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Item No. 10
Halifax Regional Council
May 3, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Denise Schofield, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 8, 2022

SUBJECT: Accessibility Strategy Annual Update 2022

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

May 18, 2021 Regional Council motion (item 11.1.6):

MOVED by Councillor Deagle Gammon, seconded by Councillor Mancini

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Adopt the Accessibility Strategy as set out in Attachment 1 of the staff report dated April 19, 2021;
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to carry out the actions contained in the Accessibility Strategy as part of the multi-year budgeting and business planning process; and
3. Request that the Chief Administrative Officer provide annual progress reports on the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy to Regional Council.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The *Accessibility Act*, S.N.S. 2017, c. 2, subsection 39(2) provides:

39...(2) A municipality, university or organization shall prepare and make publicly available an accessibility plan within one year of being prescribed as a public sector body

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39, subsections 34(1) and 34 (3) provides:

34 (1) The Chief Administrative Officer is the head of the administrative branch of the government of the Municipality and is responsible to the Council for the proper administration of the affairs of the Municipality in accordance with the by-laws of the Municipality and the policies adopted by the Council.

...

(3) The Council shall provide direction on the administration, plans, policies and programs of the Municipality to the Chief Administrative Officer.

BACKGROUND

Following the approval of the Accessibility Strategy by Council, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO formed the Accessibility Strategy Task Force. This Task Force is comprised of municipal staff representing all business units, and the goal of the Task Force is to oversee the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy action items. Task Force members were assigned to various subcommittees based on their areas of expertise as well as the needs of the highest-priority action items at the time of implementation. Three subcommittees were formed: Interior Built Environment Subcommittee, Exterior Built Environment Subcommittee, and Employment Subcommittee.

DISCUSSION

The Accessibility Strategy Task Force meets on a bimonthly basis, and each subcommittee meets on a monthly basis. The Task Force determined which subcommittee would be best suited to overseeing specific action items, focusing specifically on the action items that were set to begin in 2021 according to the Accessibility Strategy. The Interior Built Environment and the Exterior Built Environment subcommittees are assigned many of the same action items. This is because some of the Accessibility Strategy's action items refer to both interior and exterior built environment to some degree, so both subcommittees examine those action items from their respective lenses.

In total, the Interior Built Environment Subcommittee was assigned four action items:

- 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).
- Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B561-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM.
- Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility.
- 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.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the delay of some projects, the Interior Built Environment Subcommittee reported a significant number of construction and renovation projects with a focus on accessibility, as noted in Attachment 1. These projects include recreational facilities, public libraries, and municipal office spaces.

The Exterior Built Environment Subcommittee was assigned six action items:

- Ensure all bus stops follow accessible standards (e.g., well-maintained shelters).
- Increase public awareness, to the disability community, around snow removal.
- 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).
- Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B561-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM.
- Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility.
- 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.

Some notable accomplishments reported by the Exterior Built Environment Subcommittee include continued work on the Halifax Transit bus stop accessibility inventory project, as well as the construction or

renovation of numerous outdoor spaces such as parks and playgrounds. While some projects were delayed due to COVID-19, Attachment 1 lists the wide variety of accomplishments made since May 2021.

The Employment subcommittee was assigned three action items:

- 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.
- 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.).
- Develop a Workplace Accommodation Policy, which outlines a formal process for providing accommodations to job candidates and employees with disabilities.

Among other accomplishments, the Employment Subcommittee reported the hiring of a Duty to Accommodate Specialist in the Human Resources department, who will oversee the development of a Workplace Accommodation Policy as well as the review of Human Resources' accommodation practices.

Although both the Interior and Exterior Built Environment Subcommittees face challenges and risks associated with the current lack of adopted provincial standards, the Employment subcommittee is even further disadvantaged as less guidance or direction is available at this time. The Accessibility Directorate released a set of [Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces](#), which public sector bodies can refer to while awaiting the final set of Built Environment accessibility standards from the Province. In terms of employment, however, no such interim standards have been released as the provincial Employment Standard Development Subcommittee was only recently formed.

There were five miscellaneous action items that could not be assigned to a specific subcommittee that are being overseen by individual Task Force members. These action items were as follows:

- Implement Mobile Data Computer Software, online booking, and automatic fare systems to improve Access-a-bus booking service.
- Increase number of accessible taxis and/or have an alternative provider for accessible cabs in the Halifax region.
- Align Diversity & Inclusion business unit initiatives with the actions outlined in the Accessibility Strategy.
- Establish partnerships between the accessibility advisor and business units to conduct annual business unit accessibility reviews.
- Establish dialogue between Accessibility Directorate and the municipality regarding accessibility in the Halifax region and compliance with the provincial Accessibility Act.

The most significant accomplishments in this category have come from Halifax Transit. A mobile data software implementation plan has been developed for Access-A-Bus, with full installation set to be completed in mid-2022. Additionally, an accessible taxi service is expected to launch with a new vendor in May 2022. The Accessibility Advisor continues to engage with business units and the Accessibility Directorate on a consistent basis.

Six additional action items are set to begin in 2022. These items are as follows:

- Develop a passenger survey regarding accessible services to measure success.
- Increase training for municipal staff (e.g., recreation, fire, police, librarians) on how to serve/accommodate persons with disabilities.
- Improve services & operations (e.g., number of recreational support staff) to reflect the demand for accessible recreation.
- Compile internal list of accommodations provided to employees with disabilities (e.g., visual, physical, neurodevelopmental, etc.).
- Establish partnerships with external partners (e.g., universities and colleges) to provide municipal work placements and internships that are available for students with disabilities.

- Develop a procedure to share municipal job postings with agencies who support individuals with disabilities seeking employment.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Regional Council's approval of the Accessibility Strategy will result in an increase in multiple municipal service level standards and therefore require an increase in funding for future operating and base capital program budgets.

Some of the Strategy's Action items proposing new HRM programs and processes may be absorbed within current staffing and budgets. Additional service program delivery outside of current capacity, as well as any new or increased capital work added will require an increase to the average tax bill or reductions within other services. The provincial legislation will establish accessibility standards, which may influence the prioritization of recommended accessibility capital work, causing a greater funding and resource pressure on the existing high-risk asset renewal and desired growth projects.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While there was a community engagement component to developing the Accessibility Strategy, no further community engagement has been conducted to implement action items at this time. As the Accessibility Strategy needs to be updated every three years according to the Accessibility Act, community consultations will occur within the next two years.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Accessibility Strategy Update

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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Accessibility Strategy Update

Prepared by:

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April 2022



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Introduction

This report outlines the progress that has been made on implementing the Accessibility Strategy since its Regional Council approval in May 2021. The report will focus on a specific set of action items that were scheduled to begin in 2021 according to the Accessibility Strategy, and the progress that has been made on those specific action items since May 2021. Four of those action items have a completion deadline of 2022 according to the Strategy.

Background

On May 18th, 2021, Halifax Regional Council approved the Accessibility Strategy. As part of this motion approval, Council requested an annual update on the progress made towards the Accessibility Strategy. The Accessibility Strategy contains 30 action items, the implementation of which is based on best practices and current accessibility standards. At the time of writing this report, the Province of Nova Scotia has not released their accessibility standards that municipalities are expected to follow under the Accessibility Act. The first set of provincial standards, the Built Environment standards, will be released in 2023.

Following this approval, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO formed the Accessibility Strategy Task Force. This Task Force is comprised of municipal staff representing all business units, and the goal of the Task Force is to oversee the implementation of the Accessibility Strategy's action items. Task Force members were assigned to various subcommittees based on their areas of expertise as well as the needs of the highest-priority action

items at the time of implementation. Three subcommittees were formed: the Interior Built Environment Subcommittee, the Exterior Built Environment Subcommittee, and the Employment Subcommittee.

Accessibility Strategy Task Force

Every business unit is represented on the Accessibility Strategy Task Force by at least one member. These members were appointed by the Executive Director of each business unit based on recommendations outlined in the Accessibility Strategy Task Force Project Charter.

There are 15 members of the Accessibility Strategy Task Force, in addition to the Accessibility Advisor who sits on every subcommittee to provide support. There are a total of 6 Task Force members on the Interior Built Environment subcommittee, 7 members on the Exterior Built Environment Subcommittee, and 5 members on the Employment Subcommittee.

The Task Force meets on a bimonthly basis, and each subcommittee meets on a monthly basis. Discussions on specific action items are primarily done during the subcommittee meetings; the Task Force meetings are primarily to provide updates to the Task Force as a whole.

About CSA B651-18 and Rick Hansen Certification

There are several action items in the Accessibility Strategy which refer to the CSA B651-18 standards as well as the Rick Hansen Gold Certification. This section provides additional explanations of these two measures of built environment accessibility.

The Canadian Standards Association (operating as “CSA Group”) develops standards through a consensus standard development process approved

by the Standards Council of Canada. This process brings together volunteers representing varied viewpoints and interests to achieve consensus and develop a standard. The B651 Accessible Design for the Built Environment has been developed by the CSA Group. The current revised version is the 5th edition entitled *B651-18 Accessible design for the built environment – Implementation Handbook*. The next revision of these standards is currently in draft form and undergoing public review. This Standard has been developed in compliance with Standards Council of Canada requirements for National Standards of Canada. It has been published as a National Standard of Canada by CSA Group.

The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) program is a rating survey based on Universal Design Principles and the CSA B651 Standard. The program measures the level of meaningful access beyond building code and is based upon the holistic user experience of people of all abilities, including those with mobility, vision, hearing, cognitive, and/or intellectual disabilities.

Subcommittees

The Interior Built Environment subcommittee is responsible for action items relating to the interior of buildings and other infrastructure. There are a total of 4 action items assigned to this subcommittee beginning in 2021.

The Exterior Built Environment Subcommittee is responsible for action items relating to the exterior of buildings and exterior built environment infrastructure, such as sidewalks. There are a total of 6 action items assigned to the subcommittee beginning in 2021.



The Employment Subcommittee is responsible for action items relating to municipal employment, including recruiting, hiring, and workplace accommodations. There are a total of 3 action items assigned to this subcommittee beginning in 2021.

There were five additional action items beginning in 2021 that were not assigned to subcommittees, but that are being overseen by individual Task Force members including the Accessibility Advisor.

Interior Built Environment Subcommittee Progress

1. 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) – 2030 Deadline

Baseline: Prior to the Strategy's implement, there was a strong focus on making building entrances accessible and reviewing existing buildings from the interior using CSA B651-18 standards.

Current Progress: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a delay on the completion of certain projects. However, many other projects have been completed or underway. These projects are as follows:

- The Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Community Centre is in design phase. The goal is for this facility to achieve Rick Hansen Gold Certification.
- The design build contract was awarded for a new pool at the Halifax Commons. Anticipated accessibility features of the pool will include a

beachfront entrance, universal washrooms, and universal changerooms.

- The washroom building at Fort Needham Park has been upgraded to include new accessibility features and is expected to open in the Spring.

2. Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B651-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM - 2030 Deadline

Baseline: Buildings constructed and/or renovated in 2021 will, to the best of HRM's ability, follow CSA B651-18 standards. When the Corporate Accommodations team is leasing new spaces for municipal use, they look for a set of minimum mandatory accessibility requirements which are as follows:

- Fully accessible primary building entrance and travel paths to and from employee parking or transit points
- Accessible entrances and travel paths should not be “alternate” or different from the standard or direct means of entry
- Visual, auditory, and tactile indicators for items such as elevator announcements, wayfinding signage, and alarm systems
- Floor plates and layouts which allow for increased turn radiuses supporting ease of use by diverse users.

These minimum accessibility standards are subject to change over time. Additional accessibility requirements, in alignment with CSA B651-18 standards, are in place for leased spaces that will be occupied by municipal

staff or visited by members of the public. In the event that these CSA B651-18 standards differ from the Nova Scotia Building Code regulations, the CSA standards will take precedence as they provide a higher standard for accessibility.

Corporate spaces will be renovated to achieve RHFAC Gold Certification to the greatest extent possible.

“Barrier-Free Access” is identified as a design requirement, which is described as follows: “The lands, building, premises and facilities (including washrooms) and services provided by the Landlord pursuant to these documents must be accessible to and safely usable by persons with disabilities. All applicable standards in accordance with the latest edition of the National Building Code of Canada, the Provincial Building Code Regulations and CSA B651-18 Accessible design for the built environment must be followed to the extent possible.”

Current Progress: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a delay on the completion of certain projects. However, many other projects have been completed or are underway. These projects are as follows:

- The Dartmouth North Library underwent full renovations, including the addition of gender-neutral washrooms.
- Renovations are currently underway at the Dartmouth North Community Centre and are expected to be complete in October 2022. These renovations will include gender-neutral washrooms and an adult changing station, in addition to other accessibility features.

- Renovations are currently underway at Alderney Gate Public Library, including the addition of a new universal washroom. This is expected to be complete in early summer 2022.
- The washrooms at the Soccer Nova Scotia/Mainland Commons Fields are being upgraded to be universal.
- Design work has begun for redoing the universal changerooms at the Canada Games Centre.
- The Alderney Landing Pedway elevator upgrade contract has been awarded.
- Newly constructed accessible and gender-neutral washrooms are open at the Woodside Ferry Terminal.
- The JD Shatford Library washrooms are being renovated.
- A new accessible lift has been installed at the Needham Community Centre.
- The following Corporate Accommodations projects are in progress:
 - Duke Tower 3rd Floor (Planning & Development)
 - Relocation planned for April 1, 2022, applying CSA B651-18 standards and in consultation with an internal RHFAC professional.
 - Alderney Gate 5th Floor (Finance and Asset Management)
 - Prime Consultant Services have been awarded, seeking to apply CSA-B651-18 standards as well as receive RHFAC Gold Standard certification for the area within scope. Note that the base building washrooms are outside of the current scope. A RHFAC professional will



be included as part of the Prime Consultant scope of work.

- The following Corporate Accommodations projects have been completed, all of which applied CSA B651-18 standards:
 - CIBC 7th Floor (Legal Services)
 - TD 12th Floor (Transit)
 - Barrington Tower 13th/14th Floors (ICT)
 - Brunswick Place (TPW – Parking Services)

The most recent Design Consultant RFP included the following evaluation criteria: “Sector Specific Experience: Identify if the project achieved Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Gold Certification, or CSA B651-18 was applied.”

3. Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility – 2024 Deadline

Baseline: Year 1 of the capital funds for accessibility audits have been approved and included in previous capital budgets. This work is currently being initiated and next steps will be to retain a consultant.

Current Progress: The auditing tool is now complete and HRM is now in the process of developing a list of potential auditors.

**4. 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 – 2030
*Deadline***

Baseline: Signage will be audited along with other pieces of built environment infrastructure. Audits will check for accessibility features including braille, raised or tactile lettering, and the presence of maps that are clear and easy to understand. Corporate Communications will also review corporate signage from a branding perspective.

Current Progress: Currently, most indoor signage at recreational facilities includes braille and tactile lettering, however, external signage does not yet include these accessibility features. Corporate Facility Design and Construction includes braille and tactile signs within their project scopes, and the general contractor is responsible for providing these features. The internal sign shop does not currently have the resources to create fully accessible signage, and the standing offer that HRM currently has with a provider will not expire for another year and a half. Therefore, it was determined that there will be a need to bridge the existing gap to find a solution to the lack of accessible signage in the municipality. In terms of gym flooring for parasports, it is intended that the operating budget for new buildings with gym floors will include refurbishing every three years.



Exterior Built Environment Subcommittee Progress

1. Ensure all bus stops follow accessible standards (e.g., well-maintained shelters) – 2030 *Deadline*

Baseline: A bus stop accessibility inventory has been completed in partnership with TPW, particularly the Active Transportation group who provided technical expertise. In May 2021, 66% of bus stops were accessible, 27% were non-standard (meaning that the accessible ramp can be deployed but it may be lacking other accessibility features), and 7% of bus stops were inaccessible as the accessible ramp could not be deployed.

Current Progress: Based on the bus stop inventory completed in partnership with TPW, there have been a total of 731 identified bus stops that require accessibility upgrades; these bus stops are currently being categorized by priority level and investment required. As a result of the 2021/22 bus stop accessibility improvements, 68% of bus stops are now accessible, with only 5% being inaccessible as the ramp cannot be deployed.



Image Description: A bus stop at the West Bedford Park and Ride with accessibility features installed. These features are labeled with red text which read “Coloured curb,” “Wayfinding,” and “Way finding marker for bus stop” respectively.

2. Increase public awareness, to the disability community, around snow removal – 2028 Deadline

Baseline: A consultant was hired to meet with stakeholders and review snow removal service standards. TPW is collaborating with Corporate Communications to share winter service standards more broadly with the community.



Current Progress: Winter Works staff have collaborated with Corporate Communications to develop a one-page information sheet on the current winter service standards. This sheet is anticipated to be released to disability organizations in the community in Fall 2022. Additionally, an initial update has been made to the Winter Works [website](#) in collaboration with Corporate Communications. The intention of this initial update is to make the content more user-friendly and easier to understand. The website will be revised further in Summer 2022 with a focus on web accessibility.

3. 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) – 2030 Deadline

Baseline: Tactile Walking Surface Indicators (TWSIs) are now added to all curb cuts as per the service standards for all pedestrian ramp installations.

Current Progress:

- The Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Community Centre is in design phase. The goal is for this facility to achieve Rick Hansen Gold Certification.
- The design build contract was awarded for a new pool at the Halifax Commons. Anticipated accessibility features of the pool will include a beachfront entrance, universal washrooms, and universal changerooms.

- An accessible swing will be installed at the Portland Estates Elementary School playground.
- Accessible playground components will be installed at Birch Bear Run Park.
- Accessible playground components have been installed at Africville Park.
- A new walkway has been constructed between Main Street and Lakecrest Drive with benches installed throughout the walkway.
- Upcoming improvements at Kiwanis Graham's Grove Park include a washroom building, paving on the existing gravel parking lot, and accessible parking spots.
- An accessible splash pad will be installed at the Dartmouth Common. This will include accessible walkways, benches, and play components.
- An accessible sport court/connecting path was installed at Brownlow Park.
- A walkway at Birch Cove Park is being paved for improved accessibility.
- Accessibility improvements, such as accessible viewing area at the top of bleachers, are being installed at Silvers Hill Park.
- A new paved parking lot with accessible parking spots will be installed at Hartlen Park.
- Accessibility improvements, such as paved pathways and the addition of accessible bleachers at the Dartmouth Harbour-East Recreation Campus All-Weather Fields



- An all-inclusive playground (proposed Jumpstart Playground) at George Dixon Centre Park has been approved in the advance capital list for 2022/23. Finalization of the project with Jumpstart is underway.
- A new accessible playground has been installed at Harbour View Elementary School.
- The following proposed 2022/23 capital locations will request inclusive design features in their respective design-build Request For Proposals:
 - Peace Park Playground
 - Ian Forsyth Elementary School Playground
 - Pinecrest Park Playground
 - Scott Saunders Memorial Park Playground
 - Sunnyside Elementary School Park Playground
 - J. Albert Walker Park Playground
 - St. Stephen's Elementary School Park Playground
 - Cavalier Drive Elementary School Park Playground
 - Brookline Drive Park (this will be a new inclusive playground)
- The following proposed 2022/23 capital locations will include accessible components:
 - Beazley Park (Big Beazley ball field - paved pathways to the bleachers/public viewing areas)
 - Ravenscraig Drive Park (sport field rehabilitation, paved pathway to bleachers/public viewing area)
 - Cole Harbour Common (John Russell ball field - paved pathway to bleachers/public viewing area)



- Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Regional Park (West Bedford new trailhead parking lot paving)
- Viscount Run Park Development – Phase 2 (new park development with paved parking lot/pathways/sport court)
- Hemlock Ravine Park – parking lot paving
- Don Bayer Park – new off-leash dog park (accessible pathway/parking lot)
- Regional Council has formally approved the new Red Book standards which include accessibility requirements for pedestrian ramps and accessible parking.
- TPW has converted all Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) to be activated by a single push, as opposed to previously where users needed to push and hold the button for three seconds to obtain an audible signal.
- Elements of accessibility have been included in as many components as possible in the tendered design of the Cogswell District to ensure the project is accessible to all segments of society. A goal of this project is to achieve Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Gold Certification, the final determination of which will occur once the project is complete. This is the first project in Canada of its nature to be working towards this level of certification
- 19 new accessible on-street parking spaces have been installed in the peninsula.
- 6 new accessible pedestrian signals (APS) have been installed.
- Since the Strategy's implementation, TPW has installed Tactile Walking Surface Indicators (TWSIs) at 423 pedestrian ramps in the

municipality. Some of these are new pedestrian ramps, and in other cases, pedestrian ramps were upgraded to include TWSIs.



4. Adopt Rick Hansen gold certification and CSA B561-18 standards for current infrastructure, including street infrastructure, owned by HRM - 2030 Deadline

Baseline: As of 2021, buildings that are renovated will follow CSA B651-18 standards.

Current Progress:

- A driveway realignment project at Spencer House has been completed, creating a connecting path from the existing walkway to Spencer House.
- The Halifax Law Court pedway restoration is planned for early 2022.



- Electric charging stations are scheduled to be installed at the Zatzman Sportsplex, some of which are designated as accessible parking spots.
- The platform areas at various Halifax Transit locations will be upgraded or repaired. This includes adding Tactile Walking Surface Indicators (TWSIs) and repairing potholes.
- Keshen Goodman Library renovation design work is in progress.
- Accessible beach mats have been installed at Penhorn Lake.



5. Develop review system to audit buildings, public facilities, recreational parks/playgrounds, and trails to assess when repairs or upgrades are needed to maintain accessibility – 2024 Deadline



Baseline: Year 1 of the capital funds for accessibility audits have been approved and included in previous capital budgets. This work is currently being initiated and next steps will be to retain a consultant.

Current Progress: The auditing tool is complete and HRM is now in the process of developing a list of potential auditors.

6. Ensure that all signage (including new signage templates), walkways, and equipment for beaches, parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities are accessible for individuals with disabilities – 2030 Deadline

Baseline: Signage will be audited along with other pieces of built environment infrastructure. Accessibility features on signage that will be audited include braille, raised or tactile lettering, and the presence of maps that are clear and easy to understand. Corporate Communications will also review corporate signage from a branding perspective.

Current Progress: Exterior signage does not yet include the accessibility features required. Corporate Facility Design and Construction includes braille and tactile signs within their project scopes, and the general contractor is responsible for providing these features. The internal sign shop does not currently have the resources to create fully accessible signage, and the standing offer that HRM currently has with a provider will not expire for another year and a half. Therefore, it was determined that

there will be a need to bridge the existing gap to find a solution to the lack of accessible signage in the municipality.

Beach mobility chairs were added at Penhorn Beach and Springfield Beach. An additional Hippocamp beach and all-terrain chair was purchased for use at day camps. Twelve specialized lifejackets were purchased.

Employment Subcommittee Progress

1. **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 - 2022 Deadline**

Baseline: Employment equity information is collected and reported quarterly by the Employee Services team within Human Resources. The data collected and summarized captures the breakdown of self-identification data from applicants and new hires; however, there is no current method to track how many current HRM employees identify as having a disability. The Make Yourself Count diversity and equity census was completed in 2020, through which more self-identification information was gathered from participating HRM staff.

Current Progress: There are currently discussions underway within Human Resources regarding the next organization-wide data collection opportunity. This will likely be a collaborative initiative between the Employment Equity Committee, The Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO, and Human Resources.

This item is on track to be completed by the end of the 2022 deadline.

2. 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.) – 2022 Deadline

Baseline: The Human Resources team actively responds to and supports requests for accommodations in the recruitment process. HRM does not currently provide a prescriptive list of accommodations on the website, as accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, there was concern that a formal list of accommodations would unintentionally create barriers by discouraging applicants from requesting an accommodation that is not listed.

Candidates are asked to request an accommodation at the time of application and prior to interviews and/or assessments. New and current employees are also encouraged to request accommodations throughout the course of their employment as required. Human Resources staff, managers, unions (if applicable), and employees collaborate on supporting the organization's Duty to Accommodate.

Accommodation information is available on [Halifax.ca](https://www.halifax.ca) for job applicants. A variety of internal tools and resources are used within HR to better

accommodate staff and support the municipality's Duty to Accommodate (DTA).

Current Progress: Information regarding workplace accommodations has recently been updated on all external and internal job sites.

This action item is on track to meet the 2022 deadline, as these processes are already in place. The role of the Accessibility Strategy Task Force will be to enhance the measures that are already in place to ensure inclusive hiring practices.

3. Develop a Workplace Accommodation Policy which outlines a formal process for providing accommodations to job candidates and employees with disabilities. – 2022 Deadline

Baseline: Human Resources supports accommodation-related work as part of everyday best practices, using a variety of existing tools and guidelines. There is a recognized need to revise and consolidate the information and resources associated with this work. These tools include an Accommodations Roadmap and a formalized process to consult with Health and Safety on how to provide accommodations. Additionally, several collective agreements have specific language about how to accommodate unionized staff.

Prior to the Accessibility Strategy approval, no progress had been made in developing a formal Workplace Accommodation Policy.

Current Progress: In Fall 2021, Employee Relations hired a Duty to Accommodate (DTA) Specialist. The DTA Specialist's key deliverable will be the Workplace Accommodation Policy. This will include developing the policy and procedures, as well as reviewing best practices for accommodation and assessing the training needs for Human Resources staff and HRM employees. This policy will reflect all protected grounds under Nova Scotia Human Rights legislation. The DTA Specialist will lead this work in consultation with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO and other partners as required, and policy revisions will follow the standard HRM policy approval process.

This recommendation is on track to be completed by the 2022 deadline.

Other Action Items

1. Implement Mobile Data Computer Software, online booking, and automatic fare systems to improve Access-a-bus booking service – 2022 Deadline

Baseline: Annual Access-A-Bus boardings prior to the COVID pandemic were approximately 180,000 per year.

Current Progress: An implementation plan has been developed with the selected mobile data terminal vendor. The MDTs and Phases 1 and 2 of fare management will be implemented in 2022; however, online booking will not be implemented by the 2022 deadline. The Municipality is currently in the process of procuring an electronic fare collection system.

This action is not on track to be completed by the 2022 deadline, as the online booking system is not set to be implemented by that time.

2. Increase number of accessible taxis and/or have an alternative provider for accessible cabs in the Halifax region – 2030 Deadline

Baseline: In 2019, there were 16 accessible taxi owner licenses in HRM. In 2021, out of a total of 849 active conventional taxi licenses, the current number of accessible taxi licenses is now only 11.

Current Progress: Accessible taxi service is expected to launch with a new vendor in May 2022. The chosen vendor currently has five vehicles, so the service will initially be at reduced capacity; as more vehicles are purchased, the service will gradually increase to become full-service.

3. Align D&I business unit initiatives with the actions outlined in the Accessibility Strategy – 2030 Deadline

Baseline: Prior to the development of the Accessibility Strategy, business unit initiatives related to diversity and inclusion primarily aligned with the Diversity and Inclusion Framework. Each year, business units were required to create goals related to diversity and inclusion.

Current Progress: With the approval of the Accessibility Strategy, business units are now required and encouraged to consider yearly goals that are specifically associated with accessibility in addition to the

aforementioned diversity and inclusion goals. This will strengthen each business unit's dedication to D&I initiatives and provide additional reporting opportunities for the D&I Champions Table.

4. Establish partnership between the accessibility advisor and business units to conduct annual business unit accessibility reviews – 2028 Deadline

Baseline: Prior to the development of the Accessibility Strategy, the Accessibility Advisor would engage with business units on an as-needed basis. Business units would contact the Accessibility Advisor primarily with questions related to their ongoing projects or initiatives.

Current Progress: Following the Accessibility Strategy's approval by Council, the Accessibility Strategy Task Force was formed. In 2021, the Task Force and its subcommittees met on a monthly basis to provide updates and information on the Strategy's action item implementation. Starting in 2022, the full Task Force met on a bimonthly basis and subcommittees each met monthly. Since February 2022, the Accessibility Advisor also meets with individual Task Force members on a regular basis for updates specific to that member's respective business unit.

5. Establish dialogue between Accessibility Directorate and the municipality regarding accessibility in the Halifax region and compliance with the provincial Accessibility Act – 2028 Deadline

Baseline: Prior to the development of the Accessibility Strategy, HRM was not in regular contact with the Accessibility Directorate. This was due to frequent staffing changes both within the Accessibility Directorate and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion/ANSAIO.

Current Progress: Since the Accessibility Strategy was developed and implemented, the Accessibility Advisor (and, at times, the Managing Director of D&I/ANSAIO) and the Accessibility Directorate have met on a more regular basis, with an average meeting rate of once per quarter. The Accessibility Advisor also attends any networking events or information sessions hosted by the Accessibility Directorate that are related to the Accessibility Act. In 2022, a staff member from the Accessibility Directorate will join an Accessibility Strategy Task Force meeting to update members on the Accessibility Act as well as answer questions from Task Force members.

Additional Accessibility Initiatives

As part of the Accessibility Strategy update meeting between the Accessibility Advisor and Task Force members, a variety of accessibility initiatives were mentioned across business units that do not directly align with the action items in the Accessibility Strategy. Regardless, these initiatives will serve to improve accessibility within HRM, both internally and externally. This section outlines these additional accessibility initiatives and are categorized by the business unit leading the initiative.

Parks and Recreation

The following accessibility initiatives are related to recreational programming in HRM owned and operated Recreation Centres:

- Wheelchair and stick curling was offered at the Sackville Sports Stadium in partnership with the Lakeshore Curling Club.
- The Lebrun Recreation Centre offered a sledge hockey program in partnership with Easter Seals at the HRM 4-Pad
- The St. Andrew's Community Centre offered the first Junior NBA wheelchair basketball program in Canada.
- The Ready for Rec inclusion programs were expanded, with more locations added in 2022. Outdoor camp programs were adapted to support participants that required inclusion support.
- The Lebrun Centre established the "Zen Den" as a spot for children and youth to decompress when camp and programming activities became overwhelming.
- The business unit's Accessibility and Inclusion Committee was re-established, with representation from recreation program staff in all units.
- In 2021, over 100 children were provided 1:1 support at summer camps.
- The Community Recreation Coordinators accepted a recommendation from the Inclusion department to hire additional inclusion programming staff for the 2022 season, depending on the number of applicants.



Additionally, new equipment was obtained to improve accessibility at various locations, including:

- Clear masks were worn by Lebrun Recreation Centre staff in Summer 2021 so that children with disabilities could see visual cues from camp leaders.
- The purchase of various equipment for inclusion campers at the Lebrun Recreation Centre and Sackville Sports Stadium, including sensory items, fidget toys, and adaptive grips for markers and pencils.
- The following accessible equipment is provided at the Emera Oval: winter equipment including sledges and sleds with all protective gear, kick sleds, snow coach, and Hippocampe; and summer equipment including double trikes, recumbent trikes, adapted trikes for children and youth, ALinkers, Mobos, Hippocampe, and Ezyrollers

Finally, a second Inclusion and Accessibility Specialist was hired within Parks and Recreation.

Transportation and Public Works

The following accessibility initiatives have been undertaken by TPW:

- TPW continues to work with Accessibility Advisor and Information Technology to improve RoadWorks application accessibility.
- TPW has been prioritizing the accessibility of construction zones, including the use of appropriate signage, supporting pedestrian safety and travel through construction zones, and improved communication about road closures and construction sites.

- (Parking) hired student from Dal Planning to conduct audit of all existing accessible parking spaces against newly adopted accessible parking guidelines. This provided TPW with an accurate inventory of parking spaces and indicated which spaces do not meet the new standards, which will help staff with decision-making and prioritizing capital work.

Corporate Communications

The following accessibility initiatives have been undertaken by Corporate Communications:

- Implemented mandatory alternative text on all images on hfxgov social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) to enhance accessibility for those with screen readers.
- Created a large-print version of the Accessible Solid Waste Sorting Guide and an accompanying audio version.
- Completed the first draft of the Corporate Communications Accessible Design Guidelines.
- Supported the development of the Accessibility Strategy final draft.
- Launched a new Corporate Signature in alignment with corporate accessibility standards.
- Designed a Condensed Accessibility Strategy document for distribution during International Day for People with Disabilities and shared it as a resource on the municipal website.
- Supported the Accessibility Town Hall in November 2021, which enabled residents to ask questions via the Zoom chat and Q&A functions.



- Provided ongoing graphic design support for D&I initiatives, following accessible design guidelines.
- Implemented detailed alternative text to any maps attached to Public Service Announcements. Examples can be seen [here](#), where streets are listed in addition to being identified via the map.

Conclusion

In the first year of the Accessibility Strategy's implementation, HRM was successful in staying on track to complete the highest-priority goals for the 2021-22 fiscal year. Of the four action items that have December 2022 deadlines, three out of the four are on track to be completed by this date. Through these annual Council reports moving forward, we will continue to provide updates on the Accessibility Strategy, and, if needed, raise any considerations for Council in supporting the Strategy's implementation.

