

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES MINUTES MARCH 17, 2003

PRESENT: Mr. Paul Connors, Chair
Ms. Jane Cale
Councillor Sarto
Ms. Peggy Brown
Ms. Cynthia Street
Ms. Elsie Cholette
Mr. Bob Venus
Ms. Betty MacDonald
Ms. Anne Langille
Ms. Barbara LeGay
Ms. Joanne Coffey
Mr. Patrick Harrington

ABSENT: Mr. Donald Mullins (regrets)
Councillor Meade (regrets)
Ms. Sally Campbell (regrets)
Ms. Maureen Reynolds (regrets)
Mr. Wayne Groszko (regrets)

ALSO PRESENT: Supt. Cliff Falkenham, HRP
Mr. Kevin Hindle, Supervisor, Special Service, Metro Transit
Ms. Charla Williams, Diversity Program Coordinator
Ms. Laura Bartlett, Interpreter
Mr. Chris Racine, Interpreter
Ms. Lynne Le Boutillier, Legislative Assistant

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1. **CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m., Training Room, 3rd Floor Duke Tower. Introductions followed.

2. **ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR**

Mr. Connors, Chair, advised the Committee of his intention to resign from the Committee. Mr. Connors referred to his involvement, starting thirteen (13) years ago, as a staff representative on the City of Dartmouth's Committee. Following amalgamation he joined the Committee as a member at large, as he had retired. This was third term he has chaired the Committee.

Councillor Sarto expressed the Committee's regrets that Mr. Connors was tendering his resignation and thanked Mr. Connors, on behalf of the Committee, for the contributions he has made to the Committee both as a member and Chair.

In light of Mr. Connors' announcement, it was decided to defer the elections until the April meeting.

Mr. Connors encouraged the members to bring forward nominations or consider for the next meeting. Mr. Connors will attend the April meeting for the purpose of conducting the elections.

Mr. Venus was nominated by Ms. Cholette as Chair but he declined.

The Secretary was asked to provide a list for the next meeting of members and the date their terms expire. A discussion followed on the eligibility of some members to be reappointed for a further term, given the terms of reference allow a member to serve a maximum of six years. Whether this clause took affect the date the most recent terms of reference were adopted was debated. Ms. Williams felt that this may have to be run by the Solicitor.

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

MOVED BY Councillor Sarto and seconded by Ms. Brown that the minutes of the February 17, 2003 meeting be adopted, as circulated. MOTION PUT AND CARRIED.

Referring to the February minutes, Councillor Sarto noted item 6.1 - **Wheelchair Accessible Taxis**. He had been absent from the February meeting and questioned

where the matter stood. He noted that there is only one accessible taxi in operation which operates out of Halifax. It was concluded that an invitation should be extended to Mr. Rutt, Executive Director, CPA to attend the next meeting. A copy of the invitation to be sent to all those carbon copied in Mr. Rutt's correspondence.

Councillor Sarto also referred to a reference to a joint meeting held with the Taxi Committee December 2001 in Halifax Hall regarding this subject. As a follow-up, a letter was written re a subsidy for **Access-a-Bus** to the CAO from the Taxi Committee. He wondered if a response has been received.

MOVED BY Councillor Sarto and Ms. Brown that a follow-up letter be sent to the Chair of the Taxi Committee to determine the status of the request to the CAO re a subsidy for Access-a-Bus. MOTION PUT AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

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

It was requested that the subject of Access-a-Bus attendants be added to the agenda under New Business, item 5.3.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1 RESIGNATION - PAUL CONNORS

Refer Item 2.

5.2 JACKIE MACLACHLAN - FIRE SERVICES

Ms. MacLachlan recalled that she had attended a Committee meeting last April seeking input from the members regarding information which could be incorporated into a Disabilities Awareness Program for Fire Services.

Since that time Fire Services was able to commission a program through Reach Nova Scotia. The program, which covers a broad range of disabilities, has been received very well by Fire Services and approximately half the urban firefighters have taken it. She noted that it became obvious that other HRM business units, i.e. Police Services, Tourism, Metro Transit, Outside Workers, taxi drivers, etc. would find this program beneficial, also departments within the Province's jurisdiction, i.e. ambulance service.

She circulated to the members copies of a Resource Directory for People with Disabilities. She will endeavour to modify its format so it can be brailled.

Interest was expressed in the topic areas covered. A copy of the actual presentation was circulated at the meeting. A copy was left for the file. Ms. MacLachlan was asked to provide a summary of topics which could be attached to the meeting minutes.

During the ensuing question and answer session, the following points were made:

- C The provincially run Fire School might be interested in a similar presentation.
- C The benefit of a questionnaire being provided to tenants, so they can identify any disabilities, which could in turn be made available to dispatchers at 911. It was noted that the Housing Authority follows this practice.
- C The emphasis of the program was how you treat people with dignity.
- C The transferability of the program, given it was commissioned by Fire Services from Reach Nova Scotia. Ms. MacLachlan indicated that she felt Ms. Toba Sherman could adapt and cost sharing could be considered.
- C This would be a great program for Access Awareness Week held in May. Perhaps a session could be arranged for key people in HRM.

Ms. MacLachlan was congratulated on the work she has done and Ms. Williams noted her commitment to addressing issues facing persons with disabilities.

5.3 **ACCESS-A-BUS ATTENDANTS**

Ms. Brown relayed to the Committee that she had just found out that attendants would no longer be allowed on Access-a-Buses.

Mr. Hindle explained that there have not been any changes in the guidelines, but due to the increasing demands on Access-a-Bus, companions can only accompany a user if there is room on the bus. He noted the difference between travel companions and attendants. An attendant is someone who accompanies a disabled individual, if it is medically required. A functional assessment form has to be filled out by a clients physician in the latter instance.

Ms. LeGay noted that airlines and railways seem to have a broader definition, in particular when applied to the blind.

Mr. Hindle noted that when a blind person is accompanied they don't need to use Access-a-Bus. They could use regular Metro Transit buses if there is no physical condition which requires a wheelchair accessible bus. He also referred to the role the Access-a-Bus drivers play as travel supervisors. This role is not needed if an individual is accompanied.

Concern was expressed that perhaps the conditional eligibility aspects have not been communicated well enough to the clients. Ms. Brown felt in her personal situation her

physician's assessment was being overridden.

Caution was expressed by Ms. Williams that perhaps this is not an issue for the Committee to address, given there is a Access-a-Bus Advisory Committee, unless there is a policy recommendation the Board wishes to endorse. Mr. Hindle assured the Committee that the Access-a-Bus Advisory Committee reviews such matters on a regular basis. He noted that a whole new set of criteria is being developed because of the introduction of low floor buses.

In response to a question, Mr. Hindle noted that two days before a scheduled trip, confirmation is provided, which would include whether there was enough room for a companion.

6. BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF MINUTES AND STATUS SHEET

6.1 SIDEWALK CAFES

Mr. Barrett was not in attendance as he is no longer involved with this issue. He suggested Mr. Phillip Francis and/or Brian Roberts, Right of Way Services (ROW) be contacted as they administer the program. Mr. Francis was invited to the meeting, but he indicated (ROW) is only responsible for administration of the sidewalk café program, which is based on the current policy. They are not responsible for development of a new policy.

Ms. Williams advised that she had spoken with Kevin Barrett and he indicated that to his knowledge no changes are proposed for the upcoming season. He anticipates more enforcement of the existing by-law.

The Committee decided that Mr. Paul Dunphy should be invited to the next meeting. If he can't come Jim Donovan. Given Mr. Rutt's interest in this item and the outstanding letter the Committee has from him, it was suggested that when he is invited to the April meeting in relation to the Accessible Taxi issue, he be alerted that the Sidewalk Café item will also be dealt with.

6.2 DRAFT TO COUNCIL RE CNIB BUS PASSES

Ms. Williams circulated copies of her most recent draft which incorporates input from Ms. Coffey. While Ms. LeGay had also provided input via e-mail, Ms. Williams did not recall receiving it. Ms. Williams read the draft as she had not had an opportunity to braille it.

The Committee discussed the draft at length and agreed to a version which changed the third paragraph to read as follows:

In order to develop a policy which is fair and equitable for all persons with disabilities, the Committee recommends this matter should be sent back to staff for a full review as to the impact of *developing a policy with respect to special passes for disabled users of Metro Transit*.

MOVED BY Mr. Harrington and seconded by Ms. Coffey that an information report be prepared for Regional Council, worded as submitted by Ms. Williams, with the above noted amendment. MOTION PUT AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

6.3 TIMBERLEA AREA SIGN

Ms. MacDonald indicated she was not sure which Councillor she should direct her letter to with respect to concerns about the wording of a sign in Timberlea. She was advised that Councillor Rankin is the Councillor for the area. The Secretary will provide her with his e-mail and mailing address.

Mr. Hindle suggested that before she corresponded with Councillor Rankin, she check to see if the sign had in fact been replaced.

6.4 CROSSWALKS AND CURB CUTS FOR WHEELCHAIRS

Mr. Connors indicated he would take care of this item before the next meeting. A report needs to be written to Regional Council in response to their query. He recalled that the Committee has been working with Engineering and Transportation on this subject and they have indicated their willingness to respond when members identify locations where improvements are needed.

It was noted that Mr. McClusker has been seconded to work on Regional Planning. Mr. Connors will contact Taso Koutroulakis.

6.5 HOUSING FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE

Deferred in Ms. Reynolds absence.

6.6 UPDATE - WEST END MALL

Concerns had been previously discussed regarding the distance the bus terminal is from the mall, which causes accessibility problems. Ms. Brown advised that she had heard that the Chairman, Client Services, CNIB had drafted a letter and sent it to the managers/owners of the West End Mall. Ms. LeGay advised that she wrote to the Chairman, Client Services and requested a copy of the correspondence. From the

reaction, she felt it has not been sent out.

Mr. Hindle noted that a meeting had been held in September in the CNIB Board Room to deal with issues of accessibility. Attempts have been made to hold another meeting, but it is proving difficult to get representatives of the nationally owned company to attend.

No one knew the reason for the firm restricting bus access, ie. whether it was due to liability or not.

Ms. Williams questioned whether the Human Rights Commission has been contacted. She felt it could be argued there is discrimination, as the location of the bus terminal is presenting a barrier to those with disabilities to services. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to launch a complaint under the Human Rights Act. There is a need to bring attention to the issue and the media would likely get involved if this route was taken.

Mr. Hindle noted that Access-a-Bus has access to the mall and a bus route equipped with a low floor bus, as does a larger bus on the Walmart side of the building. As more low floor buses come into service, it is hoped that more buses will be able to gain closer access.

6.7 TAXI ISSUES - SCENTS AND DOGS

Due to the lateness of the hour, deferred.

6.8 STATUS SHEET

It was proposed by Ms. Cale and Ms. LeGay that interested members of the Committee meet with the Secretary to discuss reformatting the Status Sheet and protocol to be used in removing items from it.

It was decided to meet at 3:00 p.m. preceding the next meeting scheduled for April 28th. The Secretary will check into the availability of the Training Room that day. She also proposed inviting Edward Goodhew of the Print Shop, who does the braille for the Committee, so he can explain the limitations of the software.

In the interim, Cynthia Street provided a copy of the format of a status sheet to be copied for attendees.

6.9 SNOW REMOVAL PROGRAM FOR SENIORS

Copies of the HRM Web page which provides information on the Seniors Snow Removal Program were circulated in the agenda package. General enquiries about the program

can be made by telephoning 558-1049.

INTERPRETERS

Ms. MacDonald was pleased to report that interpreters have been found for the Halifax Regional Council session starting tomorrow night.

Ms. Williams noted that reference to the provision of this service is going to be included in the upcoming Deaf and Hard of Hearing newsletter, along with advice on other services available, i.e. TTY numbers, etc.

SNOW REMOVAL

Reference was made to a journalist from "The Coast" requesting an interview on snow removal service. Given the Committee's information report is on Regional Council's March 18th agenda, the Committee's recommendation in this regard is now public.

7. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Board's next meeting will be held April 28th, the fourth Monday of the month, given the third Monday, is Easter Monday.

8. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:15 p.m.

Lynne Le Boutillier
Legislative Assistant

