



MEDIA RELEASE

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RE: Town of Amherst adopts accessibility strategy

AMHERST, Nova Scotia – The Town of Amherst has accepted an accessibility strategy that will guide it into the future as this diverse town strives to be a more equitable and inclusive community that is barrier free.

The strategy was approved by the Amherst town council at its Jan, 23, 2023, council session upon the recommendation of the town’s Accessibility Advisory Committee.

“We are committed to working towards a community where every citizen, every visitor, no matter their age, ability or gender, has equitable access to our buildings, programs and services,” Coun. Dale Fawthrop, the accessibility advisory committee’s chair, said.

Mayor David Kogon praised the work of the committee, saying the strategy they developed “will guide us as we move to become an even more inclusive, equitable community than we already are.”

Fawthrop noted the strategy has been the focus of the committee for several months. Its creation included a dialogue with stakeholders via a survey and in-person consultations with persons with disabilities and organizations that support those individuals.

“We have listened,” Fawthrop said. “Using the input we received from our citizens, we have developed an accessibility strategy for the Town of Amherst that we believe is flexible enough to meet our ever-changing world while providing more than adequate guidance as together we work towards our goal of achieving an equitable and inclusive community that is barrier free.”

The development of the strategy was driven by the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, which recognizes accessibility as a basic human right and aims to make Nova Scotia an accessible province by 2030 and the town’s strong desire to develop a “more equitable and inclusive community that is barrier-free.”





The strategy focuses on five areas the town is committed to become barrier free in – goods and services, information and communication, transportation, employment and built environment. In each section, the town outlines its commitment, an action plan and successes to date.

As an example, in the information and communications section, the town states it is committed to:

- Ensuring people with disabilities can equitably access information and communication by endeavouring to improve communications about existing municipal programs, services and events by delivering communications in a wide range of accessible formats
- Ensuring public open houses and meetings be as accessible as possible by offering materials in various formats, providing support to facilitate participation and making sure topics are discussed in plain language when possible
- Developing and recommending a standardized symbol system for all public communications of programs and events to clearly identify what accessibility accommodations are available on site. (For example, accessible entrances, scent-free facilities and accessible washrooms.)
- Improving the signage for municipal buildings and public facilities by implementing signage consistent with accessibility best practices.

The action plan for this section calls on the town to evaluate its website limitations for persons with visual impairments, strive to hold public meetings in barrier-free locations, introduce more signage where appropriate, continue the practice of disseminating all communications through a variety of mediums and explore new ones. It also recommends sensitivity training to ensure staff are better equipped to communicate with people of all ages and abilities and to provide information in an accessible format.

The successes to date part of this section notes the council chambers have been renovated so they are more easily accessible to all people, the town has incorporated technology to live-stream meetings for persons who are unable to attend and all council/committee agendas and minutes are posted to the website and hard copies are available upon request. There are also several kiosks around town containing information on the town's programs, events and celebrations and there is ample space dedicated in our town buildings to sit while waiting for bill payments or to talk to an employee.





The strategy also outlines the responsibilities of the Amherst town council, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the community living director, the community well-being manager and the CAO and town staff.

“We believe we have developed a living strategy that will meet the needs of our citizens while being flexible,” Sharon Bristol, community living director said. “We will be reviewing the strategy every three years and making updates were appropriate. This is just the first step. We are committed to working with all citizens to make improvements that ensure our diverse community is more equitable, inclusive and barrier-free.”

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