus noted that there is a Grand Opening of the stairs and ramp,

Wednesday, May 29th at 1:00 p.m. He is unable to attend and has been unsuccessful in contacting Ms. Street. Mr. Venus felt a member of the Committee should attend the Grand Opening. Joanne Coffey was asked to attend on the Board's behalf. The Chair and Councillor Sarto also plan to attend.

4.1 **BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN CONCERNS**

Mr. Wayne Groszko, Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator was introduced. Mr. Groszko noted that he started working in mid January 2002 with Transportation Services. He noted that his mandate is fairly broad but generally deals with improving conditions for people using their bikes or walking thus encouraging those modes of transportation. He indicated to the Committee he had a lot to learn. At present he and Kenda MacKenzie are working on various pathways. He sought the members' input regarding curb designs, etc.

Considerable discussion followed on the pros and cons of various curb designs both current and future. While it would be ideal to have two curb cuts at each corner to direct pedestrians and those using wheelchairs directly to a cross walk, he noted that the corner would have to be a certain size to accommodate such a design.

In addition to this issue, there were others issues he desired input from the Committee on. He acknowledged there would not be sufficient time today however and offered to come to future meetings or talk to the members individually.

Councillor Meade noted that the slope of curb ramps is 8% and how having the whole area at a corner sloped would make it difficult to walk during icy weather and drivers might cut the corner hitting poles and people.

Ms. Campbell noted that the design used on one side of Robie Street, in the vicinity of the Professional Centre, appears to work very well for individuals in wheelchairs, versus the design on the opposite side.

Ms. Williams suggested Mr. Groszko should contact other municipalities, i.e. San Francisco and Vancouver that are also hilly locations. It was also noted the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has a Disabilities Committee and they might be of assistance.

Reference was made to handrail installations for people to hang onto at corners.

The Chair suggested that the ramp portion be started at the side of buildings, then flatten out near the road or there be a recessed flat area, the same grade as the street.

Ms. Williams suggested that it might be more effective if the members did not focus on

finding solutions, but identifying to Mr. Groszko what problems they encounter.

Ms. Cholette alerted Mr. Groszko to problems wheelchair users encounter when there is a gap between the curb and street that wheels can get caught in. It was suggested it be made flush, but Councillor Meade pointed out the requirement of a 3/4" lip for drainage.

Mr. Groszko posed questions regarding surfacing. He has observed that crusher dust surfaces don't appear to present problems to wheelchair users. However, it was recognized that they must be well maintained, or heavy rain events would disturb the surface. It was suggested he contact the Canadian Paraplegic Association. It was noted that the former Chair of the Committee is employed there, Mr. Robar.

Referring to the Macdonald Bridge bike and pedestrian walkways, Mr. Groszko assured the members that motorized scooters can be used on the pedestrian portion and also multi-use trails.

The Chair invited Mr. Groszko to attend future Committee meetings.

Ms. LeGay conveyed how she was really impressed with the Traffic Division. She referred to an awareness session later this month. Fifteen to sixteen HRM staff are planning to attend the two hour session. Instructors will be taking groups of five staff and giving them a glimpse of obstacles faced by blind pedestrians.

4.4 **DRAFT CORRESPONDENCE TO MAYOR, HOUSING CONCERNS OF THOSE WITH CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY**

Ms. Reynolds sought assistance from the Clerk and Chair in drafting the report. The Clerk will provide her with the format. The Chair explained that the purpose of the report is to alert Council to the lack of housing available to individuals with chemical (environmental) sensitivities. He will work with Ms. Reynolds to finalize.

4.5 **WEST END MALL TRAFFIC CONCERNS**

Ms. Campbell relayed to the Committee her impressions of trying to get to the mall from the bus terminal.

The Chair suggested the members call Metro Transit and record their concern. Mr. Groszko felt it would be also beneficial to log concerns with the Halifax Shopping Centre as well.

Referring to the zebra striped white and blue crosswalks in the vicinity of the bus terminal, Mr. Groszko noted this design is viewed as being more visible to automobile

drivers and is a standard used worldwide for crosswalks. It was emphasized that the Metro Transit terminal is on the Halifax Shopping Centres property. Metro Transit had requested the Halifax Shopping Centre put in the crosswalks and they obliged.

4.6 **PLAYGROUNDS - FOLLOW-UPS WITH BLAIR BLAKENEY AND/OR STEVE OAKY**

Deferred.

4.7 **CROSSING AT ALMON - VICINITY OF CNIB**

Deferred.

5.0 **NEW BUSINESS**

None.

6.0 **NEXT MEETING**

Monday, June 17, 2002.

7.0 **ADJOURNMENT**

Due to the allotted meeting time being up, the balance of the agenda was deferred to the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Lynne Le Boutillier
Assistant Municipal Clerk