

10.3.2



REGIONAL COUNCIL
November 25, 2003

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

FROM: Betty MacDonald
Betty MacDonald, Chair
Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities

DATE: October 21, 2003

SUBJECT: Accessible Housing for Persons with Disabilities

ORIGIN:

Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities meeting held on October 20, 2003.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that:

1. New legislation be enacted or existing legislation be amended in order to ensure the inclusion of a specified percentage of accessible units for persons with disabilities.
2. The required percentage of accessible units be 20 percent.
3. HRM, in consultation with persons with disabilities, develop accessibility standards including guidelines on installation to be provided for the direction of individuals involved in the design, construction and maintenance of newly-constructed buildings. These guidelines shall consider the accessibility requirements of all persons with disabilities including those with disabilities affecting mobility, hearing, vision and sensitivity to chemicals.

BACKGROUND:

Over 152,000 Nova Scotians have a disability which affects their ability to carry out daily activities according to the findings of Statistics Canada's 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey. This represents over 17 percent of the population of the province and is 5 percent above the Canadian average of 12.3 percent. Since the majority of specialized medical and educational facilities which serve the needs of this population group are located in the Halifax Regional Municipality, it is reasonable to assume that the proportion of disabled persons in the Municipality may be even greater.

Approximately 15 percent of persons with disabilities identified in the survey reported that they needed special features in their homes. "Special features" were defined to include all specialized features within the residence such as handrails, visual alarms or audio warning devices, and adapted bathrooms, as well as modifications that enable the person to enter or leave the dwelling such as a ramp.

Of those requiring special features, 37 percent had not obtained all of the modifications that they needed and 25 percent had none of the modifications they required. The primary reason cited was cost. Surprisingly, difficulties in obtaining modifications were most prevalent among the 15 to 65 year working age group. Lack of affordable housing in proximity to educational institutions and employment may mean the difference between taking advantage of education and job opportunities or remaining institutionalized or at home on social assistance.

The Metro Housing Authority maintains a small number of accessible housing units but vacancies are rare and are filled immediately. At the same time, private landlords are under no obligation to make any effort to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities in their rental units and seldom choose to do so.

Over the past few years, HRM has witnessed a boom in the construction of new housing facilities. The Committee believes that this provides an ideal opportunity for HRM to take a leadership role in addressing the need for accessible housing. Accessible housing must take into consideration the accommodation requirements of all persons with disabilities. For example, persons with mobility impairments may require ramps, bathroom adaptations, lowered door handles/counters/faucets, etc. Persons with hearing disabilities may require visual cues where audible signals for doorbells, intercoms and fire alarms are present.

People with disabilities affecting vision may require Braille and large print numbers on elevators, apartment doors and number pads for security codes. For people with chemical sensitivities, the installation of carpets and the use of certain cleaning chemicals may be a concern as well as the use of indoor pesticides and location of dryer vents.

DISCUSSION:

The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities is seeking your support for the development of municipal legislation to address the growing need for accessible housing for persons with

disabilities in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Specifically, the Committee is recommending the development of legislation which would require the inclusion of accessible units for persons with disabilities in all new residential developments in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

The Committee recognizes that these recommendations may have far-reaching implications and will require further study and refinement. Your attention to this important concern of Persons with Disabilities is greatly appreciated by the Committee.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS: Unknown.

ALTERNATIVES:

No alternatives recommended at this time.

ATTACHMENTS: None

10.3.2

TO: Paul Dunphy, Director
Planning and Development Services

FROM: Julia Horncastle
Legislative Assistant

DATE: December 1, 2003

SUBJECT: Regional Council - November 25, 2003

At the above noted session of Halifax Regional Council, the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities submitted a report and recommendation on Accessible Housing for Persons with Disabilities at which time the following motion was passed.

MOVED by Councillor Meade, seconded by Councillor Johns, that a report be requested, within the next six months, regarding the recommendations contained in the report.