

Access-by-Design:

A Ten Point Accessibility Action Program for HRM

Prepared by: Gerry Post, HRM Citizen January 2014

Introduction:

Within recent months the HRM leadership (Mayor and Council + Staff) has displayed considerable commitment to improve accessibility. Examples are:

- ✓ The positive Town Hall meeting last Fall
- ✓ The Mayor's initiative on Healthy & Livable Community
- ✓ The enforcement of the bylaws with the recent court success + fine with the pizza establishment
- ✓ The door knob + other improvements proposed in the building code
- ✓ The pavement correction to provide improved access to buttons at controlled crossings
- ✓ The CAO's initiative to assess municipal accessibility legislation
- ✓ The Recreation's Division initiative to visit Ottawa's accessibility program
- ✓ The Metro Transit recruitment of an accessibility advocate for the organization

And there provincial initiatives planned, such as the Nova Scotia Government commitment to develop accessibility legislation similar to Ontario and Manitoba.

These are all very positive signs for change and must be supported. There is also an opportunity to bring such initiatives together into a comprehensive strategy to ensure there is

maximum synergy and that the limited resources are allocated in a smart way and prioritized to reflect the needs of the community. At present, these initiatives are largely being undertaken independently...lets connect them and bring together organizational & institutional silos through a Strategic Action Program.

The 10 Point Action Program:

1. Make a leadership commitment to transform Halifax into one of the most accessible cities in North America - a policy Statement embedded in the Healthy-Liveable Communities initiative adopted by HRM Council
2. Establish a blueprint to get there, an ***Access-by-Design*** Strategy for HRM - set a tight deadline to avoid fatigue. Focus on results. Should be completed for recommendation to council in Sept. 2014
3. Involve stakeholders from Day 1, and not just the disabled community - include seniors, business community and our youth...the future of our community
4. Simultaneously work at the HRM regional (the Access-by-Design Strategy), community and project levels to show action and establish momentum
5. At Community level establish Accessibility Community Actions Plans for priority areas such as Spring Garden Road, Downtown Dartmouth, the Hospital District and major shopping areas such as Bayers Lake Big Box District

6. At Project level initiate the Stopgap Ramp program (<http://stopgapblog.blogspot.ca>) begin it as a pilot in one high profile area (Hydrostone commercial strip proposed) and involve merchants and other stakeholders

7. Establish a new line item in the HRM Capital Budget called Accessibility Improvements...re-allocate \$1M from existing infrastructure budget to this new budget initiative annually - use it to help fund the stopgap project and the projects to be defined by the community initiatives and Access-by-Design Strategy

8. Assign three HRM Staff members to the Access-by-Design initiative: a Sr. Policy Analyst (double up as project manager); a Researcher; and a technical spec writer to help develop HRM accessibility standards.

9. Establish Accessibility Leads (at managerial level) in each HRM Department, and strike an interdepartmental group of these leads - direct each Department to develop a three year priority Accessibility action program that can be measured

10. Establish an **Access-by-Design Task Force** consisting of reps from the various stakeholder groups. It reports to the Mayor and will prepare and recommend to Council the Access-by-Design Strategy.