



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR ACCESSIBILITY IN HRM  
TOWN HALL MEETING MINUTES  
October 29, 2014**

MEMBERS  
PRESENT: Councillor Steve Craig, Meeting Chair  
Councillor Jennifer Watts  
Lisa Pottie, AAC Chair  
Patricia Anne Gates

OTHERS  
PRESENT: Mayor Mike Savage  
Councillor Wayne Mason  
Councillor Matt Whitman  
Councillor Ouhtit  
Mike Labrecque, Deputy CAO

STAFF  
PANEL: Darren Young, Project Manager, Corporate Facility Design &  
Construction, Operations Support  
Damion Stapledon, Community Recreation Coordinator, Parks &  
Recreation  
Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation &  
Public Works  
Darrin Natolino, Superintendent of Winter Operations, Training &  
Compliance, Transportation & Public Works  
Ahmed Kidwai, Manager, Accessible Transit, Halifax Transit  
Kelly Marney, Webmaster, Finance, Information, Communication, &  
Technology  
Jim Donovan, Manager, Municipal Compliance, Planning & Development

*The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.*

*The agenda, supporting documents, and information items circulated to the Committee are available online: <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/access/index.php>*

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

The Chair, Councillor Steve Craig, called the third annual Town Hall meeting to order at 6:45 pm in the Cafetorium of the Bedford Hammonds Plains Community Centre, 202 Innovation Drive, Bedford.

He welcomed participants and introduced members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and HRM staff. The Chair also gave an overview of the role of the Accessibility Committee and the purpose of the Town Hall Meeting.

The Chair invited Mayor Savage to say a few words.

Mayor Savage welcomed everyone, noting that accessibility is a priority for Council and shared some of the initiatives that Council has taken on to make Halifax more accessible. He acknowledged the hard work of the members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

**2. STAFF OVERVIEW OF ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES OR ISSUES**

- **Darren Young, Project Manager, Corporate Facility Design & Construction, Operations Support**

Mr. Young introduced himself and the role of Facility Development as well as the fact that accessibility is a priority for his Department. Since last year, Mr. Young has dedicated a significant portion of his time to working on accessibility features for individuals with low vision/no vision. Mr. Young explained that the Canadian Safety Association B651 regulations are now the accessibility standard that his department follows, guiding their decision making processes.

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

Mr. Stapledon introduced himself and stated that he left last year's Town Hall Meeting with a greater understanding of the need to focus on partnerships.

Over the past year Community & Recreation Services has looked across the nation at what is being offered in other municipalities with regards to accessibility. They began this process by hiring an internship student from Dalhousie to make contact with a number of municipalities regarding service delivery. Mr. Stapledon shared that his colleague, Judy Power became involved in a mentorship program with other municipalities through the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with Disabilities.

Throughout this process it became clear that the Municipality of Ottawa is the national leader in municipal accessibility which lead Mr. Stapledon and Ms. Power to connect with them and travel to Ottawa to learn more about their accessibility initiatives.

After returning to Halifax, Community & Recreation services conducted three different focus groups: one with other service providers for individuals with disabilities, one for recreation therapy professionals, and one for individuals with disabilities along with caregivers and parents of children with disabilities.

Out of these focus groups six themes emerged: programming, staff & training, facilities & equipment, and partnerships. Mr. Stapledon and his team are currently writing a report with proposed changes to service delivery.

- **Taso Koutroulakis, Manager, Traffic Management, Transportation & Public Works**

Mr. Koutroulakis introduced himself and explained the role of Traffic & Right of Way Services.

At last year's Town Hall Meeting, many individuals brought up issues regarding crosswalk safety and accessibility to buttons along with crossing times. Staff prepared a Crosswalk Safety Plan for Council incorporating this feedback.

Zebra markings have been painted at 500 locations throughout HRM and a program has been implemented to increase the time to cross at all intersections. This program is approximately 45% complete. Staff have assessed 182 locations to identify accessibility issues and other safety concerns. A program will be brought forward to Council in this regard for consideration.

Mr. Koutroulakis also shared his understanding around the fact that cabinets that are pole-mounted are hazardous to visually impaired pedestrians. In the future, cabinets will be installed down to the pavement surface so that cane users can detect the hazard.

The number of locations with accessible pedestrian signals has gone from 37 to 44.

- **Darrin Natolino, Superintendent of Winter Operations, Training & Compliance, Transportation & Public Works**

Mr. Natolino introduced himself, noting that he was hired to the position since the last Town Hall meeting.

He explained that last year commitments were made around bus stop clearing, snow removal assistance program and making playgrounds more accessible.

Strides have been made regarding asphalt pathways to create better access to parks and playgrounds.

Time has been reduced from 78 hours to 42 hours in terms of time to clear bus stops.

Mr. Natolino explained the challenges surrounding the clearing of bus stops but emphasized the work that his staff are doing. The main challenge that was faced last year was that each snowfall was met by an equally great snowfall within a few days. He shared that a relationship was forged with the YMCA last year and that they have expressed interest in a multi-year agreement which will allow for program growth.

- **Mr. Ahmad Kidwai, Manager, Accessible Transit, Halifax Transit**

Mr. Kidwai introduced himself. He was hired as Manager of Accessible Transit after the Town Hall Meeting last year.

Plans are in motion to make Halifax Transit headquarters more accessible in a way that balances security with accessibility requirements. Currently there are telephones in the lobby, individuals can call up and staff will ensure that their needs are taken care of.

Mr. Kidwai explained that all new buses will be low floor and have a deployable ramp, making them fully accessible. Out of the 68 routes, 46 routes are now fully accessible. Every year new routes are identified based on the availability of accessible buses. There are 2,600 bus stops with 56% being accessible and described the criteria that need to be met for an accessible bus stop.

Over the last 9 months service for Access-A-Bus over has increased over 22%, with the program accepting three to four new applications per day. In 2013 Access-A-Bus carried 315 per day on average, with the 2014 average being over 433 people per day. The demand is also rising and they are traveling about 99,000 km per month.

Mr. Kidwai shared that strides are being taken to improve accessibility at their terminals and facilities. His staff are working closely with a variety of groups that represent individuals with disabilities to ensure more features.

- **Kelly Marney, Webmaster, Finance, Information, Communication, & Technology**

Ms. Marney introduced herself. Last year, she took away from the Town Hall Meeting that the Halifax website needed improvement. Her department was tasked with refreshing Halifax.ca and staff have completed Phase I. While Phase I did not address all of the content, it did address the template that wraps around all of the content. She shared that her staff are working with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level A standards working towards Level AA standards.

Ms. Marney shared that the goal is to continue improving accessibility of the site by using more advanced coding. As the web strategy project continues, the website will continue to become more accessible. It is already responsive so individuals should be able to see it on all devices. Ms. Marney noted that 5 students and 2 interns were hired to help convert every page.

Accessibility testing has been conducted throughout Phase I, including engaging a team of citizens to see what they found and any issues that came back. Ms. Marney shared that YouTube Closed Captioning has also been improved.

Ms. Marney informed the meeting of her understanding around the difficulty that individuals face regarding the transit schedule pages. This is an issue that is being worked on, with projects currently in development. Installing a modern content system will help to provide more accessible information.

- **Mr. Jim Donovan, Manager, Municipal Compliance, Planning & Development**

Mr. Donovan introduced himself and the role of Municipal Compliance, Planning & Development.

He shared that following last year's Town Hall Meeting, his staff were able to meet with an individual that attended the meeting to follow up on accessible issues that he was experiencing. Since that meeting, his team has been able to see and focus on a number of accessibility issues

such as improving T1000 regulations as well as the taxi regulations around licensing of accessibility taxi cabs. The Sidewalk Café by-law was drafted using the Canadian Safety Association B651 regulations and he is also working with the province respecting improving accessibility requirements for new homes.

### **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. Marie Jose (MJ) Crawford** explained that she works at Team Work Cooperative, an employment agency for individuals with disabilities and is also attending the meeting for personal reasons. Ms. Crawford stated that she noticed a number of comments surrounding phone calls as a means to communicate with citizens and explained that phone calls are a barrier for individuals who cannot speak on the phone. She asked the panel if there is another way for individuals to contact the municipality.

Councillor Craig explained that 3-1-1 is the central contact centre for information. 3-1-1 also has an email address, [contact@hrm.ca](mailto:contact@hrm.ca), and there is also a form for the Citizen Contact Centre that individuals can populate on the website and submit. TTY is also available. Councillor Craig said that he will take the questions and information and will follow up.

Ms Crawford explained that TTY is obsolete because most individuals use their cell phones to text instead and cannot afford to have both technologies. The price of TTYs are expensive so they are not being used as they once were.

On a separate subject, Ms. Crawford shared that in the past she was involved in HRM recreational programs. She has taken a number of programs through the municipality but has faced a variety of barriers because of a lack of funding for interpretive services.

Mr. Stapledon thanked Ms. Crawford for her questions and comments and shared that this was an issue raised in the consultation process that was recently completed. He is currently looking into who will be providing this support moving forward and also partnerships. For example, his staff are looking into fostering a relationship with Dalhousie Recreational Therapy and the NSCC Hard of Hearing Faculty. Mr. Stapledon also noted that students are often utilized in this capacity in other parts of Canada. Mr. Stapledon offered to have a conversation with Ms. Crawford following the meeting.

Ms. Crawford stated that it would be nice for Halifax to have more partnerships with deaf organizations or to call upon individuals who are deaf as consultants.

Councillor Craig suggested that Accessibility Advisory Committee discuss this concern.

With respect to the website, Ms. Crawford stated that the information provided is fine but the literacy level of the information is too high for many individuals. Ms. Marney shared that there are some technologies available in this regard and to speak with Ms. Crawford following the meeting.

**Mr. Alan Williams** shared that he works part time as a teacher at NSCC. He would like to see an LCD display on the buses showing the location of the next stop. He has seen it used in Calgary, Winnipeg and Toronto and believes that Halifax buses should have them.

Mr. Kidwai stated that Halifax Transit is embarking on the technology roadmap project, the tender has been awarded and the fundamental work has already started. A computer dispatch with an automatic location will alert staff and the customers as well. This will allow users to see when the next bus is coming, where that bus is and whether or not there is a delay. There is also a stop announcement system embedded in the program. Stops will be announced 50m before the next stop. The implementation is going through its phases and the groundwork is being done.

**Mr. Darren Watts, Halifax**, asked a question regarding accessibility of public washrooms.

Mr. Jim Donovan stated that accessible washrooms are a requirement in new buildings, however, this does not apply to retrofitting buildings. Councillor Watts explained that there is a report regarding extending the hours of the accessible public washrooms at Chocolate Lake. She noted that accessible public washrooms play a big role in making facilities family friendly and accessible which are both priorities for Council.

**Mr. Frank Sullivan** stated that it is important to have interpretive services and explained the difference between using a signer and a qualified interpreter. He has contacted a number of service departments and been told that there is no budget for interpretation services.

Mr. Sullivan requested that a Live Chat function be added to the website.

Mr. Sullivan expressed frustration with landlords in Halifax refusing to set up flashing systems on fire alarms for individuals with hearing impairments. Mr. Donovan stated that a visibility connection is required to the fire alarm system and requested the specific addresses of the buildings where this is an issue so that they can be examined under the Fire Safety Act.

**Mr. Matt Auyash**, President of the Nova Scotia Deaf Sports Association, shared that he would like to have interpreting services available for a number of sports-related activities as well as events happening in Halifax.

Councillor Craig explained that staff will be examining the issues that have been raised around interpreting services for activities provided by the municipality. His hope is that if Halifax demonstrates leadership in this regard that other community organizations (soccer, football, event promoters, etc.) can follow suit.

Mr. Stapledon shared that he is Chair of the Recreation for All Foundation which provides grants to non-profits looking for funding for these types of things. They are hoping to be able to give away \$10,000 this year and are planning to grow the foundation to make more funding available. He stated that for-profit organizations have already been donating and offered to connect with Mr. Auyash following the meeting.

**Ms. Janet Donville** lives at Samuel Prince Manor in Halifax. Ms. Donville explained that the seniors' residence is across the street from the bus stop for the Robie 7 and Gottigen 7. She shared that to get to the bus stop, residents have to cross at an unmarked crosswalk with no

sign that there is a senior residence ahead. Ms. Donville explained that the residents move slowly or with walkers and it is extremely dangerous. Mr. Koutroulakis offered to look into it.

**Ms. Amy Parsons** works and volunteers in Halifax. She wanted to take a craft course through HRM Recreation and was not able to because they could not provide interpretive services. She asked that staff put in place a policy regarding interpreting services. .

**Mr. Don Mullins** expressed difficulty crossing at the light at North Street and Gottingen Street, in front of the seniors home, because it lasts only four seconds before it changes.

Mr. Koutroulakis stated that his staff are currently evaluating all signal timings based on a new standard that would increase crossing time by 20%. While he does not think that there are only four seconds to cross at this intersection, he committed to following up on this issue and ensuring that the proper signal timings are there.

Mr. Mullins expressed frustration around poorly maintained sidewalks and long delays for clearing curb cuts after snow falls, making it difficult for residents to get into cabs or buses.

Mr. Darrin Natolino stated that the biggest challenge that Winter Operations faced last year was the high level of snow and the lack of snow storage. After the difficulties last winter, his staff have made adjustments and changed a few service providers.

Mr. Mullins stated that he has been requesting that an accessible zone be established in front of the building with an Access-A- Bus sign. Mr. Koutroulakis will follow up since his department takes care of creating these accessible zones. They will work with Halifax Transit to find out where there is difficulty picking up or dropping off passengers so that an appropriate accessible zone can be created.

Mr. Mullins expressed frustration around not being able to enter the Needs store at Robie Street and North Street because the door opens the wrong way. Mr. Donovan offered to examine this issue since the business may require a power operator by law.

**Ms. Penny Kitchen** shared that she does not feel safe traveling on the newer buses because of the single strap on the back of the chair. She also does not enjoy riding backwards.

Mr. Kidwai shared that this system has proven to be very safe and secure. However, his staff have received a great deal of feedback similar to Ms. Kitchen's. To follow up, he will consult with CUDA around what kind of concerns they are facing in their respective jurisdictions. H indicated that 58 buses currently have this system.

**Ms. Melanie Gaunt** of North Bedford shared that she had a fall out of her wheelchair in June at the intersection of South Park Street near the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The intersection was so bad she fell out of her chair twice and drivers had to get out of their cars to help her. She is now fearful about going to the city by herself which compromises her independence. She stated that she has tried to contact the Mayor's office on numerous occasions.

Ms. Gaunt challenged the Mayor, Mayor's Office, Councillors and the Accessibility Advisory Committee to spend half of a business day in a wheelchair to understand how important accessibility is.

Councillor Craig apologized to Ms. Gaunt for the challenges that she has faced. He asked her to write down her contact information so that she can be contacted later with regard to her concerns. He also suggested that perhaps there may be an opportunity for him and his colleagues at City Hall to put out a challenge and spend a day in a wheelchair at City Hall.

**4. CLOSING COMMENTS**

The Chair thanked everyone for coming.

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Jenny Benson  
Legislative Support