HALIFAX

Accessibility Strategy

Creating an inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities within the Halifax Regional Municipality

Accessibility affects Nova Scotians of all ages, from those with disabilities to parents travelling with their children in strollers. Nova Scotia has the highest rates of disability across Canada, and we know that action is needed to drastically improve accessibility in our region.

The Accessibility Strategy builds upon the municipality's Diversity & Inclusion Framework and Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act to outline 30 action items for improving accessibility and representation for individuals with disabilities. The action items are to be implemented over a 10-year period to align with the provincial Accessibility Act.

These goals represent a call to action: to create a municipality accessible to all, regardless of physical, mental, or financial ability.

Nova Scotia
Accessibility Legislation

Diversity and
Inclusion Framework

Accessibility
Strategy

The recommendations in the Accessibility Strategy are based on two sets of accessibility objectives: the key areas of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Legislation and the key areas of the Diversity and Inclusion Framework.

Nova Scotia Accessibility Legislation

The accessibility legislation is to be followed by the enactment of standards related to six key areas:

Built environment

Education

Employment

Goods and services

Information and communication

Public transportation and transportation infrastructure

Diversity and Inclusion Framework

The municipality's Diversity & Inclusion Framework outlines the following five priorities.

Inclusive public service:
To ensure that individuals with disabilities can easily access inclusive and equitable municipal services, programs, and facilities without substantial barriers.

Safe work environment:
To have a diverse and inclusive workplace accessible to all employees, which provides the accommodations needed to support municipal employees.

Equitable employment:
To have a skilled workforce that includes persons with disabilities in a variety of positions.

Meaningful Partnerships:
To develop positive and respectful internal and external partnerships that include disability organizations who contribute to improving accessibility in the Halifax region.

Accessible information and communication:
To provide accessible information, in a way that educates individuals on the accessible services that are offered and how to access these services.

The Halifax Regional Municipality can be a leading example for other municipalities and communities on how to take proactive steps in universal design to not only build an accessible community, but to form a community of allies working together to make their city a better place for all.

Accessibility strategy and implementation plan

The municipality's strategy draws from the five priorities outlined in the Diversity & Inclusion Framework. It also takes into consideration the community consultations that were held in 2018 as well as detailed input from business units on their current plans for accessibility and areas for improvement.

A key goal of the strategy is to remove barriers, whether they be systemic, attitudinal, or structural. As such, the strategy focuses on key areas for improving how individuals with disabilities interact with the municipality, in alignment with the Council Priority Outcome – Inclusive Communities: "HRM is a leader in building an accessible community where everyone can participate fully in life, including persons with disabilities and seniors." The strategy also supports the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/ANSAIO's mission: "to remove barriers and create opportunities for the full participation of all Halifax residents and municipal employees."

Nova Scotia Accessibility Legislation	Strategic Objectives	Diversity & Inclusion Framework	Accessibility Strategy
• Public transportation & transportation infrastructure • Goods & services • Built environment	Inclusive public service	To ensure inclusive and equitable access and benefit of municipal services, programs and facilities.	To ensure that individuals with disabilities can easily access inclusive and equitable municipal services, programs, and facilities without substantial barriers.
• Employment • Built environment	Safe work environment	To have a diverse and inclusive workplace free of harassment, discrimination, and systemic barriers.	To have a diverse and inclusive workplace accessible to all employees, which provides the accommodations needed to support municipal employees.
• Employment	Equitable employment	To have a skilled workforce that reflects the diverse residents of the municipality.	To have a skilled workforce that includes persons with disabilities in a variety of positions.
• Education	Meaningful Partnerships	To develop positive and respectful internal and external partnerships that contribute to inclusive decision making.	To develop positive and respectful internal and external partnerships that include disability organizations who contribute to improving accessibility in the Halifax region.
• Information & communication	Accessible information and communication	To communicate both internally and externally, in a way that demonstrates, exemplifies, and embodies our municipal diversity and inclusion values.	To provide accessible information, in a way that educates individuals on the accessible services that are offered and how to access these services.

Removing systemic barriers and creating opportunities for the full participation of all Halifax residents and municipal employees.

Action Item Summary

The Accessibility Strategy was approved by Halifax Regional Council on May 18th, 2021. The Strategy outlines 30 action items that aim to make Halifax Regional Municipality accessible by 2030 as per the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act. Below is a list of these action items as well as the timeline of completion.

Public transportation and transportation infrastructure

Inclusive Public Service

- Implement Mobile Data Computer Software, online booking, and automatic fare systems to improve Access-a-bus booking service. (2020-2022)
- Develop system for booking accessible transportation within the Halifax region (i.e. accessible taxis, Access-A-Bus, regular bus, ferries) (2024-2030)
- Develop a passenger survey regarding accessible services to measure success (2022-2024)
- Ensure all bus stops follow accessible standards (e.g., well-maintained shelters) (2020-2030)
- Increase public awareness, to the disability community, around snow removal (2020-2028)
- Increase number of accessible taxis and/or have an alternative provider for accessible cabs in the Halifax region (2020-2030)

Built Environment

Inclusive Public Service | Safe Work Environment

- Use Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B561-18 standards for future infrastructure in the Halifax region (e.g., Rick Hansen curb cuts, public washrooms, CSA standards for accessible parking spaces) (2020-2030)
- Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B561-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM (2020-2030)
- Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility (2020-2024)
- Ensure that all signage (including new signage templates), walkways, and equipment for beaches, parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities (e.g., proper gymnasium flooring for para sports) are accessible for individuals with disabilities (2020-2030)

Goods & Services

Inclusive Public Service

- Improve services & operations (e.g., number of recreational support staff) to reflect the demand for accessible recreation (2022-2026)
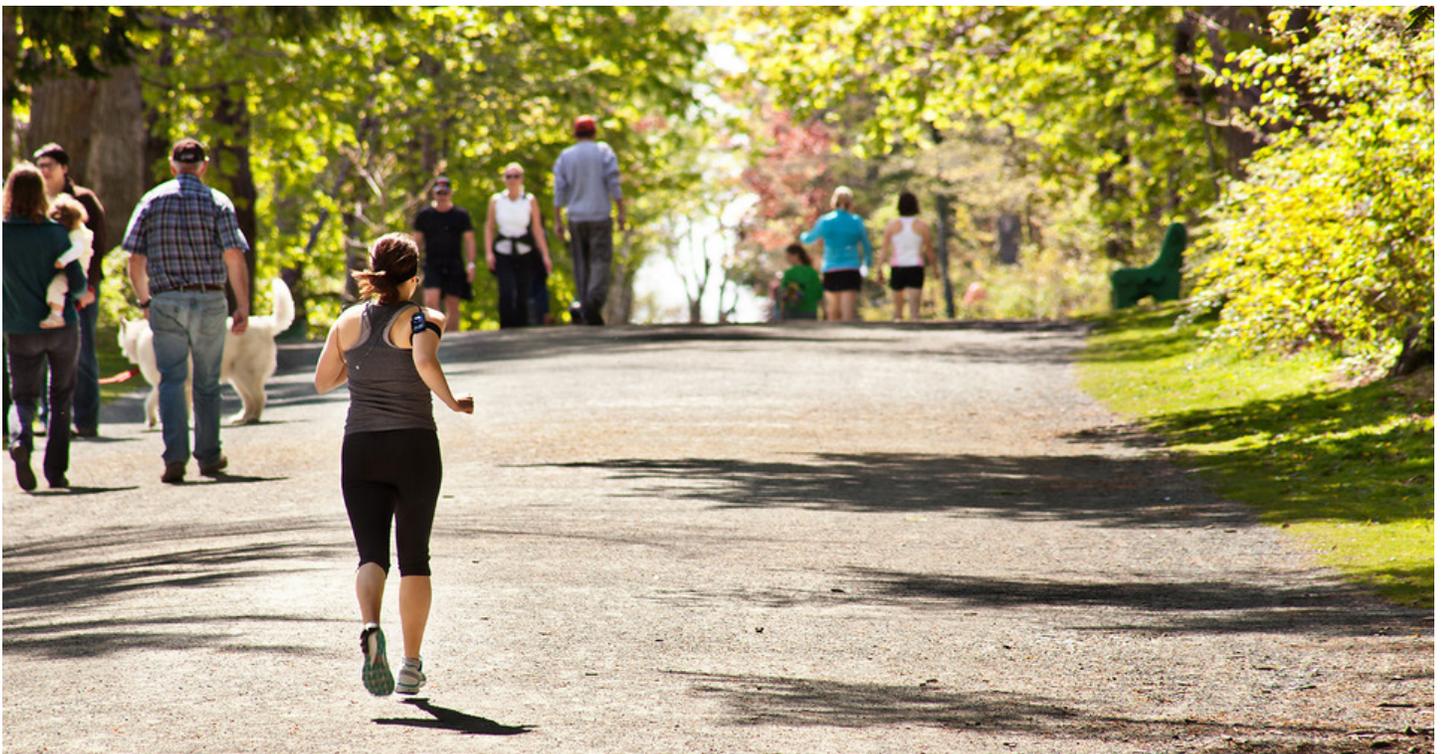
Information & Communication

Accessible Information & Communication

- Increase training for municipal staff (e.g., recreation, fire, police, librarians) on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities (2022-2026)
- Develop guide for municipal promotional materials which make them accessible to individuals with disabilities (2026-2028)
- Make the municipal internet and intranet websites and web content conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 format (Minimum Level AA- including job postings on Brass Ring and GIS mapping) (2024-2028)
- Ensure plain language and clear format, for all municipal communications (2024-2026)
- Update accessibility page on Halifax.ca to provide information on accessibility in the municipality (2024-2026)

Employment

Equitable Employment

- Collect and maintain information from employment equity reports which indicates the number of individuals employed by the municipality who self-identify as having a disability (2020-2022)
- Establish hiring procedures which requires defining accommodations for individuals with disabilities on job postings within the municipality, including accommodations available through the interview process (e.g., if a scribe is needed, etc.) (2020-2022)
- Compile internal list of accommodations provided to employees with disabilities (e.g., visual, physical, neurodevelopmental, etc.) (2022-2026)
- Develop a Workplace Accommodation Policy which outlines a formal process for providing accommodations to job candidates and employees with disabilities. (2022-2026)
- Develop corporate training which educates hiring managers about workplace accessibility (2024-2028)
- Establish partnerships with external partners (e.g., universities and colleges) to provide municipal work placements and internships that are available for students with disabilities (2022-2024)
- Review current hiring practices and ensure that they are providing employment to individuals with disabilities (2024-2028)
- Develop a procedure to share municipal job postings with agencies who support individuals with disabilities seeking employment (2022-2024)

Other

- Align D&I business unit initiatives with the actions outlined in the Accessibility Strategy (2020-2030)
- Establish partnership between the accessibility advisor and business units to conduct annual business unit accessibility reviews (2020-2022)
- Develop an accessibility policy and procedures to align with the provincial Accessibility Act (2026-2030)
- Develop municipal procedures for accessible business unit consultations with the public (2026-2030)
- Establish dialogue between Accessibility Directorate and the municipality regarding accessibility in the Halifax region and compliance with the provincial Accessibility Act (2020-2030)
- Facilitate relationships between business units and accessibility community stakeholders (e.g., CNIB, Autism Nova Scotia, etc.) to improve information sharing regarding municipal services (2024-2030)

Accessibility Strategy Task Force

The Accessibility Strategy Task Force was developed following the Accessibility Strategy's implementation and is comprised of representatives from various business units in the municipality.

The Accessibility Strategy Task Force meets regularly to discuss their respective business unit's progress on the Strategy's action items and overall progress on other corporate accessibility initiatives. The Task Force may also be involved in future updates to the Strategy and its recommendations.

Every citizen, regardless of their disability, should feel that they are a valued member of the Halifax region. The way to achieve this is through emphasizing values and ideals that prioritize inclusivity and diversity within every social system.
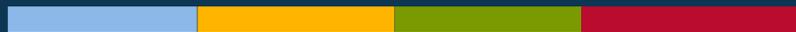
Glossary

Accessibility Act
Also known as Bill 59, is the Nova Scotian legislation passed in April 2017, which aims to make the province inclusive and barrier-free by 2030.

Accessibility Advisory Board
A board which was established under the Accessibility Act that works to address barriers in the province for individuals with disabilities. Under the Act, the majority of board members must be persons with disabilities.

Accessibility Advisory Committee
A municipal committee which advises and assists with municipal policies, programs, and services for persons with disabilities.

Accommodations
Modifications which have been made to facilities, objects, environments, or systems that enable persons with disabilities to be on an equal level to other individuals

CSA B651-18
A set of standards, released by the Canadian Standards Association, which outlines a set of technical recommended requirements for accessible design within built environments including sidewalks, buildings, sign posts, etc.

Disability
A term of self-identification used broadly by those with a broad range of disabilities including vision, deafness/hard of hearing, intellectual/developmental, learning, mental health issues, cardiac/diabetic conditions, balance, cognition, mobility, etc.

Mobile Date Computer Software
Computerized software used in public transit vehicles and taxis to communicate digitally with a central dispatcher.

Plain Language
Ensuring that writing is clear, concise, well-organized, and able to be properly understood by a diverse group of individuals, regardless of their intellectual or educational backgrounds.

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™
A rating system provided by the Rick Hansen Foundation which uses trained professionals to evaluate the meaningful access of commercial, institutional, and multi- unit residential buildings and sites. Rick Hansen Certification is recognized Canada-wide.

Systemic Barriers
Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from full participation in, and the benefits of, social, economic, and political life. They may be hidden or unintentional but are built into the way society works. Existing policies, practices and procedures, as well as assumptions and stereotypes, reinforce them (City for All, 2015).

Tactile Ground Surface Indicators
A system of textured ground surface indicators found on footpaths, stairs, bus stations platforms and more to assist pedestrians who are visual impaired. *Tactile ground surface indicators have been installed across the municipality at newly constructed bus terminals, pre-existing crosswalks, and the curb of the new Argyle street re-design.*