

ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

September 30, 2013

MEMBERS

Councillor Steve Craig, Meeting Chair
Councillor Jennifer Watts
Lisa Pottie, AAC Chair
Theresa Horwill, AAC Vice Chair
Tom Boyd
Cynthia Bryant
Yvon Clement
Patricia Anne Gates
Bob Hayter
Mark MacKenzie

OTHERS
PRESENT:

Mayor Mike Savage
Councillor Lorelei Nicoll
Councillor Gloria McCluskey
Councillor Darren Fisher
Councillor Waye Mason
Mr. Richard Butts, CAO

STAFF:

Darren Young, Project Manager, Facility Development
Damion Stapledon, Coordinator, Community & Recreation Services
Taso Koutroulakis, Acting Manager, Traffic & Right of Way Services
Gordon Hayward, Superintendent, Winter Operations
Glen Bannon, Manager, Transit Operations, Metro Transit
Jessie Debaie, Assistant Trails Coordinator
Jane Young, Manager, Citizen Contact Centres
Kelly Marney, HRM Webmaster
Jim Donovan, Manager, Municipal Compliance

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1. CALL TO ORDER/OPENING REMARKS/PURPOSE OF MEETING

The Chair, Councillor Steve Craig, called this Town Hall meeting to order at 6:30 pm in the Common Room of the Dartmouth Sportsplex, 110 Wyse Road, Dartmouth.

He welcomed participants and introduced members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and HRM staff. The Chair also gave an overview of the purpose of the town hall meeting.

2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES OR ISSUES

- **Mr. Darren Young, Project Manager, Facility Development**

Mr. Young introduced himself and explained that Facility Development with HRM involves three main areas; parks and playgrounds, trails and buildings. He noted that HRM's aim to make playgrounds accessible to all. He realizes that many of the playgrounds in HRM are not accessible. He explained that this is due to the location of the land provided for a playground.

Mr. Young then explained some of the accessibility features found within the HRM buildings including the new Dartmouth Transit Terminal and the BMO Centre. He also noted the use of the Universal Accessibility plans in the design of some of the new HRM buildings and projects including the new Central Library.

- **Mr. Damion Stapledon, Coordinator, Community & Recreation Services**

Mr. Stapledon provided an overview of his position and noted that he oversees the area of Cherrybrook to Gaetzbrook. He stated that he is also a member of the Inclusion Committee for Recreations Services.

Mr. Stapledon indicated that Community and Recreation Services covers municipally owned and operated buildings, and the services they provide. He stated that there has been an increase in requests for inclusion support and added that staff are currently conducting a national scan of recreation service delivery throughout Canada and how they are providing service to those with disabilities. HRM's current model is to take their mainstream programming and adapt it to the individual's needs; however they would like to introduce some specialized programming.

Mr. Stapledon noted that earlier registration from programs is ideal as it gives staff time to prepare a better service. He added that HRM's Community Recreation Services has a number of partnerships including Dalhousie Recreational Therapy and Occupational Therapy, the IWK, Easter Seals, and Autism Nova Scotia. An audience member asked about a relationship with CNIB. Mr. Stapledon responded that they are always looking for new partnerships and he will look into a partnership with CNIB.

- **Mr. Taso Koutroulakis, Acting Manager, Traffic & Right of Way Services**

Mr. Koutroulakis explained the role of Traffic & Right of Way Service and stated that his area of responsibility includes the installation and maintenance of traffic signals, pedestrian signals and pavement markings. He indicated that, with respect to accessibility, his area of responsibility is the installation of accessible pedestrian signals throughout HRM. He noted that there are currently 37 locations and that number is expanding. Mr. Koutroulakis stated that one of the challenges is older infrastructure in place. They have been working closely with the CNIB, the Accessibility Committee and members at large to locate areas for improvement.

Mr. Koutroulakis indicated that there is an upcoming initiative to upgrade the traffic signal system in HRM. One of the challenges that this initiative aims to overcome, is the relocation of the traffic signal cabinets so that they are detectable by visually impaired citizens who use a cane.

- **Mr. Gordon Hayward, Superintendent, Winter Operations**

Mr. Hayward introduced himself and explained that he mainly oversees snow removal. He indicated that for this coming year, one of the projects Municipal Operations will be working on is accessibility to the playgrounds. They are working on renewing the equipment with accessible equipment and aiming to make the grounds more accessible. With regards to snow removal, Mr. Hayward stated that for bus stops, the new standard is to have it cleared within 48 hours instead of 72 hours. He also noted that on the Halifax Peninsula, homeowners are no longer responsible for snow removal; HRM will be responsible for clearing the snow and ice on sidewalks in this area. Mr. Hayward added that they hope to have the snow removal assistance program for seniors and persons with disabilities up and running for this coming season. The past provider of this service has opted out and they are currently working to contract a new provider.

- **Mr. Glen Bannon, Manager, Transit Operations, Metro Transit**

Mr. Bannon introduced himself and explained that he is overall responsible and accountable for the delivery of bus and ferry service for Metro Transit. He indicated that Metro Transit currently offers 63 bus routes, including 43 which are considered to be accessible. He stated that Metro Transit is committed to improving the services provided to those with accessibility challenges and they are committed to expanding their Access-A-Bus fleet.

Metro Transit is also committed to implementing the Technology Road Map which includes the replacement of their computer aided dispatch program and automatic vehicle location system. Mr. Bannon noted that this lays the groundwork for the commencement of the "Stop Annunciation" program. This program is anticipated to be underway in 2015 with a 12 month implementation plan.

Metro Transit is also working with HRM's Facility Development to improve accessibility in the terminals. He believes the new Dartmouth Terminal has been successful and is looking forward to plans for the Lacewood bus terminal and Alderney and Halifax ferry terminals.

- **Ms. Jessie Debaie, Assistant Trails Coordinator**

Ms. Debaie explained that she works with HRM Regional Trails. Ms. Debaie stated that they have worked with 22 community groups to develop the trail booklet to increase awareness of the trails with HRM. She indicated that she has worked with Mr. Laughlin Rutt, HRM Diversity Consultant, to assess to accessibility of the trails and look for barriers. They are aiming to have 1 km route on each trail that is wheelchair accessible. The trails website now indicates what areas of the trails are wheelchair accessible.

Ms. Debaie indicated that the First Lake Trail has some braille signs for those with visual impairments. She added that she realizes the progress is slow, however they are continually looking for areas to improve and she is looking forward to hearing from participants at the meeting.

- **Ms. Jane Young, Manager, Citizen Contact Centres**

Ms. Young explained the she manages the HRM '3-1-1' Call Centre as well as the HRM Customer Service Centres. She stated that the Customer Service Centres are accessible. Ms. Young explained that she is at the meeting to take questions and concerns, and to also make people aware of the services.

- **Ms. Kelly Marney, HRM Webmaster**

Ms. Marney introduced herself and explained her role as Webmaster. She indicated that she is aware that the HRM site requires much work with regards to accessibility. She noted that that there are many projects underway to clean up the website and make it more accessible. They are currently working on the implementation of Compliance Sherriff and working on the accessibility pages. Ms. Marney also explained that they are working on transit schedules that would be much more accessible. She also provided an overview of the Open Data App Contest to create a mobile app for accessibility. She stated the sheer size of the website and older code on the back of the site is a challenge for them. Ms. Marney added that they are always considering accessibility as a top priority when assessing new software and programs. She welcomes comments and suggestions.

- **Mr. Jim Donovan, Manager, Municipal Compliance**

Mr. Donovan explained that he manages municipal compliance which is responsible for the regulatory aspects of by-law enforcement, licensing and building codes. He stated that he works closely with the province with regards to the building code as they are not municipal rules; they are provincial. He indicated that building accessibility is one of the

form principle objectives of the building code. Making these regulations appropriate and functional is very important so that engagement with the province can be more effective.

3. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Chair opened the floor for those wishing to speak. He reviewed the ground rules for the meeting.

Ms. Emily Daigle, Dartmouth, expressed concern over bus accessibility. She indicated that it was very disappointing to see so few people at the consultation regarding the Metro Transit Five Year Plan. She expressed concern that the Metro Transit building at 200 Ilsley Avenue is not accessible to someone like her. It is also dangerous to try and get there along a road with no sidewalk. She stressed that it is important to have accessibility to services and freedom to get there safely. She noted the number of essential services in areas such as Bayers Lake that are not accessible. She is proud of Metro Transit and that 85% of the buses are accessible; however less than half the stops are accessible. Ms. Daigle also expressed that they need the “Stop Annunciation” program now, not in 2015.

Mr. Bannon responded to Ms. Daigle’s concerns, noting that he is aware of the issue at 200 Ilsley Avenue and noted that they are working to make the building more accessible to their customers and staff. For the longer term, Metro Transit would like to create a Store Front which would allow all users access to their services.

With reference to the safety of the routes, Mr. Bannon stated that creating safe landing pads is, unfortunately, a slow process. However, they are slowly improving the accessibility of their routes by creating landing pads. He also noted that they are currently hiring a new manager of accessible transit.

Ms. Daigle stated that the biggest challenges for her are bus stops and the transit terminals. She indicated that she could take Mr. Bannon around the terminal and show him all of the challenges to someone who is visually impaired and/or in a wheelchair. She also suggested that Metro Transit ask users of accessible transit what the essential services are for them within HRM and to focus on making safe landing pads or route changes in those areas. She reiterated the importance of “Stop Annunciation” on the buses.

Mr. Bannon stated that he would be pleased to meet with Ms. Daigle and go through the terminal in Dartmouth. He indicated that he has taken down her comments with regards to essential services. He added that Bayers Lake is a known issue and that they are continuing to work to strike a balance of accessibility and safety on the routes.

Joanne Coffey, Halifax, asked about some of the shopping areas in the north end of Halifax. She indicated that many of these stores are not accessible and asked Mr. Donovan if the Building Inspectors go out to inspect locations.

Mr. Donovan encouraged Ms. Coffey to call 3-1-1 to report these locations and inspectors will go out. He also explained that if there is no change of occupancy classification the barrier free regulation doesn't apply; however if there is a change in occupancy classification these regulations do apply.

Mr. Michelle Yorke inquired about the size of motorized wheelchairs and scooters as he has been told that his wheelchair is no longer allowed on certain buses. He also expressed concern and disappointment over the number of bus drivers who are not respectful to those with disabilities.

Mr. Bannon regrets that Mr. Yorke has had negative experiences with Metro Transit. He explained that Metro Transit works to correct the understanding of their operators to ensure respectful treatment of all Metro Transit clients.

Mr. Bannon addressed Mr. Yorke's concern about the size of wheelchair and explained that the buses that are part of the newer fleet can only accommodate chairs that do not require a three point turn for safety reasons. Metro Transit is required to comply with the safety regulations and guidelines of the manufacturer. In the event of an emergency or accident, Metro Transit wants all patrons to be able to exit smoothly and in a safe fashion.

Mr. Dennis Sheehy, HRM, explained that he works for the school board and he has noted how many schools have playgrounds that are not accessible. He stated that having rocks as the playground surface ruins wheelchairs. He also wanted to bring awareness to the set of lights at Bayers Road and Joseph Howe and explained that this intersection's lights do not give people enough time to cross. He has almost been struck by a vehicle at that location a number of times. He suggested that the intersection's timing be reviewed. Mr. Sheehy also explained that with the newer buses where people in wheelchairs have to ride backwards, it can be difficult to see your stop.

Mr. Bannon addressed Mr. Sheehy's concern with regards to the buses. He explained the operation of the passive restraints on the buses. He noted that there are a number of different opinions on restraint systems and explained that there have been complaints about motion sickness with the passive restraint. He explained that the j-hooks and forward facing arrangements are preferred; however some of the newer buses are not equipped with these restraints.

Mr. Koutroulakis indicated that he has made note of Mr. Sheehy's concern at Bayers Road and Joseph Howe and will have staff review this site. He also explained that after a review of National feedback, the standard walking speed has been reduced meaning that staff will be reviewing traffic signal timing and there will be adjustments made to sites as per the new national standard.

Responding to an enquiry from Mr. Young, Mr. Sheehy advised that he works at Duc d'Anville Elementary School. Mr. Young explained that he will bring this issue back to

the staff that work with the playgrounds and noted they could look at making the surface accessible. He added that, unfortunately, playgrounds are very expensive.

Mr. Gus Reed, Halifax, asked Mr. Bannon about the position they are looking to fill for a Manager of Accessible Transit. Mr. Bannon responded that they are looking for a Manager and he explained the scope of the position. Mr. Reed explained that if he, for example, was hired for that job he would have difficulty working in the Metro Transit building at 200 Ilsley Avenue because it is not accessible. He suggested that this is an example of discrimination. He asked Mr. Bannon what he would do to accommodate an individual with a disability should they be hired for that particular position.

Mr. Bannon stated that he is aware of the accessibility issue at the Metro Transit building. He recognizes that they have a lot of work to do to make this site more accessible. He outlined some of the temporary measures they have taken to make the site more accessible.

Mr. Reed responded that he believes that a person with a disability is fully entitled to a paying job with HRM and that inaccessible buildings are denying opportunities.

Ms. Tammy Sampson, HRM, asked about snow removal around the pedestrian signal buttons at crosswalks. She indicated that snow around these buttons makes it difficult to reach. She also asked if the low floor buses with one tie-down could be changed to four tie-downs with the j-hooks as one tie-down allows a wheelchair to slide around with the movement of the bus. She expressed concern over the amount of space certain strollers take up on the buses. She suggested more fold up seats or perhaps encouraging parents to fold up the strollers.

Mr. Hayward thanked Ms. Sampson for her question and explained that in a few days the snow removal supervisors will be undergoing some training and removal of snow around the pedestrian signal buttons will be a topic that is covered. He also stated that this topic will be covered with all of their contractors.

Mr. Bannon responded to Ms. Sampson's question about the tie-downs. He explained that the first priority is to convert the buses with the seat belt restraint to the j-hook restraints. He will take her feedback with regards to the restraints and encouraged the audience to bring any feedback about restraints to Metro Transit.

Ms. Sampson then expressed concern about some of the operators not being properly trained on the restraints. Mr. Bannon explained that there will be on site training showing the operators how to properly operate the restraint systems. He noted that there would be better refresher training for operating these systems.

Ms. Peggy Brown expressed concern over the state of the sidewalks around Northwood Manor and areas around the Halifax Forum. Mr. Hayward responded that he is unable to speak to this location in terms of full capital renewal. However, he can look at specific areas and any maintenance that is required.

Mr. Jim McDermott thanked his interpreter for being here and asked about the 24 hour accessibility of the HRM website. He doesn't understand how a deaf person is supposed to call in and also asked how the 3-1-1 service is accessible. He understands that the website is being worked on, however he suggests the use of ASL video-logs instead of just text. It would help the deaf community understand.

Ms. Young responded that there are online service requests and that the Call Centre staff also respond to these online service requests. She noted the hours of operation for the Call Centre are 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., 7 days a week. Ms. Young advised that the TTY line is 490-6645.

Mr. McDermott responded that TTY is outdated technology, and that the average deaf person would rather work online. Ms. Young stated that they are looking at a service that would allow them to answer through the computer; however that service is not yet implemented.

Ms. Marney was pleased to receive the feedback about the website. She noted that they are uploading video-logs and also noted the "Browse-Aloud" plug-in available.

Ms. Joanna Stork, CNIB, suggested that perhaps there be a mobile text service for 3-1-1 that could be beneficial to the deaf community. Ms. Young and Ms. Marney received Ms. Stork's comments and stated they would look into this possibility.

Mr. Gordie Publicover explained a situation of an Access-A-Bus user that he works with who was able to get to a certain location in Burnside but was unable to book a ride home. He noted that Access-A-Bus should be a service that promotes independence. He believes 7 days' notice to book an Access-A-Bus would be challenging if appointments are short notice.

Mr. Bannon responded that he would be interested to work with Mr. Publicover to help develop some information to hand out to the people that he works with and noted he would be interested in speaking to Mr. Publicover after the meeting.

Ms. Eileen Nauss, Beaver Bank, explained that her husband, Charles, had a stroke one year ago, so this year has been a huge learning curve for them. She applauded the amount of support available to her. She expressed concern with regards to the Access-A-Bus service. She believes it is broken because 90% of the time they are unable to get a bus. She believes the scheduling service is not well run. Her husband is often coming home alone and is often the only one on the bus. She also believes the Schedulers need sensitivity training.

Ms. Nauss also asked about the trails and whether there are plans to have a fully accessible trail that is longer than 1 km. Ms. Debaie responded that the First Lake trail is almost fully accessible. She also explained that they want to have 1km of the trails

around HRM accessible rather than just focus on one specific area. She reiterated that progress is slow, but they are moving forward.

Ms. Violet Rosengarten, Dartmouth, stated that she believes 3-1-1 is a wonderful service. She asked Mr. Donovan about the Khyber Centre for the Arts on Barrington Street. She explained that at a recent art show, one of the artists needed to be carried up three flights of stairs because the building is not accessible. She asked Mr. Donovan why HRM has not done anything to improve the accessibility of this space.

Mr. Donovan reiterated the comments made earlier in the meeting; because the occupancy classification has not changed, the barrier free regulation does not apply. He will bring Ms. Rosengarten's comments back to staff and attempt to get back to her with an answer.

Mr. Isai Estey, Dartmouth, through his mother, Ann MacRae, would like to know why when booking an Access-A-Bus does it sometimes arrive very early. Mr. Estey asked if there is any sort of service that could be put in place that would confirm pick-up times. He also wondered if there could be some sort of electronic system that would allow him to independently book the service rather than rely on others to book the service by phone.

Mr. Bannon noted that the bus arriving early is often to avoid traffic, and the driver would be required to wait until the specified pick up time. He also explained that they are planning to move towards a web based system that would allow them to schedule trips and provide confirmation.

Mr. Ken Sawler asked about the policy for ramps into buildings. He stated that there are many times that he cannot get into buildings and this is very frustrating to him. He also explained that there is a lack of cut-outs on sidewalks. He has taken photos of these locations and brought them to HRM's attention and no action has been taken. He also expressed concern over the size of the ramps on the Access-A-Bus, noting that his scooter does not fit on the newer buses.

Mr. Bannon thanked Mr. Sawler for his observations on the ramp sizes. He was not aware of the shorter ramps and will take the feedback away.

Mr. Koutroulakis responded to Mr. Sawler's question regarding cut-outs on sidewalks and access to the buttons. He stated that this is one area that is looked at when sidewalks are upgraded. Mr. Sawler then made reference to the locations in HRM where this is a problem including the area by the Dartmouth Transit Terminal. Mr. Koutroulakis indicated that he has made note of this location.

Mr. Donovan then noted that he would talk to Mr. Sawler after the meeting to discuss the buildings that are lacking ramps.

Mr. Gerry Post, HRM, thanked the Committee for holding this session. He believes one of the challenges is having HRM truly understand the needs of those with disabilities. He suggested that each year each department come up with three areas where they could improve accessibility. He also suggested having assessments done with regards to accessibility.

Mr. Post applauded Metro Transit and explained that he hasn't had many issues with the service. Mr. Post commented that he really appreciates the Google Map feature on the site however he suggest having the feature indicate whether or not the route is accessible. He also suggested an application that could be developed that would allow someone to take a photo of a barrier and send it to HRM with a message. He believes this would help enhance the 3-1-1 service.

Ms. Cathy Crouse, Executive Director, Metro Community Housing Association, explained that mental health issues are not a visible disability. She suggested incorporating mental health issues in training for HRM service providers, such as recreation and transit, so that they know how to address a panic attack or paranoia, for example.

Mr. Stapledon responded that some staff members have recently attended a symposium on mental health and that they will be incorporating skills within their programming. He added that mental health is a priority for HRM Recreation.

Mr. Jerry Pye, Dartmouth, stated that one day he hopes that an individual with a disability will be sitting on the panel. He noted that there has been difficulty hearing people at the meeting. He believes that this meeting could have been delivered in a better way. Mr. Pye asked if HRM has set goals for itself for making sure individuals with disabilities serve on boards and committees within the municipality or if they set goals for inclusion with HRM staffing. He believes there needs to be more people with disabilities active with HRM so that accessibility is more heavily considered. He stated that there should be someone with a disability working for Planning and Infrastructure. He noted that many heritage properties are not accessible. Mr. Pye also noted that more could be done to make trails accessible.

4. CLOSING COMMENTS

The Chair thanked everyone for coming.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

Jane Crosby
Legislative Support