Inverness County

Equity Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Strategy 2025

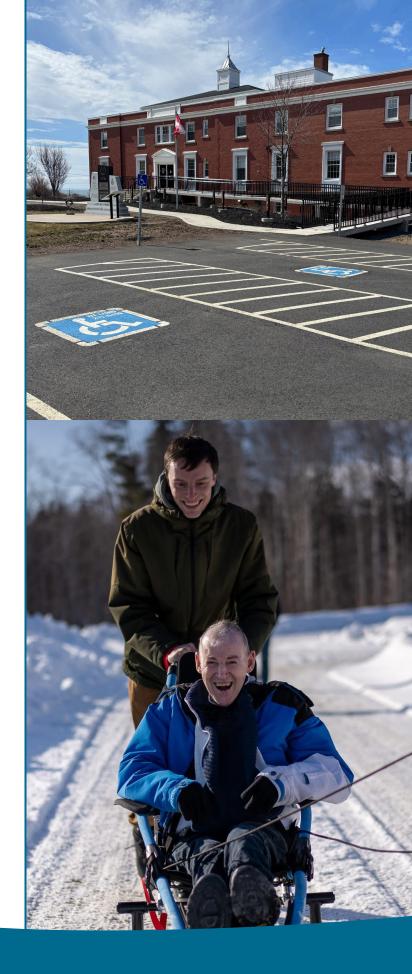


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Introduction

In 2017, Nova Scotia passed the Accessibility Act with a goal of becoming a fully accessible Province by the year 2030. Recommendations were made by persons with disabilities, and the Act recognizes accessibility as a human right. In 2022, the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act was passed by an allgovernment bill. This legislation will address systemic racism, hate, and inequity in Nova Scotia. Both Acts require "public sector-bodies" such as municipalities to develop strategies of their own.

Under the Provincial Department of Justice, the Accessibility Directorate, and the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism are all responsible for supporting and guiding municipalities to meet these obligations.

The Municipality of the County of Inverness appointed two Advisory Committees of Council. The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) and the Diversity and Inclusion Action Team (DIAT) are made up of representatives from Council and members from the public who represent equity-seeking groups.

The role of the committees are to create a municipal Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Strategy. The strategy will be reviewed and updated every three years or as new standards are developed. The committees have advised Council on the impact of municipal policies, programs, and services for residents and visitors of the municipality and here is the draft document for council to review.

Our Vision

The Municipality of the County of Inverness envisions a county where all residents and visitors are welcomed to a safe, vibrant, and inclusive space. We are committed to fostering a place that deeply values equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Our goal is to amplify the voices of equity-seeking groups and dismantle systemic barriers, ensuring that every individual feels truly welcomed and like they belong. This is a place that rejects racism and hate, celebrates diversity, and honours cultural differences. We are committed to continuous learning, unlearning, and being strong allies, taking deliberate action to eliminate barriers and create a more inclusive future for all.







Welcome

A Message from Municipal Council

On behalf of the Municipality of Inverness County, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the dedicated municipal committee members and staff whose efforts were pivotal in the creation of this plan. As the Council, we are proud to reaffirm our commitment to accessibility, diversity, and inclusion, and we are excited to begin implementing the actions outlined within this plan. We remain steadfast in our mission to work alongside leaders within our communities to foster an inclusive, welcoming environment that we can all proudly call home.

We acknowledge the inequities, hate, and racism that persist in our society, and through our Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategy, we are determined to confront these challenges head-on. Our goal is to build more accepting and inclusive communities where everyone, regardless of their background, can thrive.

We are committed to ensuring the voices of equity-seeking groups are heard, and we are dedicated to creating opportunities for all. Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive future.

Sincerely,

Warden Bonny MacIsaac Municipality of Inverness County



From left to right: Councillor Claude Poirier, Councillor John MacLennan, Councillor Blair Phillips, Warden Bonny MacIsaac, Deputy Warden Lynn Chisholm, Councillor Catherine Gillis. Front: Jason Gillis

Our Communities

Inverness County is located on Cape Breton Island/Unama'ki, which is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People, also known as the People of the Dawn. The Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet and Penobscot nations are the People of the Dawn.

Historically made up of farming and fishing lands, Inverness County offers a perfect

Historically made up of farming and fishing lands, Inverness County offers a perfect balance of nature, culture, history and community, attracting many visitors to this tourist destination.

Inverness County has a rich history of Mi'kmaq, Acadian, Scottish, and Irish cultures, and welcomes newcomers from all parts of the globe to call Inverness County home. We recognize the diversity of our communities and celebrate the many cultures that enrich our County.

Inverness County borders the Atlantic Ocean and the Bras d'Or Lakes and covers six municipal districts;

District 1

Meat Cove/Pleasant Bay/Chéticamp

District 2

Grand Étang/Le Moine/The Margarees

District 3

Dunvegan/Inverness/Scotsville

District 4

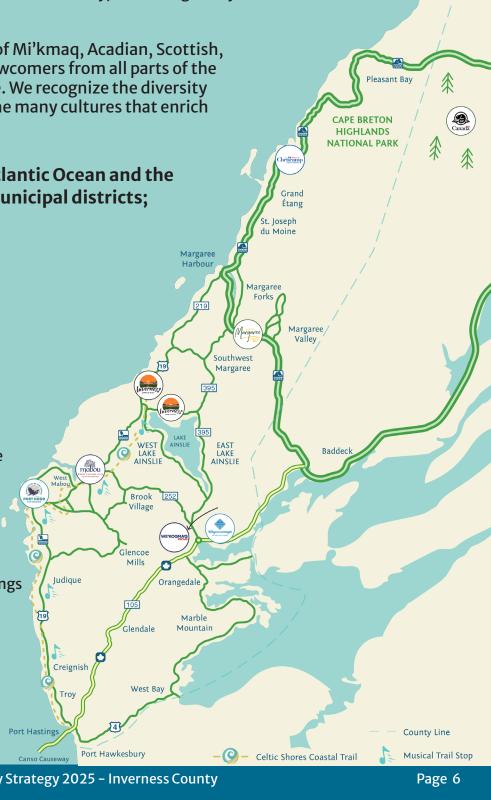
Lake Ainslie/Whycocomagh/Orangedale

District 5

Mabou/Port Hood

District 6

Judique/Creignish/West Bay/Port Hastings



Meat Cove

Land Acknowledgement

We are all treaty people.

We would like to acknowledge that Inverness County is located on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people in Unama'ki. Unama'ki is the Mi'kmaq word for Cape Breton Island, which also means "Land of the Fog". This territory is protected by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1752 between Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and the British Crown.

We recognize the harmful impacts of colonialization on Indigenous Peoples and commit to working in partnership with Mi'kmaw communities in the spirit and practice of reconciliation. This means we aim to continue to educate ourselves, build partnerships, and create a more inclusive and understanding place.

We further acknowledge that people of African descent have been in Nova Scotia for over 400 years, and we honour and offer gratitude to those ancestors of African descent who came before us to this land.



What We Achieved

- The Municipality of the County of Inverness completed accessibility renovations to the main access ramp and entrance at the Port Hood Administration building.
- The Recreation and Community Wellness department implemented an adaptive equipment loan program that includes a hippocampe chair, two adaptive sleds, two hand-cycles, and two "Rigs" (adaptive e-bikes).
- Created Sensory Loan Program as part of the Seniors' Safety Program.
- Municipality hosted its first public Adaptive Equipment "try-it" event to celebrate Accessibility Awareness week.
- Community development departments and accessibility coordinator worked with community organizations on accessibilitybased projects.
- Accessibility coordinator worked with community organizations on accessibilitybased projects.
- An Accessibility Advisory Committee member completed the credited Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) training Winter 2025 and earned their designation.
- The Municipality has appointed an internal Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee.

- Recreation programs partnered with Autism Nova Scotia on skating program.
- Recreation and Community Wellness department purchased new skate helpers that can be adapted for adult learners.
- Equity and inclusion statements have been added to outgoing job advertisements with the municipality.



Photo: Municipal Administration Building, Port Hood



Dalbrae students using rental bikes and hand-cycle

What the Words Mean

- Accessibility Act (2017): The provincial law enacted to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The law includes standards, compliance, and enforcement. (www.nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/ legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf)
- Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC):
 A volunteer committee appointed by a municipality to advise the municipal council on identifying and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives, and facilities.
- Accessible: A barrier-free and inclusive design of products, devices, services, or environments that can be utilized by all people, including those with disabilities.
- Accessibility Directorate: An office in the Department of Justice that is responsible for administering the Accessibility Act.
- Accessible Route: A path or way that is designed to accommodate persons with disabilities.
- Accessibility Standards: Set of Provincial laws that individuals, government, businesses, nonprofits, and public sector organizations must follow in order to become more accessible.
- Adaptable Seating: A public seat designed to be easily used for side transfer from a wheelchair.

- Alternative Format: Information in various formats, such as braille, large print, electronic, or online in an accessible format.
- Amenity: A thing that improves a person's convenience or comfort.
- **Barrier:** A condition or physical obstacle that prevents persons with disabilities from using or accessing resources or places.
- Braille: Reading and writing system for individuals who are visually impaired (Designed by raised dots that can be interpreted by touch).
- Built Environment: Human-made buildings and all other built structures: includes roads, parks, canals, bridges, solid waste sites, and others.
- Bylaw: A law passed by the municipal Council to establish procedures and help manage actions of resident
- CART: Communication Access Realtime
 Translation is live, word transcription that is displayed on a computer or large screen.
- Colour Contrast: A significant difference in colour from background to the content on top (Ex. Dark colour on a light background or light colour on a dark background).
- CSA: Is the Canadian Standards Association, whose B651-18 accessibility standards will be adopted by the Province for accessibility in the built environment.

- Curb Ramp: A sloped transition between a vehicular path and a sidewalk.
- Deaf-blind: When an individual has both sight and hearing loss.
- **Disability:** The Accessibility Act defines a disability as physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment that hinders an individual's full participation in society.
- Diversity: is defined as the many ways we are different from one another and experience the world in unique ways. Can include social and ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender, and disability.
- Equitable/Equity: A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is not the same as equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same, equity implies that everyone is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.
- Inclusion: is the act of creating a culture and environment where any individual or group can feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate.
- Pedestrian: A person walking or using an assistive device outside to travel.
- Plain Language: Written text that is easy to read and understand that uses everyday language.
- Request for Proposals: Specific contracts that are made to attain goods, services, or construction. Proposals are awarded to the bidder with the highest score.

- Request for Quotes: Used to attain goods or construction where specifications or requirements are well-defined, contract terms are clear, and bidder ranking is often based on lowest price.
- Residents: People who live in Inverness County.
- RHFAC: Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification.
- Systemic Barrier: A systematic barrier is an obstacle or impediment that excludes an individual or group from being treated equitably. These barriers are often not intentional and can frequently occur when policies, procedures, and practices are not designed with diversity in mind.
- Underrepresented: An underrepresented community is a group of people who do not have enough presence or are not shown fairly in areas like society, politics, the economy, education, or culture. These communities might face unfair treatment, exclusion, or discrimination because of things like their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or how much money they have.
- Universal Design: The design and composition of any element of our built environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.
- Wayfinding: A standardized process whereby people can understand their location, their intended route, and how to get to their destination.

Community Findings

- Poor accessibility in the built environment for those with vision loss.
- No large print signage or clear wayfinding throughout buildings.
- Community festival events are welcoming, but not accessible.
- Outdoor events are not accessible for wheelchair users.

- Not enough "non-sport"
 related recreation programs
 for people with disabilities to
 participate in.
- Some municipal buildings
 are hard to navigate and
 have heavy doors and stairs.
- Uneven sidewalks with debris and gravel.
- It is hard to find employment in my community as a person with a disability.

Most common barriers:

- 1. Built environment
- 2. Lack of goods and services for persons with disabilities
- 3. Lack of transportation in communities

Our Accessibility Plan

According to Federal and Provincial Accessibility Requirements and following Nova Scotia's 'Access by Design 2030' timeline, (www.novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/) the Municipality of the County of Inverness as a prescribed public sector body must aim to meet the following goals included in the plan.



1. Awareness and Community Engagement:

Our Goal:

Raising awareness and understanding around equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility to communities is an important part of creating an inclusive municipality.

Continuously engaging with community groups and organizations will help us better understand the diverse needs of our communities and create lasing change.

Current Situation:

We have formed partnerships with organizations that advance equity work and advocate for inclusion. These organizations include Autism Nova Scotia, L'Arche Cape Breton, and Mill Road Social Enterprises.



Photo: Group of participants cooking together during an Intergenerational Cooking class.

- Develop relationship with the Cape Breton Partnership's, Local Immigration Program to help foster more welcoming communities and support community level planning.
- 2. Host information sessions and workshops for municipal staff and volunteers on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility related topics.
- 3. Encourage ongoing learning and training opportunities for municipal staff and volunteers to participate in.
- 4. Continue to host annual accessibility awareness events during National Accessibility Awareness week for councillors, staff, and the public to participate in.
- 5. Host municipal "Open House" series to engage communities on the work the municipality is promoting and to find out how we can better support equity-seeking groups in the County.
- 6. Advocate for members of the Capital Projects team to complete the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification training.
- 7. Provide cultural competency training opportunities to municipal employees.
- 8. Host annual events that recognize and celebrate the diversity of Inverness County residents and newcomers.
- 9. Celebrate and recognize special holidays of equity groups (Aboriginal Day, International Women's Day, National Seniors Week, etc).
- Council and employees receive mandatory training on Equity, Anti-Racism, and Accessibility topics.
- 11. Program Coordinator to share ongoing lunch and learn opportunities and training on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility topics with municipal employees.

2. Transportation

Our Goal:

Everyone in the Municipality of the County of Inverness can access reliable and equitable transportation services to get where they need to go.

Current Situation:

Currently, no taxi services exist in Inverness
County. Strait Area Transit, a non-profit transit
service, provides transportation to residents
of Inverness County. Strait Area Transit is a
community-based transit system that delivers
door-to-door accessible transportation
throughout Port Hawkesbury, Richmond
County, Inverness County, and beyond. This
service requires users to book their trip the
day before and is based out of the Town of Port
Hawkesbury.

La Coopérative de Transport de Chéticamp, known as L'Acabie is a community-based, charitable, non-profit established in 2010. Servicing the areas on Northern Inverness County and sometimes surrounding areas when needed. L'Acabie serves older adults, persons with disabilities, and those needing reliable and affordable transportation.

Inverness County residents also have access to walking, hiking, biking, and motorized trails, as well as many sidewalks and walking loops that allow for active transportation.

- 1. Ensure that all persons have equitable access to publicly funded or regulated transportation services.
- 2. Ensure that no resident is denied or charged extra for transit service because of a disability (E.g. no one is charged a fee to store their mobility aids or assistive devices).
- Encourage all newly developed walking and biking paths to be developed using the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Standard B651-23, Accessible Design for the Built Environment.
- Continue to work with local trails groups and Trails Federation to increase the accessibility and age-friendliness of trail systems.



Photo: Two youth driving adaptive e-bikes called the "Rigs"

3. Built Environment

Our Goal:

Municipally owned and leased buildings, sidewalks, streets, and public spaces will provide safe, inclusive, and accessible environment for all people.

Current Situation:

The Municipality of the County of Inverness currently owns:

The Port Hood Administrative Building (375 Main Street, Port Hood)

Strathlorne Recycling Facility (15109 Route 19, Strathlorne)

Kenloch Waste Management Facility (420 West Lake Ainslie Rd)

The Port Hood Resource Centre (214 Main Street, Port Hood)

Recreation & Community Wellness (86 High Road, Port Hood)

Various sidewalks and few roads.



Photo: New accessible entryway at the Municipal Administration Building, Port Hood

- 1. All municipal infrastructural projects and new building designs are developed using universal design.
- 2. Complete accessibility wayfinding and signage audits of all municipally owned buildings to improve accessibility of wayfinding.
- Ensure that all new municipally owned buildings constructed meet the Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) Accessibility Certified level and advocate for RHF Accessibility Certified Gold.
- 4. Encourage outdoor park and trails development associations to meet the standards outlined in Canadian Standards Association CSA-B651-23, Accessible Design for the Built Environment.
- 5. Ensure one fully accessible washroom at the Port Hood Administration building on the main floor.
- 6. Collaborate with CNIB to update Sidewalk Maintenance Policy and work with public works team to develop a safe snow removal plan.
- 7. Encourage recreation facilities and accessible beaches to have accessible change rooms that meet the Canadian Standards Association CSA B651-23, Accessible Design for the Built Environment.
- 8. All municipal Request for Proposal's (RFPs) and Request for Quote's (RFQs) reference the CSA B651-23, Accessible Design for the Built Environment Standards.
- 9. Encourage all municipally funded infrastructural projects to be looked at from an accessibility lens and offer an opportunity for the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) to make recommendations.

4. Goods & Services

Our Goal:

The Municipality manages and oversees multiple services offered to the public including; water and waste management, recreation and community wellness, tax and finance, community development and infrastructure, emergency services.



Photo: Recreation summer staff using adaptive e-bikes

- Accommodate service animals and personal support people at municipal programs and events.
- 2. Develop inclusive customer service training for public facing employees and volunteers.
- 3. Prioritize programming to meet the needs of equity-deserving groups.
- 4. All public service counters will have a dropped area with knee clearance, according to CSA-B651 Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment.
- 5. Continue to market adaptable rental equipment as part of the Recreation and Community Wellness equipment loan program.
- 6. Set up QR codes on adaptable equipment that provides direction on how to use equipment piece as well as safety features.

- 7. Annually train public-facing employees on accessible customer service.
- 8. Advocate for a more accessible online recreation registration and payment software.
- Continue to be a point of contact to the public for accessibility related questions such as; adaptive equipment, mobi-mats on the beach, and more.
- 10. Continue to support non-profit community organizations with advising on accessibility renovations and best practices.
- 11. Work with Recreation and Community Wellness department on developing more inclusive programs and events.
- 12. Provide programs and services to underserved and underrepresented communities within the County.

5. Employment & Policy Development:

Our Goal:

The Municipality of the County of Inverness commits to providing equitable employment opportunities. We aim to create more inclusive employment practices and workplaces for new and existing employees of all backgrounds and abilities. This includes developing policies through an equity lens with adequate representation of equity groups on committees.

Current Situation:

The Municipality of Inverness County has six municipal Council members and 97 employees. Each new hire is onboarded by their management and human resources team where they review policies, manuals, sign up for any training relevant to their position, fillout payroll forms, and receive devices such as laptops, cell phones, or work vehicles.



Photo: L'Arche Cape Breton

- Advocate to revise the employee sick leave policy for allowing employees to take more than two sick days annually to provide care or to attend appointments of a family member.
- 2. Develop an equity lens tool used for decision making to ensure our policies, programs, and protocols are developed to ensure they reflect our values and minimize biases.
- 3. Work with Human Resources to adopt the practice of providing interview questions 24 hours in advance.
- 4. Conduct annual self-identification surveys on staff and volunteer diversity at all levels of the organization.
- 5. Advocate for a policy that addresses Intimate Partner Violence leave for municipal employees.
- Amend Committee of Council terms of reference and policies to allow for more first-voice individuals and remove any barriers that exist to participation.
- 7. The Policy and By-law Committee schedules a review of all policies as they relate to equity and inclusion.
- 8. Explore developing additional policies and mandates that reflect equity and inclusion in municipal government.

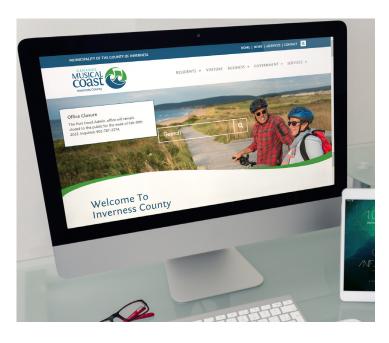
6. Information & Communication

Our Goal:

Municipal information and communications will be easily accessed by members of the public in a format that is suitable for them.

Current Situation:

Key information and communication are made public on the municipal website, social media, printed in local newspapers, and broadcasted over local radio from time to time. Municipal staff also support individuals in accessing and clarifying information over the phone.



- New municipal website will be designed with the most recent web accessibility standards in mind. The municipal website will support the use of assistive technology on any electronic devices, including; computers, tablets, and smartphones.
- 2. All policies and bylaws should be translated into a plain language version.
- 3. Alternative text (ALT) for image descriptions should be imbedded in all images posted with public communication on social media and the municipal website.
- 4. Sign language translation or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) will be available to residents who request this for special events or meetings in advance.
- 5. Public communication should be in plain language to improve readability for all users.
- 6. Ensure captions are used on any videos.
- 7. Create an online entry form where citizen requests and complaints can be submitted on the municipal website.
- 8. All registration forms produced by the municipality should include a section where participants can request the need for accommodation to fully participate in the program or event.

Top Priorities for 2025

- 1. Develop an equity lens tool used for decision making to ensure our policies, programs, and protocols are developed through an inclusive lens and reflect our values and minimize biases.
- 2. Continue to host annual accessibility awareness events during National Accessibility Awareness week for councillors, staff, and the public to participate in.
- 3. Conduct annual self-identification surveys on staff and volunteer diversity at all levels of the organization.
- 4. Amend Committee of Council terms of reference and policies to allow for more first-voice individuals and remove any barriers that exist to participation.
- Continue to market adaptable rental equipment as part of the Recreation and Community Wellness equipment loan program.





Responsibilities

The Municipality of the County of Inverness' Council is responsible for adopting and overseeing the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategy. The Chief Administration Officer is responsible for implementing the strategy and overseeing the work of the Accessibility Coordinator, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, and the Diversity and Inclusion Action Team.

The Accessibility Coordinator is responsible for receiving and responding to public

concerns, feedback, and suggestions, while bringing these forward to the advisory committee meetings.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Diversity and Inclusion Action Team is responsible for providing advice, solutions, and recommendations to Council, while guiding the Accessibility Coordinator in creation and implementation of the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategy.

Responding to Public Feedback

Anyone can lodge a complaint, ask a question, or give feedback about accessibility and inclusion in the Municipality of the County of Inverness. Inquiries should be directed to the Chief Administrative Officer and the Accessibility Coordinator, and a response will be given within a reasonable amount of time.

The Accessibility Coordinator will keep a record of all complaints, questions, and feedback given and provide an update to the advisory committee's during monthly meetings. These updates will be reviewed by the committee's and may impact future revisions to the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategy.

Anyone can ask a question, submit a complaint, or offer suggestions to the Accessibility Coordinator who will consult with the responsible staff and respond within a reasonable time. Appeals can be made to the advisory committee's first and to Council second if any response, or lack thereof, is unsatisfactory.

Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation of the Strategy

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will be responsible for providing Council with an EDIA Report Card by March 31st of each year. This report card will track and report on the progress made towards the goals set out in this plan, while making recommendations to improve this plan. The Accessibility Report Cards will be made public and posted to our municipal website.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Diversity and Inclusion Action Team will review new directives, guidelines, and updates from the Accessibility Directorate and Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, serving under the Department of Justice as new standards are developed and implemented.

Timeline of the Plan

All items listed under the "Top Priorities" section shall be completed one year from April 2025. Other commitments will be implemented overtime to be achieved by 2030 or as new Accessibility Standards come into effect

Community Highlights

The Inverness Development Association in partnership with the Inverness County Accessibility Committee made Inverness Beach the most accessible beach in Atlantic Canada.







La Coopérative de Transport de Chéticamp, better known as L'Acabie, is a community based, charitable, transportation organization offering accessible and affordable transportation to its residents.



The accessible fishing dock at the Provincial Park in Lake O'Law provides persons with mobility disabilities access to the fishing platforms, picnic area, parking, and accessible washrooms.

Photo: Pat Wall

Helpful Resources

Funding & Grants:

Nova Scotia Business ACCESS-Ability Grant
Program - Businesses can apply for a
cost-shared grant to make
accessibility-related improvements.
https://cch.novascotia.ca/business-access-ability-grant-program

Nova Scotia Community ACCESS-Ability
Program - Can be used by Registered
non-profit society/cooperative in good
standing, Federally incorporated non-profit organization, Nova Scotian Mi'kmaw
Councils, and Municipalities for accessibility
focused initiatives and improvements.
https://cch.novascotia.ca/investing-ourfuture/community-funding-and-awards/
community-access-ability-program

Information:

CSA B651-23- Accessible Design for the Built Environment:

https://www.csagroup.org/store/product/ CSA-ASC%20B651%3A23/

Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate - "The Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate is responsible for administering the Accessibility Act and advancing disability issues within government."

Accessibility Directorate - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada

Rick Hansen Foundation www.rickhansen.com

Inverness Literary Council - "The Adult Learning Program (ALP) is an outcomes-based education program for adults in Nova Scotia... training (including post-secondary education), and high school completion or equivalency... Free Instruction for adults; Computer instruction/essential skills training; Prepare to write your GED." www.invernesslit.com

ReachAbility Association - ReachAbility provides supportive and accessible programs for individuals facing barriers and advocates for a more equitable and inclusive workforce. www.reachability.org

Appendices

Accessibility Advisory Committee:

Aaron Macdonald, Member of Committee
Marcel Visser, Member of Committee
Marcella Poirier, Member of Committee
Mary Anderson, Member of Committee
Blair Phillips, Councillor
Bonny MacIsaac, Warden

Diversity and Inclusion Action Team Members:

Chelsea McPhee, Member of Committee
Riley MacGillvray, Member of Committee
Ticiane Cruz, , Member of Committee
Vicki Patterson, Member of Committee
Blair Phillips, Councillor
Lynn Chisholm, Deputy Warden

Staff Members:

Keith MacDonald, Chief Administration Officer

Maggie MacDonald,

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