

2023-2030

Town of Pictou Accessibility Plan



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Pictou Accessibility Advisory Committee

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1.0 Introduction

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act was adopted in 2017 as a means of achieving accessibility in the Province by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The Province has a goal of becoming accessible by 2030. The Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate is responsible for administering the Accessibility Act and advancing disability issues within government. The Accessibility Directorate works collaboratively with persons with disabilities, municipalities, businesses, post-secondary institutions and others to achieve the goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. In 2020, the province determined that "prescribed public sector bodies" shall have an approved accessibility plan. Municipalities were included in the prescribed public sector bodies and are developing plans for how they will achieve this goal.

This Accessibility Plan was developed by the Town of Pictou Accessibility Advisory Committee. This committee provides advice to Town Council on identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers experienced by people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives and facilities, and works with staff on the development and oversight of this plan. This document outlines the overarching goals for improving accessibility in the Town of Pictou. Over the course of the next 7 years, the Town will work incrementally at achieving the goals of this plan.

The Town created the Committee to receive guidance in writing the accessibility plan and organizing actions to improve accessibility. In accordance with Section 44 (2) of the Accessibility Act, "At least one half of the members of an accessibility advisory committee must be persons with disabilities or representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities." The Committee meets this requirement.

As part of this process, members of the public were invited to provide input regarding their areas of concern about accessibility in the Town. Although the plan must be updated at least every three years, we encourage the public to voice questions, suggestions or concerns at any time, since the Town and the Accessibility Advisory Committee rely on this invaluable input.

For Committee members and staff, serving on the Committee is an opportunity for engagement, learning, and growth, we are grateful for it. We are proud of the Town of Pictou's Accessibility Plan and look forward to seeing it put into practice.

The Town of Pictou partners with other municipal units, organizations and regional agencies. These are not part of this document, but the Town is committed to working with our partners to improve accessibility for all. They include:

- Pictou County Wellness Centre
- Pictou County Solid Waste
- deCoste Entertainment Centre
- Pictou Antigonish Regional Library
- Regional Emergency Management Organization

2.0 What We Believe

The Town of Pictou believes that strong communities flourish by promoting and creating inclusiveness, equality, and a quality of life for all citizens and visitors. By improving accessibility for everyone, we improve the lives of people with disabilities, the elderly, individuals who may require supports, families with children,

and people who are underrepresented. Ensuring accessibility in physical, social and technological aspects creates a more equitable and functional community for everyone, allowing for full participation in daily activities and contributing to a stronger and diverse society.

3.0 Glossary of Terms

Access by Design 2030 (2018)

The provincial strategy for implementing the Accessibility Act. Access by Design 2030 provides a roadmap for government, businesses, and communities to work together to eliminate barriers to accessibility and make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030 (novascotia.ca/accessibility/access-by-design/). Also see the Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan (2018-2021).

Accessibility Act (2017)

The provincial law enacted to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The law defines the role and responsibilities of the Accessibility Directorate and the Accessibility Advisory Board, and addresses standards, compliance, and enforcement (nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf).

Accessibility Advisory Committee

A volunteer committee established by a municipality to advise municipal council about identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee plays a pivotal role in helping the municipality become a barrier-free community that complies with Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act (2017). At least one half of the members of the advisory committee must have a disability or represent an organization that represents people with disabilities.

Accessibility Advisory Board

A 12-member provincial board appointed by the provincial government to advise the Minister of Justice on accessibility and make recommendations on accessibility standards. The majority of board members are people with disabilities (novascotia.ca/accessibility/advisory-board/).

Accessibility Coordinator

A person appointed by municipal staff to support the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee in developing and implementing the municipal accessibility plan. The Accessibility Coordinator also liaises with the Town's senior management and provides consultation services to staff, from frontline workers to website developers.

Accessibility Directorate

The provincial body that is responsible for implementing and administering the Accessibility Act, supporting accessibility initiatives and advancing broader disability-related issues. (novascotia.ca/accessibility/).

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."

Disability

As defined in Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act: "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.”

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.

Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan

A multi-year plan setting specific priorities and commitments for achieving accessibility within the Government of Nova Scotia. The first plan was published in 2018 and covers the years 2018-2021 (novascotia.ca/accessibility/plan).

Plain language

Clear, conversational communication that makes sense to the intended audience. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information (plainlanguagenetwork.org/).

Prescribed

Means “prescribed in the Accessibility Act General Regulations.” The Accessibility Act enables the government to use the regulations to identify which organizations must comply with certain requirements. These requirements include forming an Accessibility Advisory Committee and developing an accessibility plan within one year. The use of the word “prescribed” in legislation is intended to give wide authority for regulations to be made that set down a specific rule or direction.

RHF / RHFAC

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible/rating-certification).

4.0 Community Consultation

4.1 Who We Heard From

Citizen engagement was achieved via a survey that could be completed electronically or by paper copy. 49 people responded. There was a good representation of age demographics, however only one person was under the age of 30. Eight people identified as having one or more accessibility needs, while 28 others identified as being someone who others depend on for care. 38% of respondents were from equity seeking communities and everyone that responded had internet access.

4.2 What We Heard

Feedback from citizens was positive and helpful. Most suggestions can be achieved over the next seven years, with proper planning. The most common themes brought up were related to streets and sidewalks. They included sidewalk conditions, crosswalks, street and sidewalk winter clearing, and parking. Built environments were also mentioned. Respondents noted the community is making progress with buildings and other amenities, and offered some suggestions on how to continue with these efforts. They also suggested more celebration and promotion of existing services and amenities for all abilities.

5.0 Areas of Focus

There are five main areas of focus providing a base line starting point, outline of achievements to date and actions moving forward. They will serve as a guide to inform the implementation of the plan. The areas of focus include:

- Goods and Services
- Information and Communications
- Transportation
- Employment
- The Built Environment

5.1 Goods and Services

5.1.1 The Vision

People of all abilities have equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Town of Pictou. This includes ensuring that there are policies, procedures, and tools to promote the accessible delivery of goods and services.

5.1.2 The Starting Point

Overview

The following are services the Town of Pictou delivers to the public:

- Meetings of Municipal Council and Advisory Committees
- Overseeing communication to the public (see Information and Communication section)
- Providing Customer Service counters and reception areas
- Maintaining municipal streets and sidewalks (including snow removal) (see Built Environment section)
- Maintaining parks, trails, and open spaces (see Built Environment section)
- Providing recreational services and activities/programs
- Maintaining sewer services
- Development office, building inspection, fire inspection, by-law enforcement
- Commercial Development District Improvement program, Grants to Community Organizations, other supports to community groups/organizations
- Economic development services

Achievements

- Administration Building – the main entrance is physically accessible (ramp, automated doors), there is an elevator to access the second and third floors, there is a public washroom on the first and second floors
- Staff Training – Specialized inclusions and diversity training provided to Recreation and aquatics staff; other related training as identified when opportunity arises (ie. assisted hike guide training)
- Council meetings are live streamed to Facebook, with closed captioning available
- Council Chambers is accessible
- Town website has an accessibility tool
- Working on a regional age friendly action plan
- Multi-mode, frequent communications with the public; i.e. Facebook, website, newsletter, live stream meetings
- Administration of Low-Income Tax Exemption Policy
- Access to equipment loan program (no cost), which includes hippocamp, sledge hockey gear, adaptable life vests, walking poles, hand cycle, and tandem bikes for winter and summer activities

- Recreation Programs – Walk and roll program, aquatic programs, guided hikes, summer day camp
- Pool – hydraulic lift, aqua wheelchair, adaptable life vests, fully accessible changeroom and shower, automated doors, use of contrasting colors
- Entrance fees for persons who support a person with a disability are waived

Barriers

- Front counters for Town Office and Fisheries Training Pool are not at a height for wheelchairs or to allow people to sit
- No braille on any signages or documents
- No staff members are trained in alternative communication methods, such as American Sign Language (ASL)
- Accessibility training for employees
- No resources or funds are designated to offer alternative communications to people who need them (for example, a sign language interpreter).
- Not all documents are in plain language or compliant for accessibility (hard copies or website)
- Recreation services – ability to designate “time out” spaces and no health related supports for participants/care givers
- Glass barrier at customer service counters problematic for hearing impaired

5.1.3 Actions

Top Priorities (2023-2026)

- Update Council Briefing Notes and Recommendation Reports to include a section for “Accessibility Considerations”/Impact Analysis
- Upgrades to the front counters at the Town Office and the Fisheries Training Pool

Other Initiatives

- Improve municipal trails so they can be enjoyed by more people of all abilities
- Provide an adapted listing of recreation programs and services for people of all abilities, and update it annually to increase awareness
- Train the staff who are responsible for delivering accessible services to people with diverse abilities (including seasonal employees)
- Provide sign language interpreters, on request, to enable people to participate in municipal programs
- Provide accessible exercise equipment at municipal recreational facilities

5.2 Information and Communication

5.2.1 The Vision

To deliver clear and accessible information and communications to people of all abilities.

5.2.2 The Starting Point

Overview

The Town delivers information to the public in many ways, including:

- In-person meetings of Town Council and Committees of Council, which are open to the public
- Video conference meetings of Town Council and Committees of Council
- Email distribution lists, Town website, subscribe feature on Town website, social media, newsletters, print media and posters
- Verbally through our staff

- By telephone
- Radio

Achievements

- Agendas and minutes of all meetings are posted on the Town’s website
- People can listen to or watch Council meetings live on the Internet during the meeting. Closed captioning is provided. After the meeting, people can listen to or watch a recording for 48 hours.
- Newsletter mailed out to residents three times a year
- Electronic newsletter available in English
- Electronic business transactions – allowing clients to conduct more municipal business electronically
- Council Chambers is accessible to people with physical disabilities
- Town website was recently updated – it now has an accessibility tool, making it accessible to people with visual impairments and most pages meet the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

Barriers

- There is currently no process for hearing-impaired individuals to attend or participate in public in-person meetings, including Council meetings and Committees of Council
- “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
- No materials are available in Braille or any language other than English
- Some older documents on the Town website do not meet the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

5.2.3 Actions

Top Priorities (2023-2026)

- Identify key staff members to include plain writing and inclusive communications training in their annual professional development plan
- Work with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) to advocate for accessibility to be included in the public notice requirements of the Municipal Government Act
- Create awareness on how and when to request an adaptation or support to participate in a Council or Committee of Council meeting
- Identify ways/methods to communicate with people who we are not currently reaching due to an accessibility barrier
- Develop page on Town website to house resources and other information related to accessibility to raise awareness of opportunities and support systems
- Ensure digital communications, including emergency alerts, are screen-readable
- Complete building evacuation plans using accessibility lens

Other Initiatives

- Provide modified editions of key municipal resources – in large print, Braille and/or in plain language – on request (examples include recreation guides, emergency management information, and bylaw services)
- Review existing policies and bylaws to include accessibility lens
- Emergency management reviewed with an accessibility lens
- Add a section to all major documents that indicates the document was reviewed from an accessibility perspective

- Explore options for providing Sign Language and/or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services at Council and other Town-hosted public meetings, on request
- Issue meeting agendas with enough lead time to review and provide for any accommodations which may be required
- Investigate alternate communications methods and best practices

5.3 Transportation

5.3.1 The Vision

That people of all abilities have equitable access to publicly funded and/or regulated transportation.

5.3.2 The Starting Point

Overview

- The Town of Pictou does not have a publicly funded transit system, however there is a pilot transit between the Towns of New Glasgow and Stellarton
- The Town’s residents have access to CHAD Transit, a critical part of the non-profit community in Pictou County (they help people of all abilities, seniors, and anyone else who requires transportation assistance)
- There is a Taxi Bylaw that allows businesses to set up within the Town of Pictou

Achievements

- The Town provides an annual grant to CHAD Transit
- The Town’s current Taxi Bylaw includes vehicle provisions addressing barriers for people with physical disabilities

Barriers

- The Town is geographically separated from the other four Pictou County towns by a harbour, making it more difficult for a joint-public transportation system to extend to Pictou
- CHAD Transit – drives must be booked a day in advance and dispatch only operates Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 4:00pm
- The cost of CHAD Transit service may be a barrier
- There are no registered taxi service providers within the Town of Pictou
- Cost of taxi insurance is a barrier for new businesses
- The Taxi Bylaw only addresses physical barriers

5.3.3 Actions

Top Priorities (2023-2026)

- Promote taxi business opportunities
- Update Taxi Bylaw to include provisions for all abilities

Other Initiatives

- Explore expanding Pictou County Transit to the Town of Pictou
- Explore possible incentives for opening up a taxi service that addresses all abilities

5.4 Employment

5.4.1 The Vision

People of all abilities have equitable access to employment, Council, and Citizen representative opportunities with the Town of Pictou.

5.4.2 The Starting Point

Overview

The Town employs roughly 20 permanent employees and approximately 15 seasonal or part-time employees. There are 5 elected representatives on Town Council and anywhere from 20 to 30 citizen representatives on advisory committees to Council.

Achievements

- Members of Council receive technology that makes reading material more accessible because users can zoom in on text and change the font size
- Employment postings have standard language that states what an applicant should do if they require accommodation during the employment and hiring process
- Citizen representatives can receive material for meetings and committee electronically
- Ergonomic assessments for workstations are offered
- Funding for multi-position desk adaptations
- Accessible parking meets all accessibility standards
- Accessible washroom at the Fisheries Training Pool, Wastewater and Water Treatment Plant
- Fully accessible changeroom with shower and change table at the Fisheries Training Pool
- Accessible washrooms at Wastewater and Water Treatment Plants

Barriers

- Limited data exists that helps the Town set a benchmark for understanding the current needs of employees/volunteers
- Across the organization there is not a high level of awareness on the adaptive tools and resources to support recruiting qualified individuals/support elected officials with barriers
- Employment opportunities are posted in traditional ways, including web pages, which may not be accessible
- Some spaces at Administration Building are not accessible to people with disabilities (ie, hallways, washrooms, file room)
- No interior door systems at municipal work sites have electronic openings
- There is not an accessible washroom in the main office area or Public Works and Park Buildings
- No standard language in employment postings that states Town is prepared to make accommodations to support barrier free access
- None of the fleet vehicles have adaptive devices
- No technology/assistive devices available for people with vision or hearing impairments

5.4.3 Actions

Top Priorities (2023-2026)

- Conduct a survey to better understand accommodation requirements of existing employees/volunteers
- Promote that citizen representatives can access training offered by the Town

- Promote adaptive tools and resources to employees, volunteers and the public
- Add standard language in employment postings that states the Town is prepared to make accommodations to support barrier free access
- Incorporate accessibility training in the annual staff and Council training plan
- Include an accommodation fund in annual operating budgets
- All municipal councillors and senior management staff will be required to take the Working with Abilities online training provided free by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission (workwithabilitiesns.ca)

Other Initiatives

- To be developed, based on survey and provincial initiatives
- Establish a centralized accommodation fund to pay for borrowing assistive devices or accommodations for councillors, citizen representatives and employees; promote this fund on the postings
- Investigate strategies to reach a wider and more diverse audience with postings

5.5 Built Environment

5.5.1 The Vision

Town owned and operated public buildings and public spaces are accessible to people of all abilities.

5.5.2 The Starting Point

Overview

The Town of Pictou owns and operates:

- Administration Building
- Public Works Building
- deCoste Entertainment Centre*
- Fisheries Training Pool **
- Pictou Fire Department
- Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Water Treatment Plant
- Broidy Park Building
- CN Station (home of Council Chambers)
- RCMP Station
- Former Visitor Information Centre
- Several wellhouses
- Water reservoir
- Sidewalks
- Parking areas
- Trails

*Although the Town is the owner of the deCoste Entertainment Centre, it does not run the facility; however, it is going through an expansion that will have an accessibility lens applied to it.

** The Fisheries Training Pool is owned by the Province of Nova Scotia and managed by the Nova Scotia Community College. The Town has a positive working relationship and contributes financially to facility upgrades, including capital projects.

Achievements

- Administration Building has two public washrooms that are accessible to people with physical disabilities
- The Administration Building has an elevator to access all floors
- Administration Building exterior doors have assisted opening mechanisms
- Council Chambers meeting area and washrooms are accessible to people with physical barriers
- Wastewater and Water Treatment Plant Buildings are built to new building code requirements
- Recreation Department loans out adaptable equipment
- Pictou Fisheries Training Pool – improvements include walkway, automated doors (front entrance and to the deck), hydraulic lift to access the water & aqua wheelchair, fully accessible change room with shower and adult change table (certified Rick Hansen staff at NSCC reviewed plan before installation), adaptable life vests (youth and adult), vision audit (contrasting colors), specialized staff training (NS Parasport and Autism Nova Scotia)
- Parks and trails – The first 1.5kms of the Jitney Trail is paved; new accessible swing equipment installed in two playgrounds (Broidy Park and Veterans Drive)
- Public Seating – All benches installed after 2017 have been custom built to be accessible; several accessible picnic tables on the Pictou Waterfront
- New All Wheels Skate Park – recreational facility for all abilities
- Site enhancements to Market Square – surfacing, improved access, ramp to gazebo and seating
- Accessible parking spaces meet accessibility standards
- RCMP Station – front entrance, counter and washroom are physically accessible
- deCoste Cultural Hub and Library Project – certified Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) Standard review completed during design phase
- Water Street – meets all Canadian Standards Association (CSA) B651-18, Accessible Design for the Built Environment standards

Barriers

- Interior Administration Building is not fully accessible
- Front counters at Town Office and Fisheries Training Pool are not at a height to allow wheelchair access
- Some sidewalks need landing spaces and drop curbs at crosswalk locations
- Public Works and Fire Department Building do not meet all accessibility standards
- Glass at front counters is a barrier to some with hearing impairments

5.5.3 Actions

Top Priorities (2023-2026)

- Complete town-owned building accessibility audits to establish remaining priorities using RHFAC Standard
- Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Standards (emphasis will be placed on locations used for meetings, events, programs and where people access basic town services)
- Low-vision audit of town-owned buildings and public spaces
- Town Office and Fisheries Training Pool front counters to be lowered to allow wheelchair access
- Explore adding microphones to glass at customer counters

Other Initiatives

- Council to add the recommendations from the building audits to its 5-year capital investment plan
- Include landing spaces, tactile plates and drop curbs in annual budgets
- All new municipal buildings (including major renovations) meet the RHFAC Gold Standard

- Train (at minimal) one municipal staff under the RHFAC program
- Train in one municipal staff in ASTM 1951 – design test procedures for materials and surfaces
- Ensure that design and capital work related to the Waterfront Development Plan follows Canadian Standards Association (CSA) B651-18, Accessible Design for the Built Environment standards
- Playground and park enhancements follow above standards (planned upgrades to playgrounds, new splash pad project)

6.0 Implementing the Plan

6.1 Responsibilities

6.1.1 Accessibility Advisory Committee

- Review this Accessibility Plan at least every three years as required by the Accessibility Act and recommend updates to Council as required
- Report annually to Council on progress toward meeting the commitments outlined in this Plan
- Receive reports from the CAO (or appointed staff) outlining complaints, concerns and/or questions from the public
- Advocate in a positive manner for the work the Town of Pictou is doing to improve accessibility

6.1.2 Council

- Recognize the significant cost of implementing this plan and the municipal operational plans and seek adequate funding to allow the Town to meet the requirements under Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act
- Fund resources required for the Accessibility Advisory Committee to carry out its mandate
- Advocate in a positive manner for the work the Town of Pictou is doing to improve accessibility

6.1.3 CAO/Staff

- Ensure the commitments outlined in the Accessibility Plan are reflected and operationalized in Town Action Plans required as public sector bodies under Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act
- Accept complaints, questions, and concerns submitted to them by the public
- Provide a summary of complaints, questions, and concerns to the Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Advocate in a positive manner for the work the Town of Pictou is doing to improve accessibility
- Public communication of the plan, success stories, public engagement in advancing actions

7.0 Timeline

In 2017, the Government of Nova Scotia passed the province’s Accessibility Act. A supporting document, Access by Design 2030, is the implementation strategy for how Nova Scotia will achieve an accessible province by 2030. It also identifies actions to improve public awareness, build collaboration and increase compliance with existing regulations. The Accessibility Act set an ambitious goal to become a fully accessible province by 2030. As such, we strive to have the commitments of this plan achieved by 2030, to be consistent with the Province of Nova Scotia.

A Gantt Chart with timelines, lead and partners will be developed. It will be used to ensure proper resources are identified and priorities are completed successfully.

8.0 Monitoring and Evaluating

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will be responsible for submitting a report to Council by January 31 of each year. Council will set specific benchmarks against which to measure the progress of the plan. This report will track the progress made towards the commitments in this plan and make recommendations on priorities and changes to improve the Plan.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee will review new directives, guidelines, and updates from the Province as they are released, and determine if updates to this Accessibility Plan are required based on those updates.

9.0 Responding to Questions and Complaints

- Anyone can lodge a complaint, pose a question, or express a concern about accessibility in the Town of Pictou. These should be directed to the CAO.
- The CAO will respond within a reasonable time. Before responding, the CAO will consult with the staff person responsible for the area of inquiry. The CAO's response will contain the reasons for the decision. The Accessibility Advisory Committee shall receive a copy of such response.
- If the complainant still has concerns, they can contact the Accessibility Coordinator who will share the complaint with the Committee. The complaint will be reviewed and responded to by the Committee.
- Anyone can appeal to Council if they are not satisfied with the response from the CAO or the Accessibility Advisory Committee. 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 on a regular basis. These updates will become part of the Accessibility Advisory Committee's continual review of the Accessibility Plan and may inform future changes.