

WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Agenda - AMENDED
October 30, 2024, 6:00 p.m.
Council Chambers, 76 Morison Drive

Agenda is subject to changes up to and including during the meeting

This meeting is open to the public. It will not be livestreamed on Facebook



-
- ~~1. Call to Order~~
 - ~~2. Announcements / Wins~~
 - ~~3. Approval of the Agenda, including additions or deletions~~
 - ~~4. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes – April 25, 2024 (No official minutes from the meeting on June 20, 2024, as we did not have quorum, unofficial minutes included for your reference)~~
 - ~~5. Membership Terms~~
 6. Call for Active Transportation Committee Membership
 7. Unfinished Business / Updates
 - a) Update on Cycling Nova Scotia Project
 8. New Business
 - a) Accessibility Plan and Anti-Racism and Hate Plan (2025 – 2027)
 - b) Diversity and Inclusive Communities Committee Update
 - c) Yearly Review of the Accessibility Plan (2022 – 2024)
 9. Next Meeting Date / Meeting Adjournment

WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes (Unofficial)
October 30, 2024, 6:00 p.m.
Council Chambers, 76 Morison Drive

Agenda is subject to changes up to and including during the meeting

This meeting is open to the public. It will not be livestreamed on Facebook



In attendance: Kevin Waters, Jennifer Davison, Michel Bourgeois, Roseanna Boyd, Jordan Stephens, Melissa MacAskill, Troy Burgess, Tina McKay, Mark Phillips, Carmen Dewar-Miller

Due to this meeting being held after the municipal election, but before Council committee appointments and new member approvals, it is being held as an informal, information-sharing session. No voting will take place and no decisions made. Staff Member and Active Living Coordinator Kevin Waters encouraged committee members to reapply for appointment and/or share the word if they know folks who would like to apply. Kevin offered thanks to those committee members who would not be reoffering.

Call for Active Transportation (AT) Committee Membership

Kevin advised that this committee is looking for a new member and would love to add someone with an accessibility lens – absolutely paramount at this time. So much happening with the new rail trail, other trails, parks, AT plan and trail strategy update. Please email Kevin at kwaters@westhants.ca if you or anyone you know is interested.

Update on Cycling Nova Scotia Project

The scope of this project has become more defined. They are now looking at one specific route only - Route 3 (Water, King, Obrien Streets out to the highway). The work is focused on more public engagement surrounding design components and a design plan. Accessibility will be key.

Wheelchair Basketball

Parasport Nova Scotia has organized a new wheelchair basketball program at Avon View High School, starting in November. West Hants resident, Zach Dixon of Parasport Nova Scotia, has volunteered to run this program with support from BNS/Shooting Stars. Kevin encouraged committee members to help spread the word.

New Business

Accessibility Plan and Anti-Racism and Hate Plan (2025 – 2027)

The accessibility plan is coming to the end of its three-year life cycle. A final report will contain a review and summary of this plan.

An added piece to the new version of the plan will be the Anti-Racism and Hate Plan, which Kevin and Sarah Taylor are working to get off the ground.

This will be a conjoined effort with an engagement piece to be kicked off in November – December. The engagement portion will run through a couple of cycles:

- The first step involves learning from high stake holders how they want to be engaged in the process. This will be scheduled to start around November 4, potentially involving one-on-one chats.
- In late November they will meet to review with community partners, community stakeholders and Council
- In December the plan is to heavily engage the community using many different formats (surveys, one-on-one chats, stakeholder meetings, etc.), and reaching out to as many groups as possible.

Kevin would love to get committee feedback. They are in the process of identifying stakeholders to include within this pre-engagement plan. Another piece to this initiative will be creating a greater working group. Resident Members Stephens, Boyd and Bourgeois have been recruited to participate.

Sarah added that there would be representation from our Indigenous and African Nova Scotian partners, newcomers, seniors, 2SLGBTQIA+, people with intellectual disabilities and community groups such as New Boundaries, Limitless and Parasport Nova Scotia. They will gather a diverse perspective with the ability to tap into networks and facilitate discussions. There was a suggestion to reach out to Tracy's Place as well.

Regarding representation from local schools, they held a group meeting where they brought in educators from across West Hants. This meeting revealed a real need. Some have since taken a seat on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusive Communities Committee (DEI). All West Hants schools are listed as stakeholders.

Kevin then opened discussion to the floor, asking for the committee's input. The following potential stakeholders were suggested:

- The Hants Shore Health Association / Clinic
- NS Federation of Acadians
- West Hants and Hantsport Historical Societies
- Posse
- The Portal
- Schools Plus
- Hants County Pride
- Hantsport United Church
- People experiencing homelessness
- Shelters
- Salvation Army
- Immigrants and Refugees
- Family Resource Centre
- WH Branding Committee
- Welcome Network
- Caremongers
- West Hants Branding Committee
- WH Senior Games / Gliders
- Faith Based
- Hants Learning Network
- AT Committee
- A youth representative (Teens for Change). Benefit for consultant to go into the schools.

This will be a staple piece for the new committee coming in. Please keep asking questions, keep communicating.

Diverse, Equitable and Inclusive Communities Committee Update

Sarah provided an update, noting some of the committee's official and unofficial priority items. It's been a while since the priority list was discussed. Representatives from local schools have come to the table. Different initiatives in the works (banners, libraries), but she is not sure where they are in the process.

Kevin has been working on programming for youth, 12-18. Free access to our facilities, including public skates, turf times and swims, is key. An open gym time has been added on Thursdays. Uptake has been pretty solid. They have a game cart at the community centre purposely created for free play programs.

When there is an open block in the schedule at the community centre, there will be free gym time. A calendar has been posted in the entry as well as an online calendar, both of which list open blocks of time. If you see an open block, you can call to see if it's available for open gym.

Kevin informally broached the idea moving forward with a conjoined committee (combining DEI and Accessibility) and opened the floor to discussion.

Group consensus was that it makes sense to combine the two groups as so many of the topics overlap. Concern was expressed regarding functionality. How would one big committee work? We would want a voice for each of the priority areas discussed. Not just one accessibility seat but voices from many within that community. Currently there are ten or 12 on each committee. Designated members could come together to workshop how best to fill the seats, considering representation.

CAO Mark Phillips would endorse combining the two with a reminder that this would require a change in Council policy. It is good to see that there is a bit of movement towards this initiative.

Yearly Review of the Accessibility Plan (2022 – 2024)

Our last plan review occurred in June, 2023. This review will highlight the progress made and also provide that first lens on what the updated plan might look like. Kevin ran through the report card included as part of the plan. Points coming out of this section included:

- Refocused and continued promotion of accessible representation on all municipal committees
- A suggestion to add an accessibility icon to the home page of the municipal website, linking visitors to all things related to accessibility, including the plan, meeting minutes and packages, resources and list of available equipment. Reducing the number of “clicks” for everything to a maximum of three.
- It remains crucial for front-line staff to be trained as we continue finding ways to improve those first interactions.
- One area of opportunity would be the application process for becoming a committee member. The application form is not accessible and adaptations are needed. Include a contact who can be called for a less formal conversation. Possibly include the specific committee chair as a contact. Promote using videos. Even on this committee, we make assumptions that everyone can read, everyone can see, etc. Start by adding a piece to application form; if you'd like to talk to us, reach out to the Municipal Clerk. It is okay to recruit committee members, reach out to someone we feel might be great.

- The template for recommendation reports sent to Council is consistent. Maybe we could add a section to the template that addresses accessibility considerations. This may create a higher level of awareness in a formal environment, at the table of the decision-makers. There will be debate as to applicability and interpretation. Debate is okay. Opportunity and responsibility are the desired outcomes. Mark will make a commitment to revise this template.
- The communications strategy will be a rollover. There are still improvements to be made on the website, training for staff on plain language, fonts, icons, alignments, use of description boxes, transcriptions on videos. The switch to YouTube does provide more transcription options. The decision to eliminate commenting was noted as a positive step forward.
- National Accessibility Week will continue to be promoted and coordinated with DEI events such as Pride

Built Environment

The Committee's facility walk-throughs have been well-received. Our voices are being heard. We need to continue with these, a great learning experience for all. Feedback is being actioned.

As changes are occurring within the built environment, Kevin would like to see a more formal and consistent process where the committee is given an opportunity to review them in advance. One point made was that if the process becomes too formal, project timelines can be held up. Possibly an email update could be sent out to the committee, including project design, with a deadline for feedback. We could be added to the project to-do list. There is an accessibility and AT lens put on all projects currently. Information would be sent out based on construction season.

There might be a standard which does not need review. Just information to share and communication surrounding policy, standards and consistency. Maybe our committee influences the standard. This could play into the updated Council recommendation report to include accessibility.

Guide Council consistently through recommendation reports, and budget consideration for accessibility items will be a natural outcome.

Integrate an accessibility component into the municipal procurement policy/process as well.

A suggestion was made that the Windsor Township Business Association's full-time employee could be utilized to assist in promotion and support for local businesses to make accessibility improvements.

There is the possibility of an opportunity for the municipality to establish a related grant program for local businesses thanks to recent amendments to the MGA.

Updates to smoke alarms would be subject to fire code and buildings are inspected every three years.

It was noted that the Active Transportation plan will take growth centre sidewalk assessments into consideration.

Employment

Training for Council is taking place. The employee survey piece has not occurred yet and will fall under the DEI umbrella. The suggestion was made to post accessibility meeting minutes. A check-in could be added to the labour management meetings.

Staff are accommodated as needs are identified. Walk-throughs have identified some areas for improvement. There are a few spaces that we did not make it to, but committee audits were done at 76 Morison, 100 King, the Community Centre and the Sports Complex.

Programs and Services

Kevin has delivered his vetted inclusion training to Community Development staff (recreation, aquatic, parks and grounds), over the last two years.

The questions was raised as to extending training to all staff as part of onboarding training when a new hire comes on board. Regarding seasonal staff, there has been talk of contracting additional hourly staff with prior training (therapeutic rec), offering a respite team that will support more accessible programming.

One of the outcomes expected from the consultant will be a concrete vision, mission value statement about equity, diversity and accessibility. West Hants does not have a fully developed mission statement.

Kevin's training could be made available for delivery to Financial Services/Customer Service and Planning and Development staff.

Training staff on the safe and proper use of adaptive recreation equipment will be rolled over.

Staff are made aware and reminded annually to maintain barrier free access when clearing snow, including plow operators. Policy is reviewed as well.

There are partnerships being formed with organizations having expertise in adaptive sport and recreation (Parasport NS, Limitless). There is a need to promote opportunities outside of our region if the opportunity is not provided within it. Some standards should be applied, but this can be presented to the Communications Team for consideration.

Kevin did add the accessible trail marketing strategy as a potential priority in the new plan. New adaptive equipment has been added.

Information and Communication

The top priorities in this category require input from community members who are receiving the information. Feedback must come from the other side of the lens.

Training still required for staff as related to plain language and accessible document formatting. This priority will be carried forward, working in conjunction with the Hants Learning Network.

Building Inspection staff have created a plain language reference guide as related to accessible housing and secondary suites to send out with building permits. The guide provides easier interpretation of associated building code and regulations.

There is more to be done with offering word documents on our website as opposed to PDF. Readers will not work with PDFs.

Wayfinding signage is being updated at the Community Centre. Going forward and looking at accessibility upgrades, we should be able to pick one item and deliver on it. Then it becomes manageable and measurable. Signage needs to be uniform throughout municipal facilities and sites.

Inclusive programming is becoming more full-fledged and promotion of it will follow.

Examples of other priorities within this category that are ongoing:

- Braille staff business cards (pilot project)
- ASL being made available if requested

Transportation

AT Plan update is in the works.

Joint Regional Transportation Agency is overseeing the implementation of transit services outside of Halifax.

Dial-A-Ride is now a funding item within the municipal budget. They are fully at capacity with their service. Dial-A-Ride and the Windsor Senior Citizen Bus Society should be added to the list of stakeholders as discussed earlier in the meeting.

Follow-up would be required with Kevin Bennett regarding prioritizing AT facilities in the Asset Management Plan.

Lighting improvements are happening (waterfront in Windsor, Chambers Road, highway side of the causeway).

Conversations will start to move forward as the engagement process begins.

Next Meeting Date / Meeting Adjournment

Next meeting date to be advised, with new committee members in place.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.