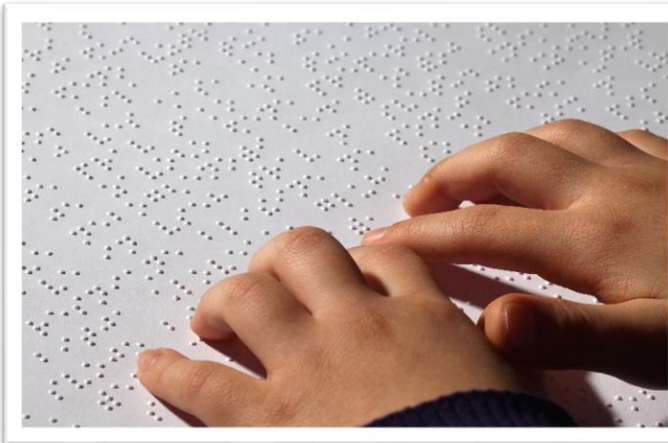




ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2023-2025



MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF PICTOU



Welcome

On behalf of the Municipality of Pictou County's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), and the Municipality's staff members, I invite you to read our first Accessibility Plan.

Nova Scotia is the third province in Canada that has adopted an accessibility law. The Municipality of Pictou County created our Accessibility Advisory Committee to receive guidance in writing the accessibility plan and organizing actions to improve accessibility.

Our plan is the result of the collaboration of the Municipality of Pictou County, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate within the Department of Justice, and members of the public.

During meetings, Committee members provided input to municipal staff members on setting priorities for accessibility. In turn, staff members drafted several versions of the plan according to the input they received from the public and the Committee.

The plan reflects the goal of the municipality to be responsive to the needs of people with various abilities. The Municipality of Pictou County strives to be a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting community to all people.

Our Accessibility Plan is meant to be a "living document" and will change as our community members change and evolve.

Our goal is to continually improve and reflect on the work being done in the Municipality and encourage community members to give feedback to improve how we serve our community.

We look forward to seeing this plan put into practice and are excited for the next, more inclusive chapter of life in rural Pictou County.

Rick Parker Chair, Accessibility Advisory Committee
Municipality of Pictou County

WHAT WE BELIEVE

The Municipality of Pictou County is committed to ensuring equitable access to community life and participation in society for all people, regardless of their abilities. We are committed to helping all people maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in inclusion.

We are committed to meeting the needs of people who face barriers to accessibility. We will do this by identifying, removing, and preventing these barriers and by meeting the requirements of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The Municipality of Pictou County is committed to ensuring equitable access to community life and participation in society for all people, regardless of their abilities. We are committed to helping all people maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in inclusion.

The Municipality of Pictou County acknowledges accessibility barriers and is committed to ensuring equal access and participation for all residents and visitors to our municipality, regardless of their abilities.

An Accessibility Advisory Committee has been formed to prepare an Accessibility Plan and will focus on identifying, preventing, and eliminating accessibility barriers to municipal programs, services and infrastructure. During the development of the plan, citizens will be informed of the progress and will be invited to provide input.

The Municipality supports the goals of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and will strive to ensure that its policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the following core principles to create an inclusive environment that is considerate and accommodating to all.

Areas of Focus

During the development of our plan, we considered all areas of accessibility. For each area of focus we considered:

1. What is the vision or commitment?
2. What is the starting point? What is the current situation?
3. What policies are already in place or under development?
4. What actions will the municipality take to remove accessibility barriers?

Our plan includes five areas of focus:

1. GOODS AND SERVICES
2. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
3. EMPLOYMENT
4. BUILT ENVIRONMENT
5. TRANSPORTATION

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will carry out public consultation through the efforts of a public survey. Information will be provided to participants on why the municipality is doing this work, and what its responsibilities are under the act. Outcomes will be incorporated into the Accessibility Plan.

The plan will be reviewed yearly, and public input is welcome at any time.

Glossary Definitions

AAC: Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Appeal: Make a formal request to clarify or change a decision.

ASL: American Sign Language.

Auditory: Related to hearing or sensing sound.

Barrier: Something that makes it harder for some people to participate. Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act defines a barrier as "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 communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice."

Braille: A reading and writing system for people who are visually impaired.

CART: Communication Access Realtime Translation.

CSA: Canadian Standards Association.

Density bonusing: (Also called "incentive zoning" or "bonus zoning") A way for developers and municipalities to negotiate changes to zoning rules. For example, the municipality might allow the developer to include less parking in exchange for benefits to the public, such as public art, parks, or accessibility improvements.

Disability: A condition that makes it harder for a person to participate. The condition may always interfere, or only sometimes. Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act defines disability as "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."

EMO: Emergency Management Office.

Equitable/equity: A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same; equity means everybody is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.

Infrastructure: The “underlying structure” that makes a place liveable and keeps its systems working (e.g., roads, sewers, clean water, electricity, and more).

NSFM: Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities.

Pedestrian: A person walking outside or using an assistive device outside to travel at a walking speed.

Plain language: Language a reader or listener can understand easily and completely.

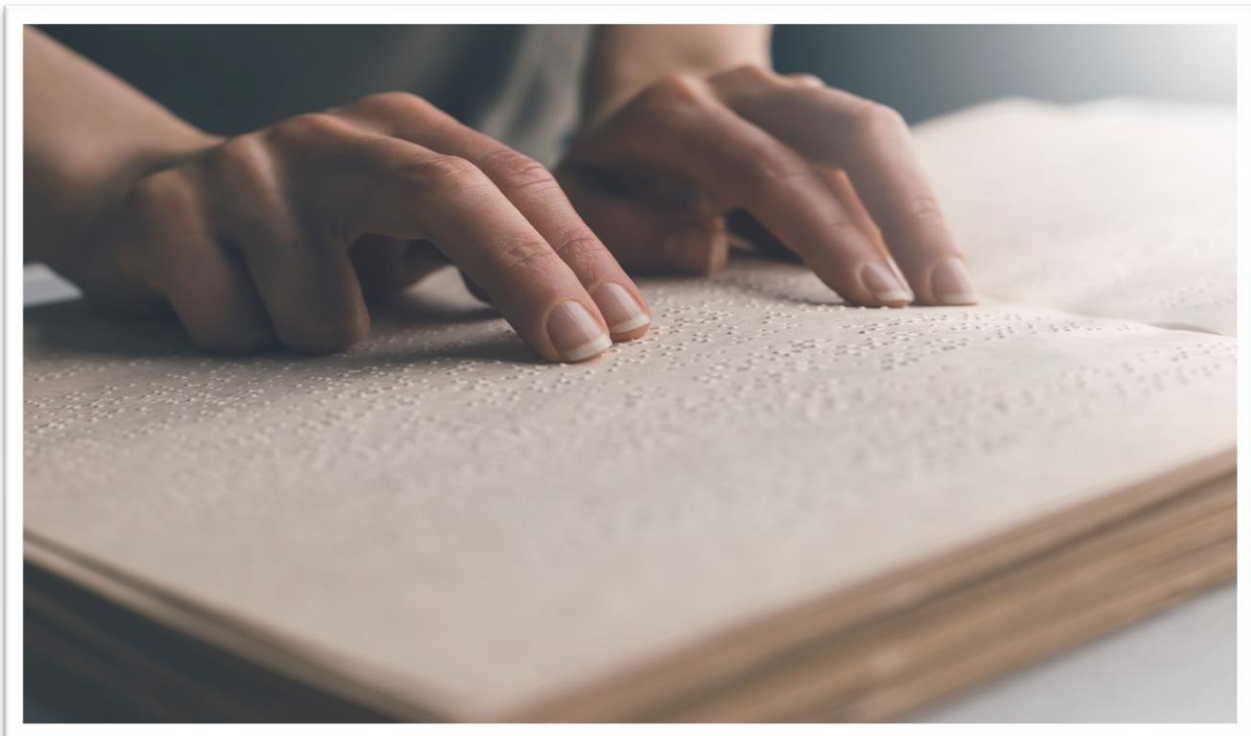
Retrofit: To add features that were not included in the original design.

RHF: Rick Hansen Foundation.

RHFAC: Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification. (Learn more at www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification.)

Tactile: Related to the sense of touch.

WCAG: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. (Learn more at www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag.)





Goods and Services

Our Commitment

We will ensure that people of all ages and abilities have equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Municipality. This includes ensuring that there are policies, procedures, and tools to promote the accessible delivery of goods and services.

Where We Are

The following are some of the services the Municipality of Pictou County delivers to the public:

- Handling meetings of Council and Advisory Committees
- Overseeing communication to the public (see Information and Communication section)
- Providing Customer Service counters
- Maintaining streets, including sidewalk snow removal (see Built Environment section)
- Supporting the maintenance of parks, trails, and open spaces. (see Built Environment section)
- Maintaining water and sewer services
- Ensuring accessibility in Recreation programs and services.
- Providing emergency services, such as police and fire

Achievements

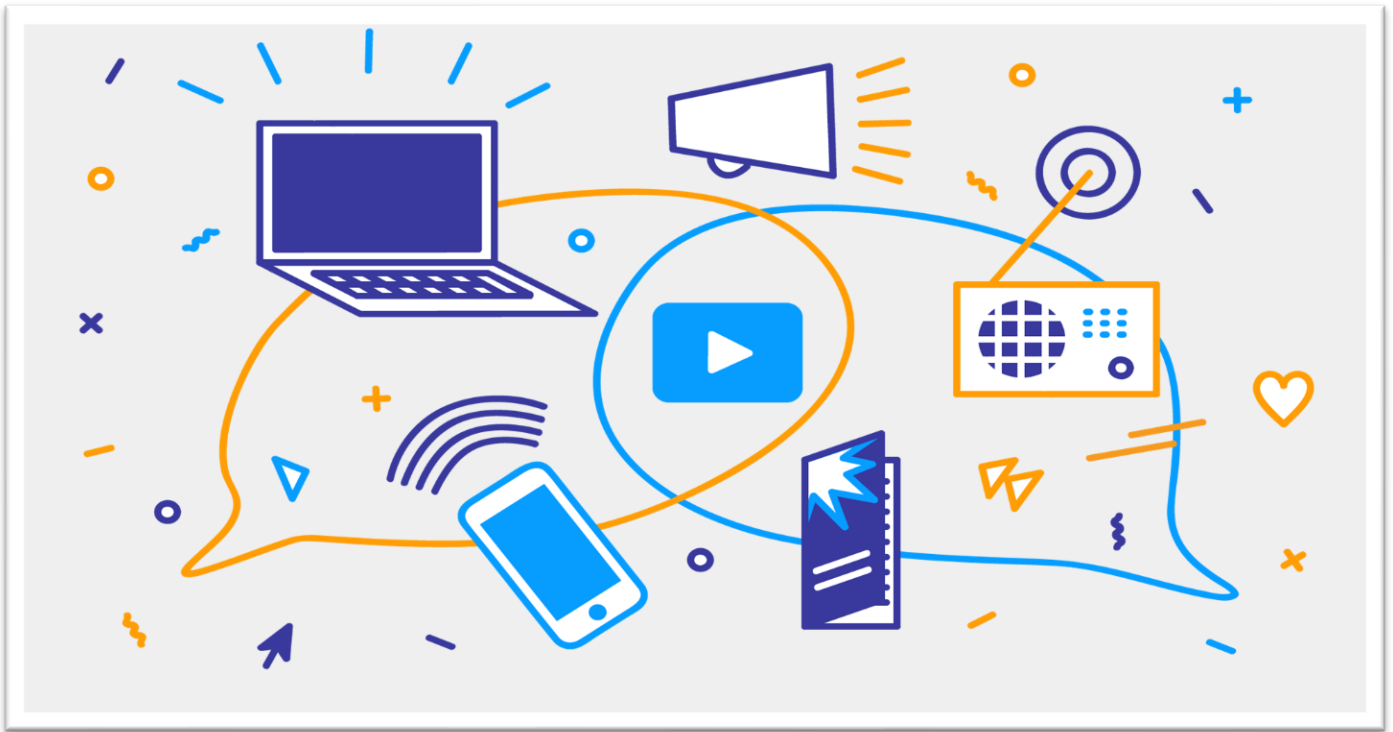
- The customer service counter in the Municipal building is at a height that is wheelchair accessible.

Identified Barriers

- No staff members are trained in alternative communication methods, such as American Sign Language (ASL).
- No resources or funds are designated to offer alternative communications to people who need them (for example, a sign language interpreter).
- The Municipality's website is not fully accessible to people with visual impairments.

Top Priorities (2022-2025)

- Ensure public parks can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.
- Improve snow clearance.
- Continue to grow the adaptive portion of the "Go Play" Equipment Loan Program.
- Using plain language in documents and advertisements for municipal programming.
- Provide an adapted listing of recreation programs and services for people of all ages and abilities and update it annually.
- Train the staff who are responsible for delivering accessible services to people with diverse abilities.
- Consult volunteer groups responsible for trail development and maintenance to ensure trails are accessible.
- Promote disability-related programs and supports to the community. Provide general updates to the community and provide specific information upon request.
- Ensure the delivery of administrative and financial services can be completed barrier free.
- Provide sign language interpreters, on request, to enable people to participate in recreation and library programs.
- Provide accessibility training to the Municipality's Building Inspector(s), through the RHFAC training offered by Nova Scotia Community College.



INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Our Commitment

Information and communications delivered by the Municipality of Pictou County will be clear and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. We will take steps so people understand accessibility and barriers to participation and will increase awareness about the accessibility rights of every community member.

Where We Are

The Municipality delivers information to the public in many ways, including email, website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other forms of social media, public awareness campaigns, and meetings of Council and Advisory Committees, which are open to the public.

Meetings are generally held at the Municipal Building, where the first floor is barrier free and an elevator to the council chambers is available if needed.

When meetings are not held at the Municipal Building, a wheelchair-accessible space is booked whenever possible.

Agendas and minutes of all meetings are posted on the Municipal website.

People can listen to or watch Council meetings live on the Internet during the meeting. (Council meetings are recorded on Microsoft Teams and uploaded to YouTube after the meeting; people can listen to or watch an archived copy on the Municipality's website.

Identified Barriers

- Many people do not know that others face barriers to accessibility.
- There is currently no process for hearing-impaired individuals to attend or participate in public meetings, including meetings of Town Council and Advisory Committees.
- The Municipality's website is not accessible to people with visual impairments.
- Staff are generally not trained to promote inclusion in communications.
- "Plain language" is not consistently used in written material.
- The Municipal Government Act sets limitations for certain public notices—for example, advertisements must be published in newspapers, which may not be accessible to people with visual impairments.
- Streaming video and related technologies do not always work as intended.
- Ensure the Municipality's digital presence (e.g., website and social media) and Information Technology systems are designed for people of all
- ages and abilities.
- Train front-line staff in better ways to communicate with people of all ages and abilities and to provide information in an accessible format.

Priorities

- Ensure the Municipality's web presence meets the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- Provide American Sign Language (ASL) and/or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services at Council and other Municipality-hosted public meetings, on request.
- Upon request, provide information in an accessible format or with communication supports that consider a person's specific needs.
- Include braille on all employee business cards.

- Issue meeting agendas with enough lead time to review and book communication accommodations, if needed.
- Hold all in-person public meetings in barrier-free locations.
- Train relevant staff in plain language and inclusive communications.
- Develop and implement a public awareness program (for Municipal staff and the public) to build awareness around barriers to accessibility and what an accessible community means.
- Provide modified editions of key municipal resources—in large print and/or in plain language—on request. Examples include: newsletters, emergency management information, and bylaw services.
- Ensure digital communications, including emergency alerts, are screen-readable, and encourage partner agencies to achieve the same standard of communication.



Employment

Our Commitment

We will remove barriers to employment for people of all ages and abilities who seek a career with the Municipality of Pictou County. Our workforce will reflect the Municipality's diverse population. We will make our employment practices and workplaces more accessible for new and existing employees of all ages and abilities.

Where We Are

The Municipality employs 22 permanent employees. There are 12 elected representatives on Council, including the Warden. Elected representatives must be Canadian citizens, at least 18 years old, and live in the community. The Council may appoint other members of the public to serve on committees or task forces.

Members of Council receive iPads for reading agendas and municipal documents. This makes reading more accessible because users can zoom in on text and change the font size. The Municipal building is barrier free on the first floor, and council chambers on the second floor are wheelchair accessible.

Identified Barriers

- Staff, including senior management, are generally not trained to recognize barriers that may limit job opportunities for qualified individuals.
- Jobs are posted in traditional ways, including web pages, which may not be accessible to some individuals.
- Because the Municipality does not have a Human Resources Department, there are few ways to help staff who have individual needs.

Priorities

- Offer accommodation during recruitment, if needed.
- Offer accommodation to employees of all ages and abilities. This includes providing assistive devices so that employees can succeed at their jobs.
- Track the number of employees with disabilities, with the aim of reflecting the Municipality's diversity.
- Work with staff to build an understanding of the value of accessibility and inclusion.
- Update the employee training manual to include a section on respecting diversity. This will include training in working with people of all ages and abilities.
- All municipal employees will be required to take the Working with Abilities online training provided free by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission (workwithabilitiesns.ca).

- Establish a centralized accommodation fund to pay for assistive devices or accommodations employees need to succeed at their jobs. Promote this fund on all future job postings.
- Survey the municipal workforce to get baseline data on the ages and abilities of employees.
- Share opportunities for accessibility training with residents and local businesses—online or in person with Municipal staff.
- Investigate strategies to reach a wider and more diverse audience with job postings. Include statements in the job postings to ensure applicants are aware that accommodations can be provided.
- Assign a designated staff person to help individuals who may need assistance to succeed at their jobs.



Built Environment

Our Commitment

Our public buildings and public spaces will be accessible to people of all ages and abilities, whether we own, lease, or operate the space. We will also encourage citizens, community volunteers, and local businesses to make public and private spaces accessible.

Where We Are:

- The following are some of the many services the municipality delivers to the public:
 - Emergency services, such as policing, fire and EMO
 - Public wastewater.
 - Solid waste collection and disposal
 - Recreational programming and facilities.
 - The use of public infrastructure such as building, sidewalks, boardwalks and parks.
 - Snow removal and maintenance of municipal parking lots and roadways.
 - Animal control

Achievements

- The customer service counter at the Municipal Building is a height that is wheelchair accessible.
- Pictou County Recreation runs a free equipment loan program that features many adaptive/accessible items

Identified Barriers

- Some sidewalks and walkways are uneven.
- The entryway of the Municipal building is not fully accessible.
- Accessible parking is limited.
- There are not enough signs for people with visual and hearing impairments.
- Cars and pedestrian traffic compete for street priority and snow clearance.
- Sidewalk snow clearing does not always meet accessibility requirements.
- It can be very expensive to update existing buildings to make them more accessible.
- Accessibility projects compete with other budget demands.

For Public Spaces

The Municipality of Pictou County will...

- The Municipal Building will undergo an Accessibility audit that will inform our plan to make the building fully accessible.
- Ensure that all new municipal buildings (including major renovations) meet the provincial Accessibility Standards.
- Provide basic access for people of all ages and abilities to public buildings, public washrooms, and at public parks with a natural slope of less than 5 percent.
- Ensure sidewalks and curb cuts within the Core area are improved and maintained, as soon as possible, to the standard outlined in Canadian Standards Association (CSA) B651-18, Accessible Design for the Built Environment.
- Provide accessible parking locations, and associated curb cuts.
- Provide crosswalks and curb-cuts in areas where there are many pedestrians, such as near schools and parks.
- Encourage private developers to have their existing buildings RHFAC-certified and for new developments to meet the RHFAC Gold Standard.

Top Priorities

- Add sidewalk curb cuts at all intersections where sidewalks exist.
- Commit a portion of the annual budget to install, maintain, or improve accessibility in public buildings and spaces.
- Ensure all pedestrian buttons or light controls, such as those at intersections or pedestrian-controlled crosswalks, are located over a flat area.
- Widen doorways and install power door buttons or automated sliding doors at the entrance of municipal buildings and public washrooms.
- Municipal staff to review and bring forward to Council recommendations (with related capital and operating costs) to improve the standard timelines for snow removal on sidewalks.
- Put auditory, visual, and tactile markers at busy intersections where people cross the road
- Ensure the Council Chambers meet CSA Accessibility requirements
- Ensure service desks are an accessible height.

- Complete an accessibility audit on the Municipal building in 2023.
- Ensure lobby meets all CSA Accessibility requirements.
- Work with library partners, such as Pictou Antigonish Regional Library, River John Library to ensure library collections are more accessible.
- Promote the province's Small Business ACCESS-Ability Grant Program to the local business community.
- Consider developing Land Use Bylaws to make it easier for homeowners and landowners to:
 - add a secondary suite (e.g., an apartment unit) or a backyard suite, create co-housing (a community that includes private living space and shared space).
- Encourage aging-in-place housing options in the municipal planning strategy and zoning by-laws.
- Assist community-run buildings improving their accessibility by creating accessibility funding through a municipal grant program.



Transportation

Our Commitment

We will work to eliminate barriers for people of all ages and abilities to have equitable access to publicly funded and/or regulated transportation services.

Where We Are

The Municipality of Pictou County does not currently have a municipal transit system. A local organization currently provides this service to our residents.

The Municipality has a Snow and Ice Clearing and Maintenance By-law.

The Municipality of Pictou County will...

- Ensure that no resident is denied transit or taxi service because of a disability.
- Ensure that no resident is charged an additional fee for transit or taxi service because of a disability.

Top Priorities

Ensure accessible taxi service is available to the public by doing the following:

- Consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the public to determine how many on-demand accessible taxis are needed.
- Demonstrate progress toward meeting that need.
- Ensure that no one is charged additional fees or is charged a fee to store their mobility aids or mobility assistive devices.
- Ensure that the vehicle registration is visible and available in accessible formats for passengers of all ages and abilities.

Other Priorities

- Explore subsidized transit fares and/or transit passes for people with disabilities and/or low income.
- Ensure training is available for operators and drivers of public transportation.



Implementing the Plan

Responsibilities

The Municipal Accessibility committee, along with appointed staff and council are responsible for adopting and overseeing Pictou County: Access by Design.

The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for implementing the plan and assigning an Accessibility Coordinator.

The MOPC Accessibility Coordinator is responsible for receiving and responding to public concerns, complaints, and suggestions.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for giving feedback and recommendations to the Town Council.

Schedule

An Action Plan detailing priorities for the year will be implemented by March 31, 2023.

Monitoring

The Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee will prepare an annual report for council for the fiscal year ending March 31 of each year.

This report card will measure the performance of the policies and actions in this plan. The Committee may also make recommendations to improve the plan.

The annual report will be a public document that will be posted to the MOPC website.

Responding to Questions and Complaints

Anyone can lodge a complaint, pose a question, or express a concern about accessibility in the Municipality of Pictou County. These should be directed to the Accessibility Coordinator.

The Accessibility Coordinator will respond within a reasonable time. Before responding, the coordinator will consult with the staff person responsible for the area of inquiry. The coordinator's response will contain the reasons for the decision.

Anyone can appeal to Council if they are not satisfied with the response from the Accessibility Coordinator. Council may refer any appeal to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for additional review and recommendations before issuing a final response to the complainant.

The Accessibility Coordinator will record all complaints, questions, and concerns submitted to them and provide summary updates to the advisory committee regularly. These updates will become part of the advisory committee's continual review of the Accessibility Plan and may inform future changes.

Appendices

Committee Members

Rick Parker (Chair) Member at Large, Two-Year Term
Susan Matheson, (Vice-chair) Member at Large, Two-Year Term
Larry Turner, Councillor, Two-Year Term
Peter Boyles, Councillor, Two-Year Term
Logan McDowell, Staff Member at Large, Two-Year Term
Clare Steele, Staff Two-Year Term
Rae Gunn, Member at Large, Two-Year Term
Grace Maxner, Member at Large, Two-Year Term

Ex-Officio Members

Warden Robert Parker
Brian Cullen, Chief Administrative Officer