

Accessibility Plan



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1.0 Introduction

In 2017 Nova Scotia passed the Accessibility “Act” which recognizes accessibility as a human right. In consultation with persons with disabilities, Nova Scotia is committed to working toward a goal of achieving an accessible province by 2030.

Almost 1 in 5 Nova Scotians over the age of 15 identify as having a disability. We anticipate that this number will grow as our population ages. These numbers underscore both the significance and timeliness of the Accessibility Act.

This legislation is an important part of the government’s plan to build a more diverse province that is inclusive for all Nova Scotians.

The Act establishes a framework for addressing accessibility in 6 key areas of focus; transportation, employment, information and communication, programs and services, built environment, and education.

Accessibility standards are being developed by the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, under the Department of Justice. Standards will first apply to governments, then public sector bodies such as Municipalities, libraries and hospitals, and then finally to private businesses and organizations.

A commitment is being made to provide equitable access to all people by identifying, removing, and preventing both physical and psychosocial barriers that prevent full participation and engagement with our communities.

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1.1 Definitions

Accessibility: The quality of being easy to approach, reach, enter, speak with, use, or understand.

Disability: Includes a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability; that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.

Diverse: Including or involving people from a range of different backgrounds.

Inclusive: The concept that no parts are left out.

Equitable: Different from equal access, equity means everybody is treated fairly based on their unique needs and abilities.

Barrier: Anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communication barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

Accessibility Standards: A set of provincial laws that individuals, governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations and public sector bodies must follow to identify, eliminate and prevent barriers.

2.1 Vision

We imagine a county with no barriers, where everything – from education and employment to the physical environment, to music, sports, entertainment and everyday information – is accessible to everyone regardless of their background, circumstances and abilities. Identifying and removing barriers means more than building ramps and accessible washrooms. It calls for a change in overall attitudes where people with

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diverse perspectives and experiences are inherently valued, and able to participate easily in all aspects of society.

3.1 About the Municipality of the County of Victoria

Victoria County is a rural municipality providing service for approximately 7,000 residents over a large geographic area that is approximately 2,878 square kilometers with 4,924 dwellings. It spans from Iona at the southernmost point, to Bay St Lawrence and Capstick at the top of Cape Breton Island.

Victoria County Municipal offices and council chambers are located at 495 Chebucto Street on the main street in Baddeck in a historically significant building known as the Court House. The Municipality owns and operates waste transfer stations in Baddeck and Dingwall and recycling depots in Baddeck and New Haven. There is also a Reuse Centre at the Baddeck site. The Victoria County Water Utility has four water treatment plants: Little Narrows, Ingonish, Neil's Harbour and Dingwall.

The Municipality offers services such as Waste Collection, Tax Collection and Victoria County Transit, and facilitates public programming via our Tourism and Recreation department and Seniors Safety Program. The Revenue Department, as well as Information and Communications are also municipal assets.

Victoria County has a proud, vibrant culture; rich with arts and traditions, and supports an intergenerational lifestyle in which people are strongly connected to each other and the places where we live, work and play. Sustainable practices are encouraged, and everyone benefits from the diverse skill sets within our communities.

The Municipality of the County of Victoria is a magnificent and bountiful landscape. Nestled within the forested highlands, glens, and rivers and along the County's extensive coastline are welcoming communities where

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one will encounter a generosity of spirit, safety, and serenity.

4.1 Accessibility Advisory Committee

Several attempts were made to recruit volunteers for Victoria County's Accessibility Advisory Committee between 2019 and 2021 without success. During the spring of 2022, as the public became increasingly aware of the government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Plan, individuals with lived experience pertaining to disability came forward.

In February 2022 Victoria County's Accessibility Advisory Committee was formed with more than half of its voting membership comprised of people who identify as having a disability themselves, or as representing a person with a disability, or are employed (or volunteer with) an organization that serves persons with disabilities.

VOTING MEMBERS OF THE VICTORIA COUNTY ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Bruce Morrison, Chair (District 3 Councilor and Warden)
Fraser Patterson (District 5 Councilor)
Josephine MacNeil (municipal employee and community member)
Loreto Doyle (community member)
Agnes MacFarlane (community member)
David MacKenzie (regional building inspector)

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MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF WHO SUPPORT THE WORK OF AAC:

Leanne MacEachen (CAO)
Steff MacLeod (Executive Assistant)
Cassandra Yonder (SSP Coordinator and lead Accessibility Coordinator)
Christopher Woodford (Recreation and Active Living Coordinator)

The Terms of Reference for the Victoria County Accessibility Advisory Committee were accepted in April of 2022. The committee has held regular monthly meetings throughout the spring of 2022 to provide guidance to the Municipal administrative staff to conduct public engagement sessions that informed Victoria County's Accessibility Plan. The committee is dedicated to raising awareness about the goals to move towards a more accessible municipality.

Municipal Communications established a communication plan for the Accessibility Advisory Committee and published an Accessibility page on the Municipal website. This page contains a link to Victoria County's Accessibility Survey that was created and reviewed by administrative support staff to inform the development of the Accessibility Plan.

Articles pertaining to accessibility were also shared in Victoria County's social media, and via the Senior Safety Program Facebook group. The Municipality's Senior Safety Program Coordinator (and Accessibility Coordinator) was identified as a public contact. Cassandra Yonder can be reached by email accessibility@VictoriaCounty.ca and by telephone (902)295-3672.

Having previously completed the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification training program, Victoria County's Accessibility Coordinator has continued to provide Accessibility information to the committee members and the public and has been the committee's contact to liaise with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate.

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The Minister of Justice mandated the creation of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate and has identified all municipalities in Nova Scotia (including Victoria County) as public sector bodies that are required to establish Accessibility Advisory Committees and create Accessibility Plans for their respective municipalities. An Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Municipalities was published in December 2019 which assisted our committee with this work.

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate has been overwhelmingly responsive to this and other Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committees and Coordinators by providing appropriate information and support and resources for our communities as we have developed and now are implementing our Accessibility Plans.

Going forward, the Municipal administrative staff will continue to support the work of Victoria County's Accessibility Advisory Committee in implementing and evaluating both the short and long term goals to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility in the 6 areas of focus; transportation, employment, information and communication, programs and services, built environment, and education within the Municipality of the County of Victoria's identified assets, and to lead by example within our communities as we collaborate to work toward Access by Design 2030.

5.1 Message from the Chair

*"I am pleased about removing barriers to participation for our residents and visitors. Lots of people have contributed to the creation of this plan, and I'm excited that Victoria County is becoming increasingly accessible." -
Bruce Morrison, Warden*

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2.0 Public Engagement

1.2 How We Engaged the Public

In the interest of hearing from those who live, work and play in Victoria County, we asked for feedback about both the accessible, and also not-so-accessible features of our Municipal facilities, programs and services. We are thankful to those who shared their thoughts and ideas!

MUNICIPAL WEBSITE

A page on our website <https://victoriacounty.com/residents/accessibility/> directs anyone who has questions or comments about accessibility in Victoria County to reach out to our accessibility coordinator, Cassandra Yonder, by telephone (902) 295-3672 or email accessibility@victoriacounty.ca

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

A public presentation about accessibility was offered by our Accessibility Coordinator at the Seniors Lunch in St Ann's Bay in March 2022 to a crowd of approximately 50 persons and was well received.

SURVEY

We created a survey (see Victoria County Accessibility Survey, Appendix A) that could be completed online or submitted as a paper copy up until June 30th, 2022. The Accessibility Coordinator assisted several people to complete surveys both in person and over the phone.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

The Accessibility Coordinator and other Municipal administrative staff set up a booth to share information about the development of Victoria County's Accessibility Plan at public engagement sessions that were held in all 8 districts throughout the County between May 24th and June 7th, 2022.

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2.2 What We Heard

MUNICIPAL WEBSITE

There has been some traffic on the Accessibility page of Victoria County's website, but the Accessibility Coordinator has received only a couple of telephone calls and no emails to date from the public pertaining to accessibility.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

The vibrant group who attended the presentation about accessibility that was made to the Seniors Lunch (hosted by the St Ann's Bay Health Group) in March 2022 were very much engaged with the discussion.

They were eager to learn about the meaning of the terms: accessibility, disability, barrier, inclusion etc. and shared openly about the barriers they face. *Lack of adequate cellular service (and to some degree also wi-fi and technological ability) was brought forward as the most significant barrier to social participation.* This group of seniors feels that they are not adequately informed about Municipal programs and services and are hesitant to drive for fear that they will not be able to access help if needed.

With respect to Municipal facilities, *this group of seniors said that the Court House in Baddeck (where the Municipal offices are housed) is not meaningfully accessible.* There was agreement that the built environment across the entire Municipality of the County of Victoria provides limited access, and they said that the Provincial goals pertaining to Access by Design 2030 feel *"unattainable"*.

Seniors shared some resources that improve accessibility for themselves and their loved ones such as *apps and information sources* in addition to library resources such as *audio books*.

Those who attended the Seniors Lunch presentation agreed that meaningful access is about diversity and social inclusion. They recognized that seniors and persons with disabilities make important contributions

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socially and to the economy in Victoria County, not only as recipients of care but also as care providers, volunteers, employers, employees, consumers, and tourists!

SURVEY

There was a total of 43 survey respondents who were a fairly representative sample from across all 8 Municipal Districts of the County with diverse ages and abilities. Almost all respondents were residents of Victoria County. Approximately half of respondents work in Victoria County and over 10% were business owners. Slightly less than half of respondents identified as persons with disabilities, representing persons with disabilities, or employed/volunteer at an organization that provides service to persons with disabilities.

The survey asked respondents if they have encountered any physical, communication-related, social, or psychological barriers or challenges that have inhibited their use of Municipal facilities, programs or services.

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents reported their primary concern is the physical accessibility of the Municipal offices that are housed at the Court House building in Baddeck at 495 Chebucto St. Lack of accessible features at the Baddeck and Dingwall Transfer Stations were reported by more than half of respondents. A quarter of respondents indicated that they had faced physical barriers or challenges when utilizing Victoria County Transit.

When it comes to communication-related, social and/or psychological barriers to access, slightly more than half of respondents reported lack of accessibility related to attending Municipal events and programs. Half of respondents said that the Municipal website and social media lacked meaningful access and almost as many faced barriers in communication with Municipal Council (including watching Council sessions broadcast live online). One quarter of participants reported social and/or psychological challenges when making payments to the Municipality or dealing with waste management.

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It is important to note that many respondents failed to respond to all, or even most of the survey questions, choosing instead to comment or describe a specific experience where they encountered barriers and/or challenges. Obviously, there are limits to the relevance of survey findings considering the small sample size, and that many questions were left unanswered. Nevertheless, some excellent qualitative feedback was obtained.

Some survey respondents took time to describe how meaningful access could be improved within Municipal facilities, programs and services. This is what we heard:

There seems to be a shared understanding that the Court House building itself lacks physical accessibility. Some comments were offered about the building approach lacking a solid, stable, flat, cleared surface for approach and that it lacked accessible parking, washrooms, and most importantly physical access to the second floor of the building where Council sessions are held in the Council Chambers

The need for greatly improved wayfinding, signage and orientation to the Municipal offices (and also at the transfer stations) was highlighted. A respondent with low vision expressed the need for improved tactile attention indicators, high visual contrast in materials, and privacy. Respondents with low hearing asked for LOOP assistive hearing within the building(s) and closed captioning for virtual meetings. A respondent who identified as someone with a learning disability asked for patience (particularly at the transfer station(s)) since they need extra time to understand how to engage.

Overall, lack of meaningful access to Councillors themselves, meeting rooms, Council sessions and communications via Municipal social media creates a sense of a lack of willingness for public engagement and transparency with the public. It is interesting to note how physical and psychological barriers create real and/or perceived barriers to democracy!

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There was some incongruity between survey responses that requested less virtual engagement (due to lack of access to appropriate technology and wi-fi) and would prefer a return to mail outs and printed materials for increased engagement. Others highlighted the need for improved virtual access through increased accessibility of the website and more opportunities to make municipal payments and inquiries online. These responses indicate the need for diversity in the Municipality's communication plan.

One respondent offered feedback pertaining to the lack of accessibility of the Municipal website and other social media communications, reporting that it "is superficial, difficult to navigate and lacks accessible features such as appropriate layout and fonts". This respondent seems to feel that the Municipality of the County of Victoria's website is a missed opportunity for engagement.

Survey respondents indicated that they wish for more meaningful access to Victoria County's facilities, programs, services and staff! There was a suggestion to host "open house" days at the Municipal offices, with volunteers on hand to assist with orientation and transparency regarding administrative efforts as well as Councillors and political process. It is good to be reminded that the public cares very much about what goes on at the Municipal level of government and wishes to see barriers to open communication alleviated.

Several respondents commented that while they acknowledge that the Council Chambers ideally should be accessible, they appreciated that Council Sessions are live streamed and that meeting minutes, and information about bylaws, programs and services are made available virtually for the public to remain connected and informed.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

Despite the Municipality of Victoria County's efforts to inform the public about engagement sessions pertaining to accessibility that took place in all

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8 districts between May 24th and June 7th, 2022, the sessions were very poorly attended with only a few of people in each location, and some with no attendance besides district Councillors! Could it be that residents are not interested to offer feedback about issues pertaining to accessibility, or that they were inadequately informed about the opportunity for engagement, or that the nature of the engagement itself was not adequately accessible? Those who did attend offered valuable feedback, including observations about the lack of locations throughout the County with enough accessibility features to hold meaningfully accessible events!

Some attendees filled out paper copies of Victoria County's Accessibility Survey (see results above) on their own or with assistance from the Accessibility Coordinator, but the dialogue that was exchanged seemed most valuable.

We heard that those persons who have disabilities themselves, or who support and/or care for persons with disabilities feel worn out. They shared about their struggles to advocate for improved accessibility over many years, and the fact that they were – finally – being asked for feedback was positive, but also felt like “too little, too late”.

The most impactful message that came across during the public engagement sessions had to do with the acknowledgement that while the Municipal facilities, programs and services lack many accessible features in the built environment, that many of the people in Victoria County offered meaningful assistance that at least partially compensated for the physical barriers. We heard that the kind and compassionate service that is provided by many volunteers, business owners, Victoria County Transit operators and program facilitators is appreciated, and supports persons with disabilities within our communities to remain active and connected. So great to hear!

We also heard that some business owners have gone above and beyond to seek ways to accommodate employees who have disabilities and to create places that are diverse and inclusive, to everyone's benefit.

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We heard about lack of accessibility (similar to survey responses) such as lack of access to Council Chambers, need for improved internet access and wayfinding across all Municipal facilities, need for accessible parking and we also heard some new concerns, such as; the need for improved access to mental health services and the need for education for contractors and service providers throughout the County as well as incentives for volunteers.

Attendees at the public engagement sessions mostly agreed that Victoria County Transit offers a fairly accessible service, and that knowing about accessibility features ahead of time is crucial for planning outings and events.

We talked about the definitions of accessibility, disability, diversity, and inclusion and found agreement that there is a long way to go to achieve “Access by Design 2030” but that it is the little things (such as lever style door handles, for example) that matter most and that as long as people are willing to care about including everyone, accessibility in our communities will improve.

Some quotes from public engagement attendees who identified as persons with disabilities, or representing persons with disabilities:

“I’m touched that the Municipality of the County of Victoria took the time to invite me out to hear my opinions about accessibility.”

“My mother fell on the steps of the front entrance at the Court House because she didn’t see herself as needing the more accessible entrance around the corner since it lacked dignity.”

“It is hard to travel long distances on rough terrain. I don’t go out much because it is too tiring. My family does my shopping etc for me.”

“I like to have an option between stairs and a ramp.”

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“Sometimes it is hard to find space for my assisted mobility device [walker] in public places, which is embarrassing.”

“Generally I’m not bothered by accessibility because I get the help I need.”

3.0 Victoria County’s Accessibility Plan

Below is a description of the Accessibility Plan for the Municipality of the County of Victoria considering each of the 6 areas of focus; Transportation, Employment, Information and Communication, Programs and Services, Built Environment, and Education.

1.3 Transportation

Making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go in Victoria County.

2.3 Current

Due to the limited population distributed over a large geographic area, combined with severe weather conditions and challenges to road maintenance, some Victoria County residents struggle to have their transportation needs met. There is no taxi or public transportation service besides Victoria County Transit. Most people travel in their own vehicles across significant distances to get to work, school, appointments, and for supplies, etc. and there is inadequate access to accessible parking at most locations.

Many areas are not serviced by a cellular network so it can be difficult to get help in the case of emergency, preventing some people from leaving home. Roadways often are in need of repairs (due to potholes, etc.) and bike lanes are mostly nonexistent. Very few sidewalks exist within the County, but there are lots of scenic trails with various levels of accessibility. Seasonal maintenance including snow removal tend to be well handled, but it can be an overwhelming job in Victoria County’s remote rural

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communities. Lots of residents hire private snow clearing services and many seniors receive assistance from friends and neighbours to get where they need to go and/or to stock up on supplies at home. The Municipality of the County of Victoria is pleased to host the Victoria County Transit service that includes two vehicles with accessibility features and drivers that are willing to accommodate passengers with a range of accessibility needs. Rides to anywhere within the County are \$7.50 and can be booked online or via telephone dispatch service one business day in advance.

3.3 Short Term Goals

- Continue to provide good seasonal maintenance (lawn care, snow removal, salt) at all Municipal sites, focusing on routes at entrances from accessible parking locations.
- Improve accessibility features of parking at Municipal sites.
- Municipal Council will continue to advocate on behalf of Victoria County residents to the Department of Highways and Public Works to ensure roadways are well maintained and safe for all users.
- Assist Victoria County Transit to continue to improve accessibility by identifying policies and procedures that improve users experience booking and taking rides.
- Advocate for continuation and/or expansion of the Fare Assistance Program which offers free transportation to those that need it.

4.3 Long Term Goals

- Collaborate with community partners to improve seasonal maintenance (snow removal).
- Collaborate with EMO and RCMP to improve emergency preparedness and response.

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- Advocate for increased coverage on cellular networks throughout Victoria County to eradicate “dead zones”.
- Increase accessible features on trails / sidewalks / bike lanes / roadways.
- Continue to collaborate with community partners to provide accessible washrooms and stopping places along travel routes.

3.1 Employment

Making Municipal workplaces accessible and supporting our employees with disabilities.

1.3.1 Current

The Municipality of the County of Victoria currently employs approximately 56 staff. No formal records are kept as to whether any of which identify as persons with disabilities. County staff tend to foster close and cooperative relationships, helping one another out when needed. Some of the administration have received limited training with respect to learning about the responsibilities of employers to remove barriers for employees (and potential employees) who have disabilities. Even though we feel there is a “culture of inclusion” within the municipality, staff are open to the need for improvement in Municipal Employment practices.

“We seek to remove barriers to employment within the Municipality and seek to develop an increasingly diverse workforce that is representative of the demographic of the County by improving our knowledge, policies and practices to be more meaningfully accessible to those who may be willing to share their professional skills to increase the capacity of the Municipal workforce.” -Leanne MacEachen, CAO

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2.3.1 Short Term Goals

- Continue to develop fundamental human Resources policies and procedures within the Municipality.
- Ongoing training for human resource staff about accessible hiring and retention of employees with disabilities.
- All job postings and information for employees to be presented in increasingly accessible format and location in keeping with current Municipal Communications strategies.
- Ensure senior staff develop and maintain meaningful relationships with all employees of the Municipality to foster culture of inclusion and support, regardless of ability.
- Seek out information about best practices from Municipal Accessibility Lead and the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate about how to improve employment accessibility.

3.3.1 Long Term Goals

- Create an employment accessibility plan that identifies human resource policies and practices that remove barriers for current employees and potential employees.
- Learn about and advocate for the rights of employees with disabilities.
- Provide appropriate supports (such as assistive devices) for persons with disabilities in the workplace.
- Explore and implement practices that improve workplace accessibility and transparency within Human Resources.

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3.2 Information and Communication

Ensuring everyone can receive, understand, and share the Municipal information they need.

1.3.2 Current

The Municipality of the County of Victoria employs a Communications Coordinator whose role is to craft messaging for the public and between Municipal employees. The primary medium for communications with the public are via social media (Municipal website, Facebook page and our Voyent Alert system) where lots of information about programs, services, public works and emergency preparedness is available. The Communications Coordinator also handles media relations, printed information (posters, mailouts and newsletters, etc.), in addition to live streaming Council sessions. Other opportunities for communication within the municipality occur in person during the delivery of our programs, and at reception at various sites.

Feedback from our public engagement about accessibility indicates that there is lots of room for improvement within our Municipal communications. We heard that many people feel that they lack adequate and timely information about Municipal affairs. Many residents lack wi-fi access, technology, and/or the skills to utilize virtual information which presents a significant barrier, especially where our small local newspaper has closed and bulletin boards at local grocery stores etc. have been less used since social distancing parameters were introduced during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. People also need more and better information about our sites, services, and programs and how to use them. The need for increased transparency between the public and municipal employees, particularly Councillors, was also highlighted.

In addition to the need for more relevant information, the quality of the information that is shared can be communicated in more accessible ways

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by utilizing apps and strategies that make messaging more inclusive for diverse populations.

2.3.2 Short Term Goals

- Continue to utilize and improve use of Voyent Alert system to communicate with public about Municipal activities and emergency preparedness.
- Ensure that the Municipal Communications Coordinator receives adequate training about accessible messaging (both formatting and use of accessible language).
- Enhance communications within the Municipality (group emails, message boards) so that employees are more knowledgeable and can communicate effectively with the public about Municipal affairs.
- Ensure all front facing Municipal staff receive training about how to communicate with persons with disabilities.
- Considering barriers to virtual access to information, seek ways to disseminate information to the public in paper format (posters, mailouts, newsletters, etc.).
- Improve signage and wayfinding at Municipal sites.
- Improve instructions about what is expected of the public at Municipal sites (particularly recycling depot).

3.3.2 Long Term Goals

- Find ways to incorporate accessibility tools and strategies into all Municipal communications (e.g., closed captioning, etc.).

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- Utilize improvements in web design and technology to increase accessibility of the Municipality's website.
- Ensure ongoing training for all Municipal employees about how to communicate with persons with disabilities.
- Continue to advocate for improved wi-fi connectivity, access to technology, and technology training for all Victoria County residents, primarily seniors.

3.3 Programs and Services

Ensuring everyone has equitable access to Municipal programs and services.

1.3.3 Current

The Municipality of the County of Victoria offers the following programs and services; Public Works, Water Utility, Revenue Department, Planning and Building Inspection, Senior Safety Program, Tourism and Recreation Department, and Victoria County Transit in addition to facilitating Municipal Council (including public sessions).

Through provisions of these services to the public there are lots of points of connection; whether it be coming in to the Municipal offices to pay taxes or bills at the reception counter, taking waste to the transfer stations, participating in some of the public programming, attending council sessions and other Municipal meetings in person and/or virtually, liaising with Municipal administration (in person, by email, or over the phone), or attending municipally hosted events.

During the public engagement sessions regarding accessibility, we learned that lack of accessibility creates both a real and perceive lack of transparency around the democratic process. The Municipality is dedicated to being available and responsive to all those we serve.

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2.3.3 Short Term Goals

- Continue to improve access to Municipal Council sessions online and in person.
- Seek ways to develop increased transparency between council, administration, and the public.
- Improve availability of individual Councillors in their districts.
- Utilize resources from the NS Accessibility Directorate (such as How to Host Accessible Meetings – see Appendix B) to improve accessibility for meetings, events and programs.
- Make information about Municipal accessibility readily available so the public knows how they can participate.
- Invite all public facing staff to participate in training about how to communicate with persons with disabilities.

3.3.3 Long Term Goals

- Ensure accessible options are available for everyone to be able to complete their Municipal activities such as paying taxes, voting, dealing with waste and water management and liaising with government.
- Ensure Municipal programs are hosted in facilities that have reasonable accessibility features in the built environment and with respect to psychosocial aspects.
- Ensure all staff receive an appropriate level of accessibility training.

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3.4 Build Environment

Making Municipal facilities accessible to everyone in Victoria County.

1.3.4 Current

The Municipality of the County of Victoria includes the following assets that are listed below. Most Municipal facilities, such as the administrative offices at the Court House in Baddeck, recycling in Baddeck and Neil's Harbour and transfer stations in Baddeck and Dingwall, are open to the public and serve many users every day during business hours. Some feedback from our public engagement indicates that more clarity about how to engage with our facilities would be helpful for the public, so wayfinding and communication will be an important aspect of this Accessibility Plan.

A cursory Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification rating has been performed on the Court House building in Baddeck by our Accessibility lead, who completed the RHFAC training. The rough analysis indicated that this administrative facility has an accessibility rating of only about 30% so there is lots of room for improvement.

Many Victoria County residents, as well as tourists, utilize facilities for work, school, employment, recreation, and travel. Accessible development of trail heads is an area worth focusing on. The Municipality collaborates with community partners to maintain public washrooms throughout the County that are situated conveniently on the scenic Cabot Trail, but due to the nature of the partnerships, these washrooms have limited accessibility features.

FACILITIES:

Municipal Administration Offices (Baddeck Court House)
Baddeck Transfer Station, Recycling Depot, and Reuse Centre
Dingwall Transfer Station
New Haven Recycling
Trails (currently under development)

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Public Washrooms (owned and operated in collaboration with community partners)

2.3.4 Short Term Goals

- Complete cursory RHFAC ratings for all Municipal facilities.
- Review seasonal maintenance practices at all Municipal facilities with aim to improve access.
- Improve signage and wayfinding at all Municipal facilities.
- Work with community groups to improve washroom hours and accessible features in existent locations, and open more locations.

3.3.4 Long Term Goals

- Ensure that Municipal administrative offices, council sessions and reception counters (including exterior parking, approach and entrances) are hosted at a location that is at least 60% accessible according to RHFAC rating or another recommended accessibility measurement tool (this may involve major renovations to the existing Court House building in Baddeck or may involve moving to another site that has increased accessibility).
- Ensure that all Municipal facilities, including transfer stations, are at least 60% accessible according to RHFAC rating or another recommended accessibility rating tool.
- Consult with Tourism and Recreation department to ensure future trail head development and public washrooms for residents and visitors have accessible features that are effectively communicated.
- To work toward the development of Access Guides.

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3.5 Education

Raising awareness about diversity and inclusion in Victoria County.

1.3.5 Current

Since the Municipality of the County of Victoria does not maintain any educational assets per se, when it comes to improving accessibility, our educational goals pertain to leading by example to cultivate an attitude of inclusivity throughout the County. By ensuring that Municipal facilities, programs, and services are as accessible as possible the Municipality can educate and model accessibility for the public. The Municipality recognizes the valuable contributions that are made by persons with disabilities throughout Victoria County and we hope for active engagement with all residents. To that end, the Seniors Safety Program Coordinator's role has been expanded to include the work of "lead Accessibility Coordinator". That person has completed RHFAC and mental health first aid training. Developing an Accessibility Plan has raised awareness about some of the barrier's persons with disabilities face, and how much more vibrant and successful this County can be when everyone is able and welcome to participate fully in all aspects of Municipal life.

2.3.5 Short Term Goals

- Maintain staff person in the role of "lead Accessibility Coordinator" to bring a lens of inclusivity to all Municipal activities and complete the development and implementation of this Accessibility Plan with the oversight of the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Continue to provide educational opportunities for all Municipal staff to learn about disability, inclusion, and accessibility.
- Normalize accessibility improvements.
- Celebrate diversity through the design of Municipal facilities,

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programs and services.

- Let all users know what they can expect in terms of access to Municipal facilities, programs and services.

3.3.5 Long Term Goals

- Make information and training opportunities about accessibility available to community partners and the public.
- Assist community groups to improve accessibility of their products and services.
- Inform business owners about upcoming accessibility considerations and available funding opportunities to help defer costs.
- Implement incentives for improved accessibility (waiving permit fees for RHFAC development, for example).
- Advocate for RHVAC training for all Nova Scotia building inspectors.

4.0 Evaluation

Some aspects of Victoria County's Accessibility Plan have already started to be implemented in the sense that the recognition of accessibility as a human right is being adopted by Municipal staff and the public alike. Residents of Victoria County tend to be inherently inclusive by nature, and we welcome opportunities to express kindness and goodwill toward one another. More apprehension exists about how to improve accessibility features in our built environments, and there is widespread agreement about the need to continue to advocate for greatly improved cellular and wi-fi connectivity throughout the County.

With oversight from the Accessibility Committee, our lead Accessibility

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Coordinator will work with Municipal administrative staff to implement the short term and long-term aspects of our Accessibility Plan described herein.

Public engagement will be an important aspect of our work going forward. By utilizing public presentations and events, as well as occasional surveys and increasingly transparent communications with the County's residents, we will be held accountable to implement our Accessibility Plan.

5.0 Resources

Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate <https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/>

Accessibility in Nova Scotia

https://accessible.novascotia.ca/?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=Search&utm_campaign=2022AccessibilityDirectorate&utm_term=NS_18Plus&utm_content=Resources&gclid=CjwKCAiAs8acBhA1EiwAgRFdw_-oB2r2VPW3NF3_k4PJ0dbpbe3lXE-BpQ2o4VU2wHZ2dpz66ZD45RoCiQoQAvD_BwE

6.0 Appendices

Appendix A – Victoria County Accessibility Survey

[Accessibility Survey](#)

Appendix B- Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events

https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/Accessible_Events_Guide.pdf

**Municipality of the County of Victoria
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VERSION LOG

Change Date	Description	Editor	Approver	Approval Date
July, 2022	Draft ready for Council approval	Cassandra Yonder	CAO and Council	December 12, 2022