West Hants
something inspiring awaits

West Hants Regional Municipality

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

March 31, 2022

Bekah Craik
Active Living Coordinator
West Hants Regional Municipality

Shelleena Thornton
Municipal Operations Supervisor and Emergency Management Coordinator
West Hants Regional Municipality

Dear Mrs. Craik and Mrs. Thornton:

RE: ***West Hants Regional Accessibility Plan***

We are pleased to provide this Accessibility Plan for the West Hants Regional Municipality. The Plan was synthesized from an engagement program consisting of print and online surveys, participatory mapping, and municipal staff and public workshops.

The Plan summarizes the Municipality's commitment to addressing accessibility barriers within the six focus areas: Awareness, Programs & Services, Information & Communication, Transportation, Employment, and the Built Environment. It identifies current conditions, past achievements, and barriers identified to date under each focus area. The Plan lays out recommended policies to be adopted by the municipality and actions to be taken over the next 3 years and over the longer term.

Yours very truly,

CBCL Limited

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WELCOME

On behalf of the West Hants Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), Council, and municipal staff, we invite you to read the Municipality's first Accessibility Plan. The West Hants Regional Municipality is committed to becoming a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting place for all people. It is our intent to strive to meet the needs of those facing accessibility barriers through the process of identification, removal, and mitigation, and by meeting the requirements of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act. Nova Scotia is the third province in Canada that has adopted an accessibility law.

In accordance with section 44 (2) of the Accessibility Act, the West Hants Regional Municipality AAC is composed of at least fifty percent of members who are "persons with disabilities or representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities". We have a very active committee that has brought many different first voice lenses and experiences to the table to determine priorities and hire the consultants; we are undertaking to work with a 'nothing for us without us' approach. Through the development of the plan, public engagement was an integral key component in preparing the Accessibility Plan. The input from West Hants residents helped identify existing barriers in our region and pinpointed areas we should prioritize.

Updates to the plan will continue to flow through the AAC to Council, and a full update every three years will allow the Municipality to address barriers to accessing municipal buildings, infrastructure, programs, and services. The plan reflects the goal of West Hants to be responsive to the needs of people with disabilities. With this aim in mind, we encourage you to view the Accessibility Plan as a "living document," and to voice

questions, concerns, and suggestions for continual improvement and evolution. The Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate rely on your input.

To the Committee Members who have helped create the Municipality's Accessibility Plan, thank you. Serving on the Committee has been an opportunity for engagement, learning, and growth, and we appreciate the time you have devoted to our meetings and everyone's contribution of expertise and experience. We are proud of this plan and look forward to seeing it put into practice to improve accessibility for our residents and visitors in our communities.

We trust you will appreciate the great improvements we are constantly making in West Hants Regional Municipality and that you will always find something inspiring awaiting you.

INTRODUCTION

West Hants Regional Municipality is committed to providing the opportunity for equal access and participation for people with disabilities. We are committed to treating people with disabilities in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in equity, diversity, and inclusion, and we are committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner. We will do so by identifying and mitigating barriers to accessibility and by meeting our accessibility requirements under the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act.

We recognize the value in making meaningful changes in our communities to work toward achieving the provincial goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Bringing together diverse perspectives and experiences to achieve this goal will not only help to improve the quality of life for the 30% of Nova Scotians with a disability, but it will also create the opportunity to increase accessibility awareness and promote the rights of persons with disabilities and draw attention to the benefits of an inclusive and accessible society for all.

Limitations

The Accessibility Plan was developed using the information received through the community engagement process. Due to Covid-19 gathering limit restrictions in place throughout the consultation period, scheduled in-person engagement events were held virtually. This places a possible limitation on the amount of feedback received as many West Hants Regional Municipality residents do not have access to reliable internet, are not comfortable using computers, and/or face accessibility barriers that prevent them from participating virtually. Attempts to reach as many diverse voices as possible were made by offering accommodations to support virtual participation and mailing out paper surveys to all households within the Municipality.

An accessible West Hants is a diverse, inclusive, aware, accepting, and accessible community that is always growing, learning, and improving as it continually develops.

– AAC member

How to Read this Plan

The Accessibility Plan is broken down into this Introduction, six (6) chapters covering the areas of focus, and three (3) appendices. Chapters outlining each of the six (6) areas of focus are broken down under identical headings which provide the information outlined in this section. Lastly, the appendices provide additional material to help provide a more complete understanding of the Accessibility Advisory Committee structure, the Plan development process, and the policy context.

Our Commitment: The Municipality's commitment to accessibility in the area of focus.

The Starting Point

Achievements: The Municipality's achievements to date in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers in policies, programs, practices, and services.

Barriers: Barriers in the Municipality that hinder or challenge the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities.

Recommended Policies: Recommended principles that the Municipality use as a basis for making decisions.

Actions

Top Priorities: Recommended actions the Municipality take by March 31, 2025, to improve accessibility.

Other Priorities: Recommended actions the Municipality take by 2030 to improve accessibility.

Glossary of terms

AAC: Accessibility Advisory Committee

Access: A place that is easily reached, an environment that is easily navigated, or a program or service that can easily be obtained.

Accessibility: Refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities.

Accessibility Act (2017): The law enacted by the Province of Nova Scotia to achieve accessibility by preventing barriers to accessibility, developing and implementing Provincial accessibility standards, and defining the role of an accessibility directorate in supporting and advancing accessibility initiatives and broader disability-related issues. (https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf)

Accommodation: The personalized adaption of a workplace to overcome the barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

Active Transportation: Using your own power to get from one place to another. This includes walking, biking, skateboarding, in-line skating/rollerblading, jogging and running, non-mechanized wheel chairing.

Asset Management Plan: The Municipality's plan for how to manage municipal infrastructure to provide services to residents and other users in a way that meets their expectations, and is financially sustainable into the future.

ASL: American Sign Language

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

CART: Communication Access Realtime Translation

CSA: Canadian Standards Association

Disability: Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act defines a 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."

Equity/Equitable: A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means each individual or group is provided with the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.

Invisible Disability: A disability that is not immediately noticeable. Invisible disabilities can include brain injuries, chronic pain, hearing loss, mental health conditions, gastrointestinal disorders, vision loss, and much more.

MPS: Municipal Planning Strategy

Plain Language: Language that is clear and easy for the reader or listener to understand.

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

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

Tactile: Related to the sense of touch.

Visible Disability: A disability that is immediately apparent to other people. Visible disabilities can include cerebral palsy, amputations, paralysis, Down's syndrome, and many more.

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

Areas of Focus

Awareness: Promoting awareness about the importance of accessibility and inclusion.

Employment: Making municipal workplaces accessible, and supporting people with disabilities in finding meaningful employment.

Programs and Services: Ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to programs and services.

Information and Communication: Ensuring all people can receive, understand, and share the information they need.

Transportation: Making it easier for everyone to get where they need to go.

Built Environment: Making public buildings, streets, sidewalks, and shared spaces accessible to all.

CBCL

Understanding Disability

According to the World Health Organization, almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience a disability throughout their lifetime. A person may be born with a disability, or they may develop a disability later in life. Disability can worsen, remain the same, or improve over time and can be caused by, or as a result of, several factors including disease, illness, injury, or substance abuse.

Due to the complex, wide-ranging nature of disabilities, there is no single definition used to define a disability. The most widely accepted definition, provided by the World Health Organization, defines disability as "an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. It denotes the negative aspects of the interaction between a person's health condition(s) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)." Simply put, a disability is a condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for a person to do certain activities and interact with the world around them.

Types of Disabilities

Many different types of disabilities can affect a person's:

- Vision
- Hearing
- Mobility
- Memory
- Communication
- Ability to learn
- Mental health
- Social Relationships

Some disabilities are visible to others, while other disabilities (such as chronic pain, brain injuries, and asthma) are not; these are known as an invisible disability. While there are no universally adopted set of disability groups, disability can be broken down into different types to help provide people with a general understanding of shared experiences

related to disability and underlying health conditions. It is important to note that people can have more than one type of disability.

The following disability types were adapted from the Canadian Survey of Disability, and should not be considered to be a complete list.

Seeing: People with a seeing disability face difficulties seeing that limits their daily activities. Seeing disabilities can range from partial vision loss to complete blindness.

Hearing: People with a hearing disability face difficulties hearing that limit their daily activities. Seeing disabilities can range from partial hearing loss to complete deafness.

Mobility: People with a mobility disability face serious difficulties with their ability to move around, including walking or using stairs. Mobility-related disability can be congenital, or the result of injury, aging, disease, or other reasons.

Flexibility: People with a flexibility disability face serious difficulties with their ability to move their joints, including bending down or reaching.

Dexterity: People with a dexterity disability face serious difficulties performing tasks, especially tasks with their hands including picking up small objects. Dexterity-related disability frequently co-occurs with other types of disability, particularly mobility, flexibility, and/or pain-related disability.

Pain-related: People with a pain-related disability face difficulties that limit their daily activities because of constant or re-occurring pain. Pain-related disability frequently co-occurs with other types of disability, particularly mobility, flexibility, and mental health-related disability.

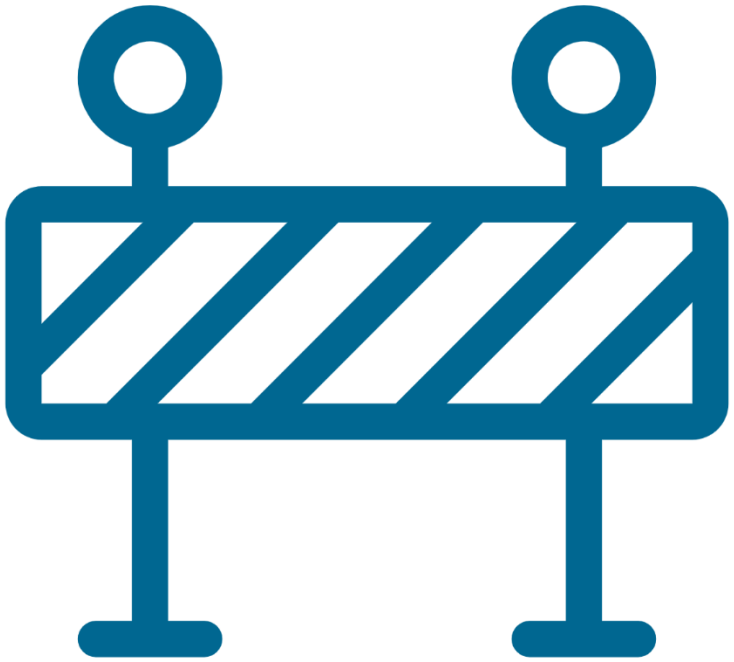
Learning: People with a learning disability face difficulties receiving, understanding, and using information that limits their daily activities. A learning disability may also affect a person's attention span, social, organizational, and reasoning skills.

Developmental: Developmental disabilities are a group of conditions as a result of physical or mental challenges that arise before adulthood. These conditions may create difficulties with language, mobility, learning, and independent living.

Memory: People with a memory disability face difficulties that limit their daily activities as a result of ongoing memory problems or periods of confusion. Memory disability can affect both long and short-term memory.

Mental health-related: People with a mental health-related disability experience limitations in their daily activities because of difficulties with an emotional, psychological, or mental health condition. People with a mental health-related disability often have at least one other type of disability.

Other: There are many other types of disabilities resulting from various conditions and long-term health problems that affect how a person lives their day-to-day life.



Types of Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are behaviors, perceptions, and assumptions that discriminate against people with disabilities.

Information and communication barriers occur when a person with a disability cannot easily receive and/or understand information that is available to others.

Physical barriers are elements in the built environment preventing physical access for people with disabilities.

Systemic barriers are policies, practices, or procedures preventing equal access to municipal employment, programs, or services.

Technological barriers occur when a device or technological platform is not accessible to its intended audience and cannot be used with assistive devices.

Transportation barriers are due to a lack of adequate transportation that interfered with a person's ability to be independent and function in society.

AWARENESS

Our Commitment

West Hants Regional Municipality is committed to being an accessibility leader and fostering positive community attitudes toward accessibility and inclusion.

The Starting Point

Achievements

- Improvements to accessibility in the built environment, recreation programming, and the delivery of information and communication are becoming more prevalent.

Barriers

- Lack of community awareness around different types of disabilities that exist, both visible and non-visible, and the barriers people with disabilities face.
- Limited educational and training opportunities to increase the capacity of the Municipality to be an accessibility champion.

Recommended Policies

The West Hants Regional Municipality will:

- Increase accessibility awareness through the delivery of public information campaigns.
- Facilitate regular activities to improve the Municipality's knowledge and understanding of accessibility challenges across West Hants Regional Municipality.
- Engage and collaborate with local disability stakeholder groups to gather insight and lived experiences.
- Demonstrate inclusivity in municipal publications and communication material.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Actively work to increase the representation of people with disabilities on all municipal committees by extending invitations to disability support networks and groups.
- Regularly promote the Accessibility Plan and actions completed to improve accessibility.
- Provide accessible and inclusive workplace training for Council, senior leadership, and key staff members.
- Build strategies to support people with disabilities to participate on Municipal committees.

Other Priorities

- Develop a communications strategy that reflects the diversity of our West Hants and promotes the Municipality's commitment to accessibility.
- Promote and celebrate National Accessibility Week, taking place annually in the last week of May.
- Explore opportunities to promote and celebrate other accessibility and inclusion initiatives.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Our Commitment

West Hants Regional Municipality is committed to providing public buildings and public spaces that are accessible to people of all ages and abilities. We will encourage citizens and the business community to take action to make other private and public spaces accessible.

The Starting Point

Achievements

- The West Hants Sports Complex includes some accessibility features.
- The Municipality is developing an Asset Management program to effectively manage municipal assets while considering budgets, service levels, and risks as well as strategic plans including the Accessibility Plan.
- Tactile indicators are installed on new sidewalks and sidewalk renewal projects.
- When issuing building permits to businesses, the Planning and Development Department actively provides informational material about adaptable housing, barriers free washrooms, appropriate

doorway sizes, and other accessibility content before projects are approved and constructed.
- Many entryways into public buildings have automatic doors installed.
- Accessible washrooms have been installed at some public buildings and outdoor public spaces.
- Community Development Department staff, in partnership with the Accessibility Advisory Committee members, have been completing informal accessibility audits of trails and other facilities.
- The leisure pool at West Hants Aquatic Centre has a beachfront-style entrance and access lift for accessibility.
- West Hants Sports Complex provides dedicated low sensory times for skating and the walking track.
- Members of municipal staff are completing RHFAC Professional designation training.
- The Municipality has put in wheelchair-accessible picnic tables at several parks.

Barriers

- Many sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the municipality are in inadequate condition.
- Snow clearing often creates barriers for people using sidewalks and crosswalks.
- Many trails are not accessible to people with mobility challenges.
- The wheelchair lift at the West Hants Aquatic Centre's outdoor pool is not suitable for permanent outdoor use and not all staff are trained to set up and operate the lift.
- Many businesses do not have accessible entryways.
- Snow clearing is prioritized for cars before pedestrians.
- Many public washrooms do not meet accessibility standards.
- There are no playgrounds with accessible play equipment (see Programs and Services).
- Some accessible parking spaces do not have adequate curb cuts or are not conveniently located.
- Some accessibility barriers remain at the West Hants Sports Complex.

- The lower ramped entrance to the Windsor Community Centre is not wide enough to turn and the door into the building is not accessible.
- The accessible shower room at the West Hants Aquatic Centre does not have a bench for changing.

Recommended Policies

The West Hants Regional Municipality will:

- Provide basic access for people of all ages and abilities to public buildings, public washrooms, and public parks.
- Improve the condition and availability of sidewalks, curb cuts, and pedestrian crossings to comply with the CSA Accessible Design for the Built Environment B-651 standard.
- By 2024, evaluate and prioritize retrofits to existing municipal buildings and facilities to meet, at minimum, the accessibility requirements in the latest version of the Nova Scotia Building Code Regulation.
- Strive to have all new municipal buildings and major renovation projects meet the requirements of RHFAC Gold.
- Provide accessible parking at municipal buildings and facilities that meet the requirements of the latest version of the Nova Scotia Building Code Regulation.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Initiate accessibility audits at key facilities
- Ensure that any proposed changes to the built environment are reviewed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Commit a portion of the annual budget to go toward the installations and maintenance required for improving the accessibility of public buildings and public spaces.
- Support local businesses in making accessibility improvements by promoting the provincial ACCESS-Ability Grant and providing resources for other funding opportunities.
- Install visual or vibration-based smoke alarms in municipal buildings.

Other Priorities

- Detail a sidewalk/crosswalk remediation plan with timeline and budget according to updated provincial standards.
- Establish a standardized process in the project planning stage for evaluating and prioritizing capital projects which consider the degree of impact on accessibility.
- Conduct a review of zoning and land use by-laws to identify opportunities to improve accessibility and support aging in place.
- Explore incentives for renovations and new builds that aim to achieve Rick Hansen Accessibility Certification. Consider:
  - Establishment of a municipal grant program to financially support small businesses completing accessibility improvement projects.
  - Deduction of accessibility certification costs from development fees;
  - Fast-tracking of development application approval process; and/or
  - Waiving of development fees.

An accessible municipality would be barrier-free for people of all abilities with easy access to washrooms, social meeting areas, recreation areas, retail areas, and sidewalks/parking lots. It would be inclusive, accommodating, and wheelchair/walker accessible. It would be the envy of other municipalities in the province!

– AAC member

EMPLOYMENT

Our Commitment

West Hants Regional Municipality will seek to remove barriers to ensure municipal workplaces are accessible and will support equitable access to employment through our employment policies and practices.

The Starting Point

Achievements

- Most municipal services are located on the first floor or are accessible by elevator.
- Ergonomic assessments are available for staff to ensure their workspaces are set up to meet their physical needs.
- The Municipality provides mental health support to employees through the Employee Assistance Program.
- Municipal job openings are advertised via marginalized networks through print and digital media.

Barriers

- The lower level of the West Hants Municipal Building (76 Morison Dr) is not wheelchair accessible from the main floor. Wheelchair access to the lower level is only available from a side entrance.
- Staff members have limited access to accessibility-related information and resources.
- Job openings are posted through the Municipality's website and are no longer posted in local newspapers.
- Staff is not trained to recognize employment barriers and identify appropriate job accommodations.

Recommended Policies

The West Hants Regional Municipality will:

- Offer accommodations to job candidates during the hiring process.
- Offer accommodations to employees to provide them with the support they need to succeed at their job.
- Offer training and awareness programs to staff and Council to foster a welcoming and inclusive corporate environment.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Require Council and all municipal staff to complete the *Working with Abilities* online training provided free of cost by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.
- Undertake an anonymous survey to establish a baseline employee demographic and track the number of employees with disabilities, both diagnosed and self-identifying, with the intention of reflecting the diversity of the Municipality in the municipal workforce.
- Assign designated liaisons to serve as the main point of contact for accessibility matters within each department.
- Establish a centralized accommodation fund to pay for assistive technology, devices, and accommodations for employees.

Other Priorities

- Undertake assessments of municipal workplaces to identify areas where accessibility improvements can be made (i.e., staff common areas including washrooms and kitchens, doorways, and workspaces).
- Provide and promote ongoing opportunities for municipal staff to complete further accessibility training relevant to their assigned job duties and tasks (i.e., plain language, inclusive customer service, accessible employment practices, accessible information, and communication practices).
- Develop a formal process for requesting accessibility accommodations.

PROGRAMS + SERVICES

Our Commitment

West Hants Regional Municipality will ensure that people of all ages and abilities have equitable access to the programs and services we provide. This includes ensuring that there are policies, practices, and tools in place to advance the equitable delivery of programs and services.

The Starting Point

Achievements

- Creation of an adaptive equipment loan program and inclusive programming options.
- Payment terminals at the Municipal Office customer service counter have been updated. The new wireless terminals have larger screens, large font number pads, and support contactless payment (tap).

Barriers

- Limited inclusive and accessible recreation programming.
- The cost to participate in programs is out of reach for people on a limited income.

- Not all facilities hosting recreation programming are accessible for all ages and abilities.

Recommended Policies

The West Hants Regional Municipality will:

- Increase customer service support to better serve people with non-visible and visible disabilities.
- Increase recreation program offerings to provide equitable opportunities for people with disabilities to participate.
- Ensure public parks and open spaces can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.
- Improve snow clearance.
- Consider accessibility as a part of policy development and decision-making processes.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Provide annual accessibility and inclusion customer service training for new and existing customer service, sports complex, aquatic centre, and recreation programming staff.
- Introduce the use of assessment of accessibility impact as a part of staff reports to Council.
- Undertake a review of recreation programming to identify barriers to participation, feasible adaptations to eliminate barriers, and/or new inclusive programming opportunities.
- Train staff in the safe and proper use of adaptive recreation equipment.
- Prioritize snow clearance on sidewalks and crosswalks, and provide training to plow operators to increase awareness about maintaining barrier-free access.
- Investigate opportunities for partnerships with local organizations with expertise in adaptive sport and recreation to support the development of adaptive sports programming.

Other Priorities

- Support the continued growth of the adaptive equipment loan program by growing the inventory and providing recreation staff with the training necessary for proper equipment use.
- Upgrade to wireless payment terminals at applicable public facilities.
- Develop an accessible trail marketing strategy.

- Investigate the development of an Accessibility and Inclusion Specialist position within the Community Development Department.

An accessible WHRM to me is a place where everyone can access services that they need no matter their race, gender, or disability.

– AAC member

INFORMATION + COMMUNICATION

Our Commitment

West Hants Regional Municipality will ensure the information and communications that we share can be received and understood by people of all ages and abilities.

The Starting Point

Achievements

- Council and committee meetings are streamed live on the internet through Facebook Live. The live stream includes closed captioning. Meeting videos are posted to the Municipality's Facebook page, along with a short video providing meeting highlights.
- Council and committee meeting agendas and minutes are posted on the Municipality's website.
- Forms can now be downloaded and submitted online through the Municipality's Website.

Barriers

- It can be hard to find things on the Municipality's website if you don't know where to look.
- Most of the key municipal documents are not available in accessible formats like large print.
- The Municipality's website can be challenging or impossible to navigate for people with visual impairments.
- There is not enough wayfinding signage to support people with vision and hearing impairments.
- Live caption technology is not always accurate.
- Limited internet access throughout West Hants prevents some people from attending public meetings and events hosted virtually.
- Plain language is not consistently used in written material.
- Public meeting highlight videos are not accessible to people with visual impairments.
- Information about municipal programs is not widely disseminated.

Recommended Policies

The West Hants Regional Municipality will:

- Provide, on request, information in an accessible format or with communication supports that consider a person's individual need, at no additional charge.
- Host in-person public meetings in barrier-free locations.
- Train front-line staff in inclusive customer service and to provide information in accessible formats.
- Increase accessibility across the Municipality's website, social media, and online resources.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Establish a dedicated stream of communication for accessibility-related information. Information should be available in digital and print formats.
- Train relevant staff in the use of plain language and accessible document formatting.
- Create modified versions of key municipal documents and resources such as forms, bills and statements, and brochures in accessible

formats. Accessible formats should include at minimum large print, plain language, and screen reader compatible digital communications.
- Develop an accessible signage and wayfinding toolkit to support people with vision or hearing impairments.
- Create promotional material to build awareness of adaptive recreation and inclusive programming. This could include video content and print material.

Other Priorities

- Ensure the Municipality's website and any downloadable content meet the latest WCGA guidelines.
- Include braille on staff business cards.
- Explore the use of mapping platforms to improve wayfinding in public buildings.
- Provide ASL and/or CART services upon request at Council meetings and other meetings hosted by the Municipality.
- Explore alternative methods to deliver information such as infographics and video content.
- Review the feasibility of permanently allowing opportunities for both in-person and virtual participation on Municipal committees and at public meetings coordinated by the Municipality.

An accessible West Hants is one where I am able to go where I need to go without worrying if I can get in or not, can use the washroom, and be able to get around the place inside.

– AAC member

TRANSPORTATION

Our Commitment

West Hants Regional Municipality will make it easier for people of all ages and abilities to get where they need to go. We will ensure equitable access to publicly funded community-based transportation services and AT options.

The Starting Point

Achievements

- The Municipality provides funding to support West Hants Dial-a-Ride.
- The Public Works Department is actively working to expand the sidewalk network and improve accessibility on new build and sidewalk renewal projects.
- The Municipality initiated the AT Plan to create a broader and more accessible AT network.

Barriers

- There is no municipally-operated public transportation service.

- Facilities are widespread across the Municipality, making access challenging for those who cannot drive or do not have access to a car.
- The cost of private community transportation offerings can be a barrier for those on a limited income.
- Many sidewalks are in poor condition which can be a barrier for people with mobility challenges (see Built Environment).
- Snow cleared from the streets often blocks sidewalks and pathways (see Programs and Services).
- AT network is not well developed outside of urban areas.

Recommended Policies

The West Hants Regional Municipality will:

- Continue to provide support to community-based transportation services.
- Improve the accessibility and availability of transportation services, AT, and parking infrastructure for people with disabilities.
- Consider the needs of people with disabilities when exploring the feasibility of any future public transit services.
- Ensure and maintain a broad and safe AT network across the Municipality which includes paved shoulders and other dedicated AT facilities.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Prioritize the implementation of the AT Plan.
- Initiate a public transit feasibility study to investigate appropriate transit models for a municipally-operated transit service.
- Prioritize support for West Hants Dial-a-Ride to help them expand their service offerings.
- Actively promote and increase awareness of community-based transportation providers including West Hants Dial-a-Ride and the Windsor Senior Citizen Bus Society.
- Prioritize AT facilities in the Asset Management Plan.
- Improve lighting on the Municipal road and trail network.

Other Priorities

- Explore opportunities and incentives for accessible taxi service.
- Explore opportunities to further expand community-based transportation services across the Municipality.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Action taken to improve accessibility will be guided by the commitments of the Accessibility Plan. As new policies and programs are introduced, the Municipality will continually assess the impact on accessibility to ensure planning aligns with the Municipality's commitments and advances the vision of an equitable, inclusive, and barrier-free West Hants. The following section outlines how the Municipality, in consultation with the AAC, will follow a whole of government approach to implement, monitor, and evaluate the Accessibility Plan.

Responsibilities

Council

- Adopt and oversee the Accessibility Plan.
- Allocate adequate funding to satisfy the commitments of the Municipality under the Accessibility Plan.

Chief Administrative Officer

- Oversee the implementation of the Accessibility Plan in partnership with senior leadership from each department.

- Assign an Accessibility Coordinator.

Accessibility Coordinator

- Work with the AAC to identify and provide advice on removing accessibility barriers in new policies and programs.
- Receive and respond to public concerns, complaints, and suggestions.

Accessibility Advisory Committee

- Provide ongoing feedback and recommendations to Council.
- Provide guidance to the Accessibility Coordinator to support the development and ongoing review of the Accessibility Plan.

Schedule

The Municipality will strive to implement all top priorities in this plan by March 31, 2025, and all other priorities by 2030, in conjunction with capital infrastructure plans.

Monitoring

- The AAC will prepare an annual Accessibility Report Card. The Accessibility Report Card will measure the performance of the policies and actions outlined in this plan.
- The Accessibility Report Card will be a public document and will be posted on the Municipality's website.
- The AAC will review new accessibility standards, directives, and guidelines from the Province as they are released to determine if any updates to the plan are required.

Evaluation Framework

The AAC will lead a review and evaluation of the Accessibility Plan every three years. The first review will be initiated before the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Questions and Complaints

- Anyone can lodge a complaint, pose a question, or express a concern about accessibility in the West Hants Regional Municipality. Questions and complaints should be directed to the Accessibility Coordinator.
- The Accessibility Coordinator will respond within a reasonable amount of time. Before responding, the Coordinator will consult with the staff person responsible for the area of inquiry. The Coordinator's response will contain 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 keep a record of all complaints, questions, and concerns submitted to them, and will provide summary updates to the Accessibility Advisory Committee regularly. These updates will become part of the Accessibility Advisory Committee's continual review of the Accessibility Plan and may inform future changes.

My vision of an accessible West Hants is of a community that is inclusive, flexible, and committed to continuous improvement. Accessibility as an integral feature of everything we do would be the end goal. Ideally, the Municipality champions, then maintains the momentum of positive change.

– AAC member

APPENDIX A – COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Debbie Francis, (Committee Chair) Councillor

Michel Bourgeois, (Vice-Chair) Resident Member

Roseanna Boyd, Resident Member

Jordan Stephens, Resident Member

Jennifer Davison, Resident Member

Kelly Ann Jobson, Resident Member

Denise Long, Resident Member

Bekah Craik, Staff Member / Support

Mark Phillips, Staff Member / Support

Shelleena Thornton, Staff Member / Support

Troy Burgess, Staff Member / Support

Tina McKay, Staff Member / Support

APPENDIX B – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT + WHAT WE HEARD

Online Public Engagement

The planning process for the West Hants Regional Municipality Accessibility Plan began in August with the project kick-off workshop attended by the Accessibility Advisory Committee. This event allowed us to establish a baseline of achievements, barriers, and opportunities to help identify priorities within the plan. Based on the feedback received from the Accessibility Advisory Committee, we developed an online engagement platform using Social Pinpoint to gather further public and stakeholder feedback to assess existing conditions relating to accessibility and further identify plan priorities. The online engagement platform included opportunities to participate via an online survey and a participatory mapping exercise to locate barriers in the built environment. The online engagement platform was open for comment from December 24, 2021, until January 28, 2022. In addition, a hardcopy survey was mailed out to West Hants residents to ensure equal opportunity to provide feedback was given regardless of access to the internet.

Public Workshop

On January 26th, 2022, the Municipality held a public virtual workshop (held virtually due to Covid-19 restrictions) to engage with the public about their experiences with accessibility in the West Hants Regional Municipality. Participants were invited to share virtual sticky notes identifying barriers they face accessing programs and services, information and communication, employment, and transportation. Participants were also invited to participate in the online mapping exercise to identify and map accessibility barriers and achievements in the built environment. The results of the mapping exercise are included in the mapped barriers and achievements represented in Figure 2 and Figure 2.

Mapping Results

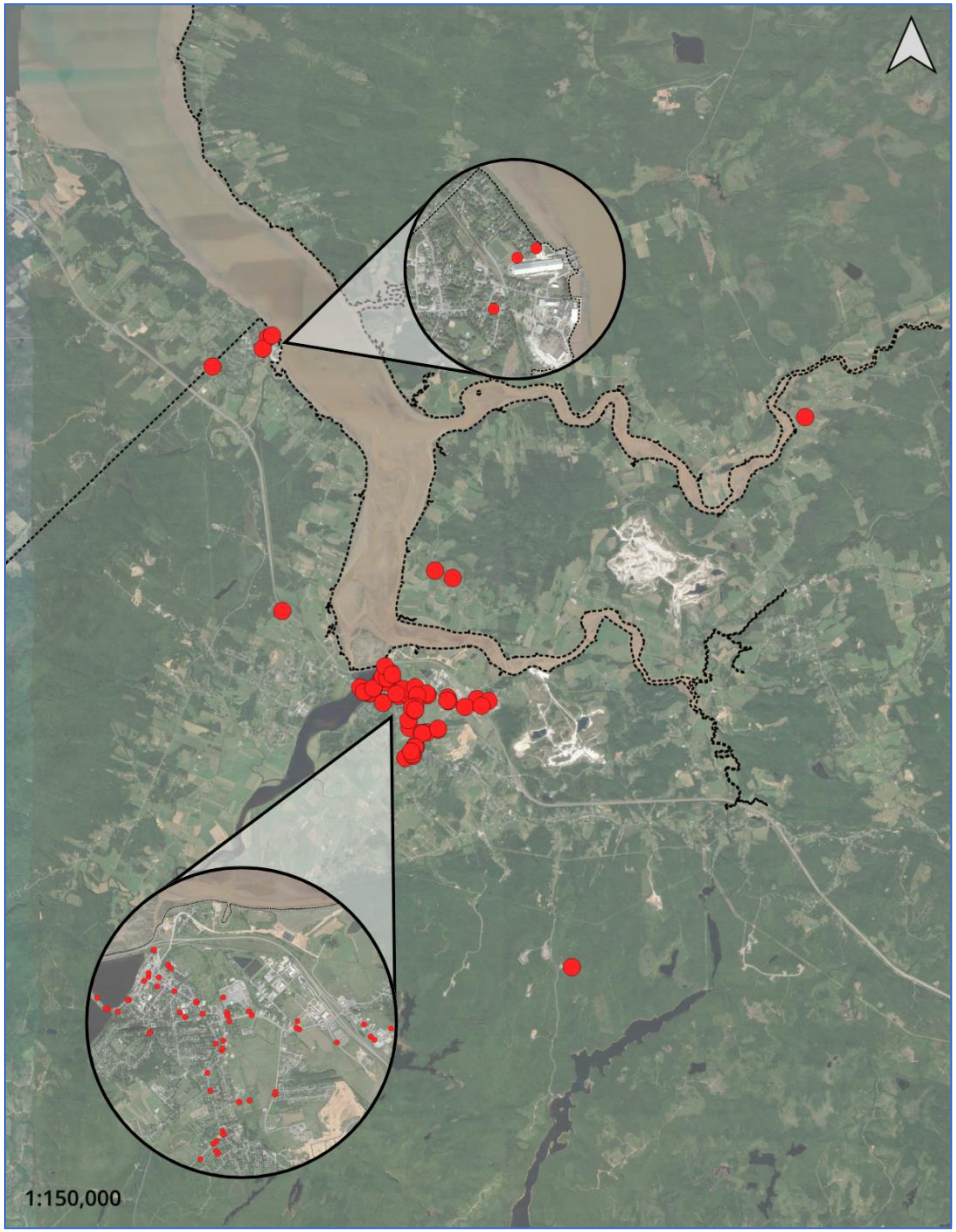


Figure 2: Accessibility Barriers

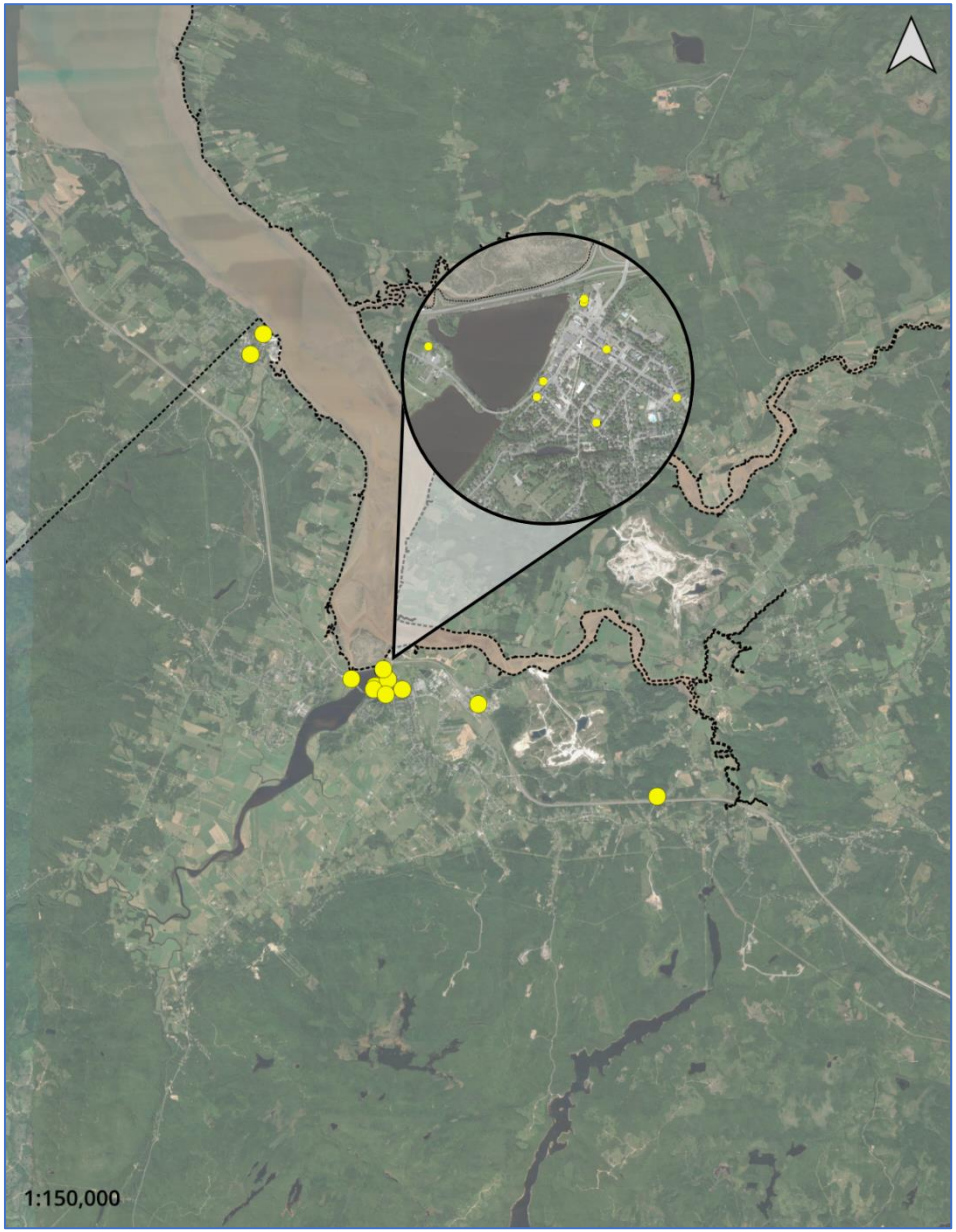
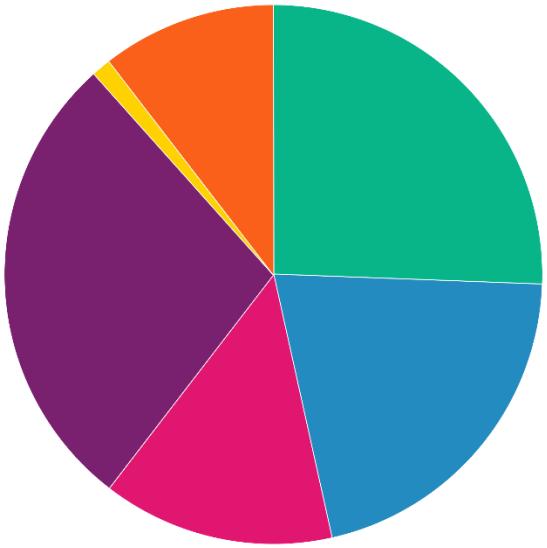


Figure 2: Accessibility Achievements

What We Heard

Survey Summary

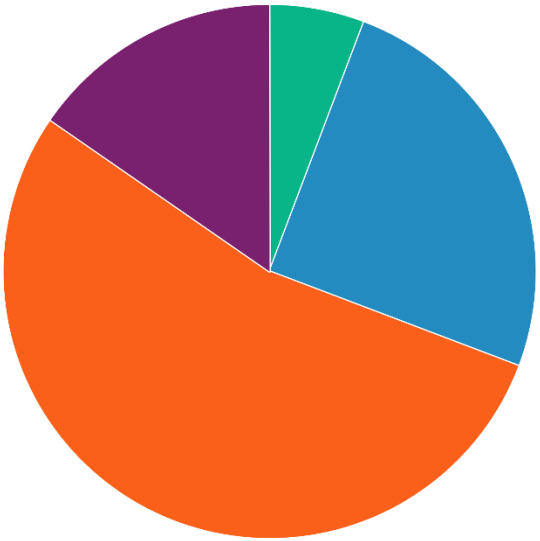


Q1 – Please select all that apply to you.

- Person with a disability
- Family member, friend, or caregiver of a person with a disability
- Employee or volunteer at an organization representing people with disabilities
- Resident of the West Hants Regional Municipality
- Employed within the West Hants Regional Municipality
- Business owner/operator within West Hants Regional Municipality

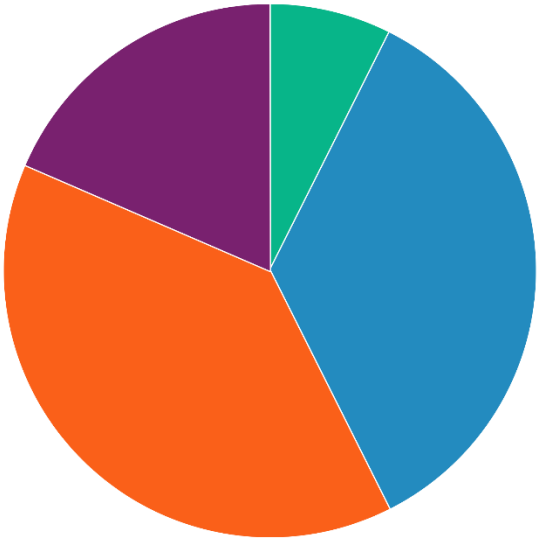
Q2 – Which type of barriers have you experienced most in West Hants?

- Attitudinal Barriers
- Communication Barriers
- Physical Barriers
- Systemic Barriers
- Technological Barriers
- Transportation Barriers



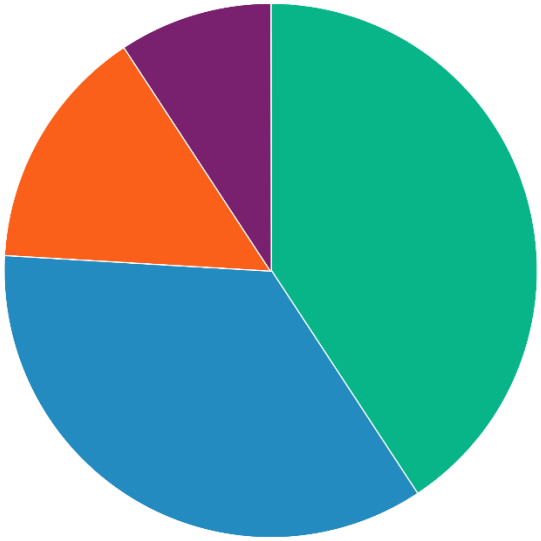
Q3 – How accessible are goods and services offered by the Municipality?

- Very Inaccessible
- Somewhat Inaccessible
- Somewhat Accessible
- Very Accessible



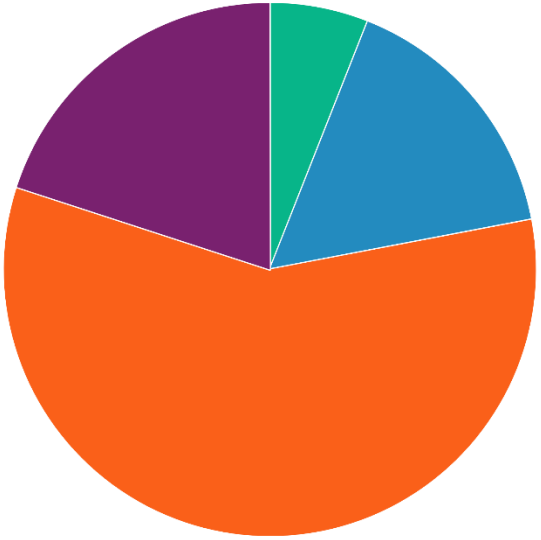
Q4 – How accessible is information and communication material provided by the Municipality?

- Very Inaccessible
- Somewhat Inaccessible
- Somewhat Accessible
- Very Accessible



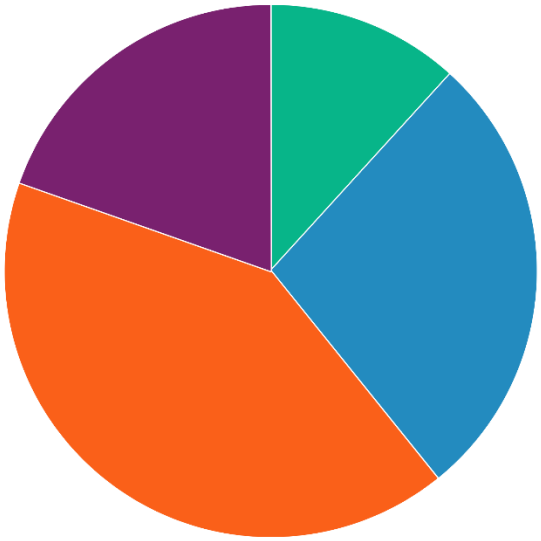
Q5 – How accessible is transportation throughout the Municipality?

- Very Inaccessible
- Somewhat Inaccessible
- Somewhat Accessible
- Very Accessible



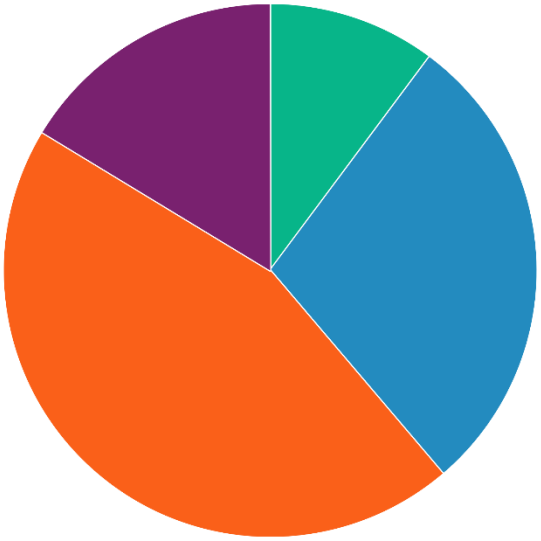
Q6 – How accessible are municipally–owned buildings throughout the Municipality?

- Very Inaccessible
- Somewhat Inaccessible
- Somewhat Accessible
- Very Accessible



Q7 – How accessible are outdoor facilities (ex. parks, trails, and open spaces) throughout the Municipality?

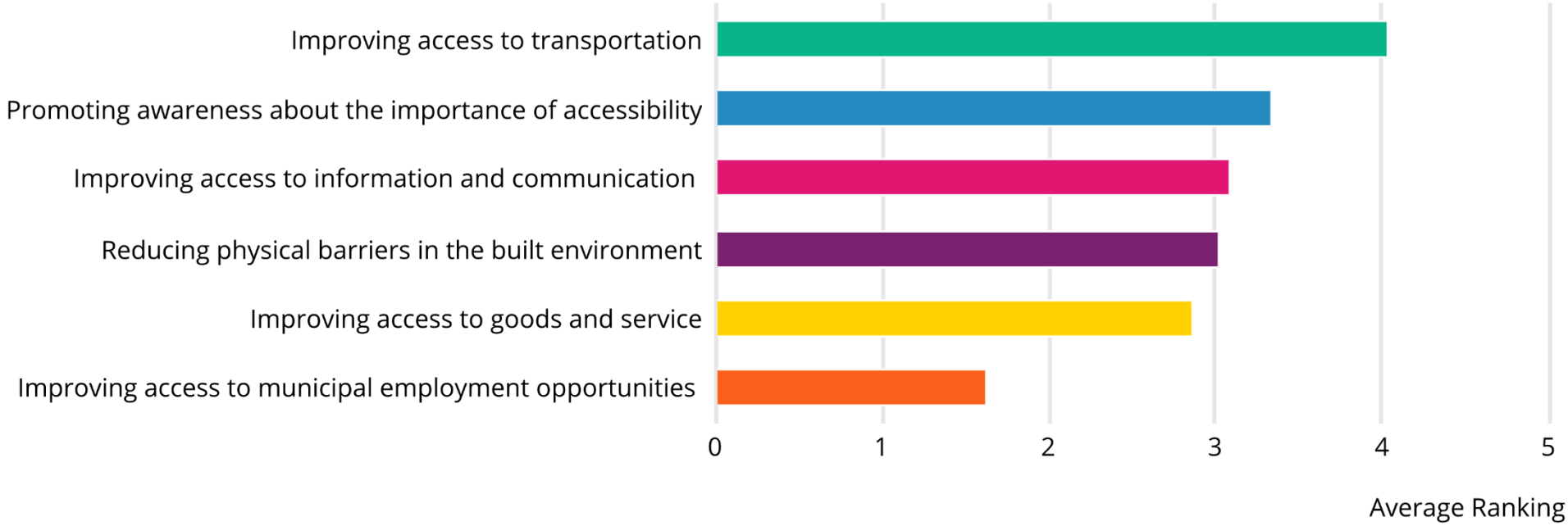
- Very Inaccessible
- Somewhat Inaccessible
- Somewhat Accessible
- Very Accessible



Q8 – How restrictive are barriers on finding and/or maintaining employment with West Hants Regional Municipality?

- Very Inaccessible
- Somewhat Inaccessible
- Somewhat Accessible
- Very Accessible

Q9 – Please rank the following from one (1) to six (6) in order of priority for improving accessibility in West Hants.



Q10 – What are some ways to remove barriers that could be done right away and that you believe could be implemented easily? What improvements could be made in the long term that would have the greatest impact on improving accessibility in West Hants?

Key Findings

- Invest in affordable public transit options and/or further invest in existing community transportation services.
- Sidewalk and crosswalk improvements.
- Promote funding opportunities for local businesses to make accessibility improvements.
- Hold public education events throughout the Municipality.
- Provide information through a variety of formats and outlets – video content on YouTube and Facebook, print (including large print options), municipal website content compliant with accessibility standards, phone.
- Increase inclusive programming/service offerings.
- Accessible public washrooms.

Q11 – Can you identify any specific buildings, facilities, services or programming in urgent need of improved accessibility?

Key Findings

- Causeway Trail – improvements to lighting and snow clearing.
- New Boundaries – improvements to sidewalks.
- Downtown Windsor – improvements to the overall public realm.
- Centre Burlington Hall – improvements to access ramp.
- Windsor Community Centre – improvements to access ramp.
- West Hants Sports Complex – lower soap dispensers in public washrooms.
- All public buildings – update washrooms to meet accessibility standards.
- Public meetings – improvements to microphones and audio systems.
- Sidewalks – improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks needed in both urban and rural areas.

Q12 – What steps should the Municipality take to promote awareness about the importance of accessibility?

Key Findings

- Involve community members with disabilities in the decision-making process.
- Host more community events that provide educational opportunities to teach people about different types of disabilities and the importance of accessibility.
- Meet with local businesses to provide education and support them in making accessibility improvements.
- Invest in public education/awareness campaigns (ex. video/social media content from the perspective of people with different types of disabilities about how different types of barriers effect their lives).
- Spotlight and celebrate contributions to the community made by people with disabilities.
- Ensure that all municipal staff are trained in accessibility and inclusion and are aware of the things they can do to improve accessibility.
- Partner with community organizations that work in the accessibility realm.
- Establish a regular and dedicated stream of communication for accessibility-related information.

APPENDIX C – POLICY CONTEXT

This section provides an overview of key components from relevant municipal documents that support various actions of the Accessibility Plan.

Parks and Open Space Plan

- Supports improved signage and wayfinding.
- Prioritizes the maintenance of trails.
- Recognizes the need for improved seating and picnic areas.
- Recognizes the need to enhance trail accessibility.
- Prioritizes the need for regrading trails and picnic areas to improve accessibility.
- Prioritizes the need for new pathways and surfaces in parks to increase accessibility.

Hantsport MPS

- Establishes policy of Council to continue to maintain the parks within the Town and to provide recreational services for all residents.
- Lists goal of providing parks and recreational opportunities.

Active Living Strategy

- Prioritizes providing recreational programs and opportunities for all residents.
- Prioritizes providing safe places to walk.

Active Transportation Plan

- Notes the importance of making users of AT infrastructure feel safe.
- Recognizes the need for entrance signage to improve a sense of arrival and communicate usage.

West Hants Trails Plan

- Lists goal to provide opportunities for West Hants residents to participate in a variety of physical activities in their communities.
- Outlines vision for residents of all ages to use and enjoy the trails.

Windsor Municipal Planning Strategy

- States that Council will work to ensure that sidewalks and crosswalks are accessible to disabled residents.
- Promotes pedestrian-friendly networks within the Town, including parks, open space, and the waterfront, through pedestrian trails and bike paths or multi-use trails.

Community Engagement Report

- Recommends building a strategy and a phased approach to building new centres and enhancing existing ones, through repairs and programming.
- Recommends starting a safe streets and trails initiative to improve the quality of life for residents.
- Prioritizes improved accessibility of information and spaces and identifies the need for non-digital forms of communication.
- Identifies need for improved public transit to connect residents to communities and regional services.
- Identifies need for greater diversity, representation, and inclusion.
- Identifies need for improvements to community infrastructure such as trails and roads.

West Hants

something inspiring awaits

West Hants Regional Municipality Accessibility Plan

Report Card

Action	Timeframe	Status	Progress Update
Awareness			
Actively work to increase the representation of people with disabilities on all municipal committees by extending invitations to disability support networks and groups.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Regularly promote the Accessibility Plan and actions completed to improve accessibility.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Provide accessible and inclusive workplace training for Council, senior leadership, and key staff members.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Build strategies to support people with disabilities to participate on Municipal committees.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Develop a communications strategy that reflects the diversity of our West Hants and promotes the Municipality's commitment to accessibility.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Promote and celebrate National Accessibility Week, taking place annually in the last week of May.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken

Action	Timeframe	Status	Progress Update
Explore opportunities to promote and celebrate other accessibility and inclusion initiatives.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Built Environment			
Initiate accessibility audits at key facilities	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Ensure that any proposed changes to the built environment are reviewed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Commit a portion of the annual budget to go toward the installations and maintenance required for improving the accessibility of public buildings and public spaces.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Support local businesses in making accessibility improvements by promoting the provincial ACCESS-Ability Grant and providing resources for other funding opportunities.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Install visual or vibration-based smoke alarms in municipal buildings.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Detail a sidewalk/crosswalk remediation plan with timeline and budget according to updated provincial standards.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken

Action	Timeframe	Status	Progress Update
Establish a standardized process in the project planning stage for evaluating and prioritizing capital projects which consider the degree of impact on accessibility.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Conduct a review of zoning and land use by-laws to identify opportunities to improve accessibility and support aging in place.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Explore incentives for renovations and new builds that aim to achieve Rick Hansen Accessibility Certification.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Employment			
Require Council and all municipal staff to complete the Working with Abilities online training provided free of cost by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Undertake an anonymous survey to establish a baseline employee demographic and track the number of employees with disabilities, both diagnosed and self-identifying, with the intention of reflecting the diversity of the Municipality in the municipal workforce.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Assign designated liaisons to serve as the main point of contact for accessibility matters within each department.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken

Action	Timeframe	Status	Progress Update
Establish a centralized accommodation fund to pay for assistive technology, devices, and accommodations for employees.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Undertake assessments of municipal workplaces to identify areas where accessibility improvements can be made.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Provide and promote ongoing opportunities for municipal staff to complete further accessibility training relevant to their assigned job duties and tasks.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Develop a formal process for requesting accessibility accommodations.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Programs and Services			
Provide annual accessibility and inclusion customer service training for new and existing customer service, sports complex, aquatic centre, and recreation programming staff.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Introduce the use of assessment of accessibility impact as a part of staff reports to Council.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken

Action	Timeframe	Status	Progress Update
Undertake a review of recreation programming to identify barriers to participation, feasible adaptations to eliminate barriers, and/or new inclusive programming opportunities.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Train staff in the safe and proper use of adaptive recreation equipment.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Prioritize snow clearance on sidewalks and crosswalks, and provide training to plow operators to increase awareness about maintaining barrier-free access.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Investigate opportunities for partnerships with local organizations with expertise in adaptive sport and recreation to support the development of adaptive sports programming.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Support the continued growth of the adaptive equipment loan program by growing the inventory and providing recreation staff with the training necessary for proper equipment use.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Upgrade to wireless payment terminals at applicable public facilities.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Develop an accessible trail marketing strategy.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken

Action	Timeframe	Status	Progress Update
Investigate the development of an Accessibility and Inclusion Specialist position within the Community Development Department.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Information and Communication			
Establish a dedicated stream of communication for accessibility-related information. Information should be available in digital and print formats.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Train relevant staff in the use of plain language and accessible document formatting.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Create modified versions of key municipal documents and resources such as forms, bills and statements, and brochures in accessible formats.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Develop an accessible signage and wayfinding toolkit to support people with vision or hearing impairments.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Create promotional material to build awareness of adaptive recreation and inclusive programming.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Ensure the Municipality's website and any downloadable content meet the latest WCGA guidelines.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken

Action	Timeframe	Status	Progress Update
Include braille on staff business cards.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Explore the use of mapping platforms to improve wayfinding in public buildings.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Provide ASL and/or CART services upon request at Council meetings and other meetings hosted by the Municipality.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement other priorities by 2030.		
Explore alternative methods to deliver information such as infographics and video content.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Review the feasibility of permanently allowing opportunities for both in-person and virtual participation on Municipal committees and at public meetings coordinated by the Municipality.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Transportation			
Prioritize the implementation of the AT Plan.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Initiate a public transit feasibility study to investigate appropriate transit models for a municipally operated transit service.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Prioritize support for West Hants Dial-a-Ride to help them expand their service offerings.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken

Actively promote and increase awareness of community-based transportation providers including West Hants Dial-a-Ride and the Windsor Senior Citizen Bus Society.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Action	**Timeframe**	**Status**	**Progress Update**
Prioritize AT facilities in the Asset Management Plan.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Improve lighting on the Municipal road and trail network.	**Top Priority** Strive to implement by March 31, 2025.		
Explore opportunities and incentives for accessible taxi service.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		
Explore opportunities to further expand community-based transportation services across the Municipality.	**Other Priority** Strive to implement by 2030.		

Initatied Underway To be Initatied Alternative Action Taken