

Town of Amherst Active Living Strategic Plan 2024-2029



Amherst
NOVA SCOTIA

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I. Introduction



Strategic Plan Development Process

The Town of Amherst developed a physical activity strategy in 2017 which was led by the Physical Activity Leader hired through the Municipal/ Mi'kmaw Physical Activity Leadership (MPAL) program. MPAL is a cost sharing agreement between the province and participating municipalities to increase the number of staff in local governments that are planning and implementing comprehensive plans to improve the participation in health enhancing physical activity and movement at a community level.

Given that it has been over five years since the plan was developed, coupled with the fact that many of the actions within the plan had been completed, the Town embarked on a second strategic planning process, supported through the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH).

A working group consisting of representatives from the Town of Amherst (Active Living Coordinator and Director of Community Living), Communities Culture, Tourism and Heritage (Regional Manager and Regional Physical Activity Consultant), and Public Health - Nova Scotia Health (Health Promoter) was formed in the fall of 2023 to lead the development of the renewed Active Living Strategic Plan with Consultation services provided by Research Power Inc.

The strategic plan development process consisted of the following:

- A review of the previous strategic plan to identify strategies completed and opportunities for continued development.
- A review of other relevant local and provincial strategies including Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia (a provincial action plan for increasing physical activity in Nova Scotia); and other local plans (e.g., Diversity Strategy, Intermunicipal Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan, Accessibility Strategy, Active Transportation Plan) to identify opportunities for alignment/synergy.
- Key findings from a provincially led, community wide physical activity and movement survey completed in Amherst fall of 2023.
- Development of draft strategic directions and associated objectives and actions for the active living strategic plan (2024 to 2029) by the working group based on the findings from the review of materials (bullets one and two).
- A consultation session with community organizations to obtain feedback into the draft strategic directions and associated objectives and actions.

The feedback from the consultation session was compiled and used to create a strategic plan report which was reviewed and finalized by the working group. This report provides a brief summary of the need for an Active Living Strategy; findings from a community survey (findings recently released by CCTH for the Town of Amherst); the strategy vision and mission; and the strategic directions and associated goals, objectives and actions.

The Need for an Active Living Strategic Plan

The Town of Amherst is developing an Active Living Strategic Plan that embraces the Canadian 24-Hours Guidelines for movement including physical activity and sedentary behavior - “no more than 3 hours on recreational screen time and breaking up long periods of sitting where possible.”[1]

The strategic plan will help to support and encourage Amherst citizens to move more and reduce sedentary time. Further, the Active Living Strategic Plan recognizes active living as an approach to life that values and includes physical activity in everyday living and includes improving access to movement opportunities for all Amherst citizens. The aim of active living is to look for ways to be active at work, school, home and during leisure time. Active living is not the same as an exercise program. Active living means making physical activity part of everyday life, whether you are taking the stairs instead of the elevator, participating in a standing or walking meeting, biking to work, doing yoga at lunch, gardening, taking the kids or dog to the park, walking to the other building at your facility, or swimming laps in the pool.[2]

There are many factors that make it more challenging for people to move more and be active such as sedentary work environments, community design focused around automobile use, changing family structures and busy lifestyles, and safety fears. Despite these challenges, there is good news and opportunity! There are many assets in communities across Nova Scotia, including Amherst. For example, the Town of Amherst has other strategies (e.g., Diversity Strategy, Intermunicipal Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan, Accessibility Strategy, Active Transportation Plan) that align with active living, and actions within various strategies can support the achievement of goals across areas of work. Further, there are many partners in the Town who can work together to achieve common goals related to supporting Amherst citizens to move more.

The time is right to renew Amherst’s Active Living Strategic Plan by building on what we have accomplished over the last five years and identifying opportunities to help us achieve our vision of **An active and welcoming community for all.**

[1] The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (2021). Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults Aged 18-64 Years: An Integration of Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep. Accessed April 30, 2024. <<https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-18-64/>>.

[2] Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2023). What is active living? Accessed April 30, 2024.

<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/active_living.html>

Fostering Equity and Inclusion

An active community is one where everyone can enjoy the health benefits of being active. It is a community intentionally designed and maintained for the purpose of facilitating and supporting daily movement for people of all ages and abilities. In active communities, everyone has equal opportunity to engage in practical (get us to where we need to go) and recreational (done for leisure) forms of physical activity.

Equity, access, inclusion and safety are key determinants of participation in physical activity. Equity acknowledges equal treatment and opportunities do not lead to equal outcomes and recognizes that some populations have diverse needs. Health inequities are differences in health status between groups and populations that are socially and systemically produced by unequal distribution across the population, often linked to the social determinants of health- where we live, grow, learn, work, play and age. To help promote health and achieve equitable access, the Town of Amherst is committed to efforts to remove social, economic and physical barriers to participation to movement and active living opportunities in community spaces.

Inclusive active living and movement opportunities are a priority throughout Nova Scotia. Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia has goals to address inclusion and access. All individuals deserve to have a fair chance to participate, regardless of their physical abilities, socioeconomic status or ethnic background, and municipalities can play a key leadership role to help break down barriers. For this reason, it is important to apply an equity lens to address systemic barriers that impact access, inclusion and safety when planning, implementing and evaluating active living programs, resources and policies.

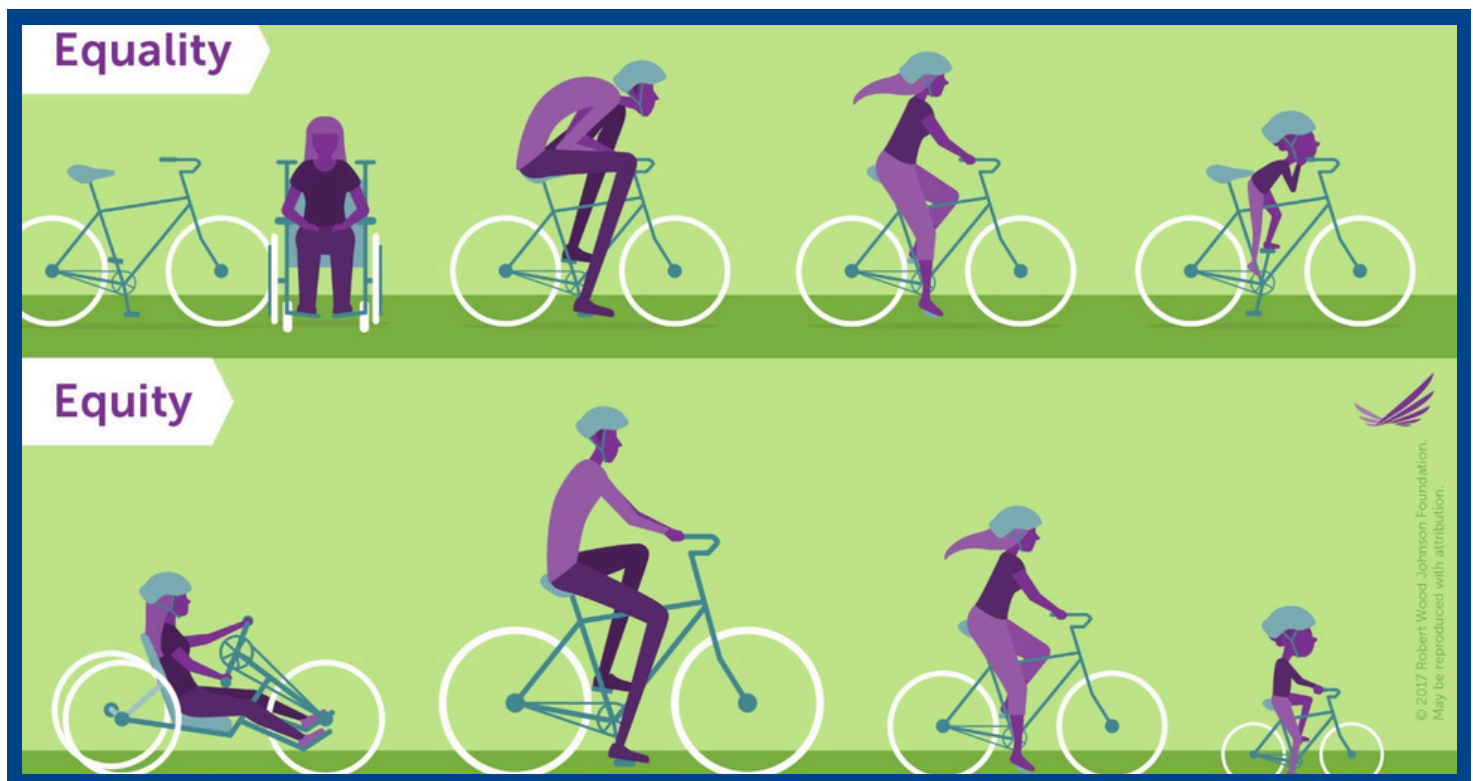


Figure 1: Equality vs Equity (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)

Community Survey

The purpose of the community wide physical activity and movement survey was to inform development, implementation, and continued evaluation of active living strategies for the Town of Amherst. The full report is available through the Active Living Coordinator in the Town, with key findings presented below.

The following graphic presents a summary of the findings from the survey including key facilitators to support being more active, and among the less active the top challenges and motivators related to Active Transportation (AT).

Key Facilitators

Self motivation: If I had more self-motivation
Time/priority: If I had more time to participate
Social: If I had someone to participate with me
Weather: If the weather was better

Among the less active in your community

Top Challenges

Social: Having someone to participate with
Routine: Incorporating activity into a daily routine
Cost: The cost to participate is too high
Roadside spaces/lanes: Not separate enough from cars for bicycling and not well enough maintained for walking
Safety: Do not feel safe riding a bicycle in the community
Access to Information: Difficult to find information on simple movement

AT Motivators

Walking: Motivators include sidewalk maintenance and trails.
Bicycling: Motivators include off road paths and bicycle lanes.

II. The Strategic Plan Framework



Vision

An active and inclusive community for all.

Mission

To inspire people of all ages and abilities to engage in movement and active living opportunities where we live, work and play.

The strategic plan includes four strategic directions:

1. Community Capacity and Partnerships
2. Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility
3. Natural and Built Environments
4. Communication and Promotion.

Each strategic direction has a goal, objectives and high-level actions, which are presented in this section of the plan.

- **Goal:** Our desired result or outcome for each strategic priority (the Why)
- **Objectives:** Our strategies to achieve the goal (the What)
- **High-Level Actions:** Our actions that outline, at a high-level, what will be done to move the objective forward (the How)

1. Strategic Direction: Community Capacity and Partnership

Goal: A diverse range of engaged community partners supporting opportunities for movement and active living that are inclusive for all in the Town of Amherst.

Objectives

High Level Actions

1.1 Grow and leverage partnerships to enhance opportunities for movement and active living for all ages.

- Build partnerships with schools to support movement and active living for students, teachers and the broader school community
- Work with health system partners to identify and support opportunities for movement and active living.
- Identify opportunities to develop partnerships with community businesses/workplace, including the Chamber of Commerce, to increase movement and active living.
- Build partnerships with community organizations to support aligning priorities and sharing resources.
- Collaborate interdepartmentally within the Town of Amherst to cultivate a workplace culture supportive of movement and active living for employees.
- Be a role model to external community members and partners.
- Build partnerships with government at the provincial and national level to support movement and active living.

1.2 Build community leadership to support movement and active living opportunities within the Town of Amherst.

- Provide training/professional development for staff and volunteers to build leadership and capacity to support movement and active living using a range of approaches (e.g., social and physical environment approaches, policy, etc.).
- Recruit and support volunteers to facilitate opportunities for movement and active living.
- Enhance social support and connections within opportunities for movement and active living.
- Utilize a multi faceted approach while providing social environments related to walking.

2. Strategic Direction: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility

Goal: An accessible and inclusive Town that provides diverse and equitable opportunities for movement and active living.

Objectives

High Level Actions

2.1 Continue to build strategies to remove barriers to participation in movement and active living and ensure inclusivity across the lifespan.

- Continue/expand initiatives that reduce barriers to participation in physical activity and recreation opportunities
- Monitor and conduct annual evaluations and update programs and policies based on findings to help ensure opportunities for movement and active living are accessible, culturally safe, and inclusive.
- Develop and implement policies to support inclusion.
- Recognize and celebrate work being done in the Town of Amherst to reduce barriers to movement and active living and ensure inclusivity.

2.2 Build partnerships with community members and groups to ensure equitable access to and participation in movement and active living.

- Engage and collaborate with community groups/organizations who work with equity deserving populations to help ensure programs and the natural and built environment are inclusive and accessible.
- Work with the facility access program to ensure all community members and groups have access to facilities and equipment.

2.3 Align with and support the implementation and integration of the Town's Accessibility Vision and Strategy, and Inclusion, Diversity and Equity plan.

- Partner (within the Town and outside) to provide training for staff and volunteers to build capacity to help ensure opportunities for movement and active living are inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible.
- Comply with the NS building code and the Accessibility Act's Built Environment standard in the development of the natural and built environment for movement and active living.
- Partner with other departments in the Town to help enhance the natural and built environment and ensure they are inclusive for all ages and abilities.

3. Strategic Direction: Natural and Built Environments

Goal: Sustainable natural and built environments that support movement and active living for all ages and abilities in the Town of Amherst.

Objectives

High Level Actions

3.1 Identify and implement opportunities to improve all season connectivity within the Town of Amherst.

- Enhance connections/networks of walking and wheeling routes to support movement and active transportation.
- Align with the Town’s Accessibility Plan to create safe walking and wheeling routes within the community.
- Link with other Town/municipal strategies/planning to ensure natural and built environments and connectivity are considered in planning and future development.

3.3 Identify and implement opportunities for unstructured use of the natural and built environment by all ages.

- Promote and support the use of green space and facilities for all ages throughout the year.
- Incorporate low-cost opportunities that support movement and active living within natural and built environments.
- Work with other departments in the Town to identify and support opportunities to improve accessibility to outdoor spaces.

4. Strategic Direction: Communication and Promotion

Goal: Informed and motivated residents who value active living and incorporate movement into their daily lives.

Objectives

High Level Actions

4.1 Develop and implement communication strategies to promote the value and benefit of movement and active living.

- Review and enhance platforms and communication mechanisms to promote the value and benefits of movement and active living.
- Refresh the branding strategy for the Town of Amherst that redefines messaging related to active living to include movement.
- Use current and relevant data and evidence to inform communication strategies to reach those who are less active.
- Research and leverage national and provincial initiatives to support messaging and communication about movement.

4.2 Develop and implement communication strategies to promote opportunities that encourage movement and active living.

- Develop strategies to promote and communicate opportunities for movement and active living including within the natural and built environment.
- Review communication strategies and incorporate mechanisms/language to help ensure inclusivity, diversity, equity and accessibility.
- Align communication and promotion of opportunities for movement with other Town strategies and events.

III. Moving Forward



Moving forward, the Town of Amherst will continue to work with partners who have contributed to the development of the strategic plan and encourage new collaborations to support its implementation. A more detailed action plan will be developed to identify timelines, accountability, resources, and indicators of success for the objectives and actions.

To help ensure successful implementation of the strategic plan, key enablers have been identified including:

- **Leadership** from the Town of Amherst and partner organizations. While the Active Community Coordinator has an important role to play in guiding the work, Council and partners need to champion the actions within the strategic plan. The strategic plan was developed through a collaborative process that engaged stakeholders from within the community and the actions reflect the shared work. Shared responsibility to support implementation of the strategic plan will help to ensure success.
- **Resources** including human, financial and physical are key enablers for the implementation of the strategic plan. Based on the actions and priorities identified, resources will be dedicated and sought to support implementation of the plan.
- **Accountability** is another key enabler to support implementation of the strategic plan. As noted above, an action plan will identify indicators of success, which are the foundation for monitoring implementation of the actions and success of the strategic plan. Through ongoing tracking of the actions, adjustments can be made to continually improve the implementation process. Annual reports will be produced to track progress and share success.
- **Communication** with our partners and community will be critical as the strategic plan is implemented. Effective communication will help to build shared responsibility for the strategic plan and to celebrate and build on achievements.

Many people contributed to developing this strategic plan. The contributions made by partners in the community have been invaluable. The ongoing support and contributions of all these individuals will be essential in helping to move the strategic directions and associated objectives of the strategic plan forward and help to ensure the vision, mission and goals are achieved. An active and inclusive community for all.