

Accessible Cumberland

Joint Accessibility Plan

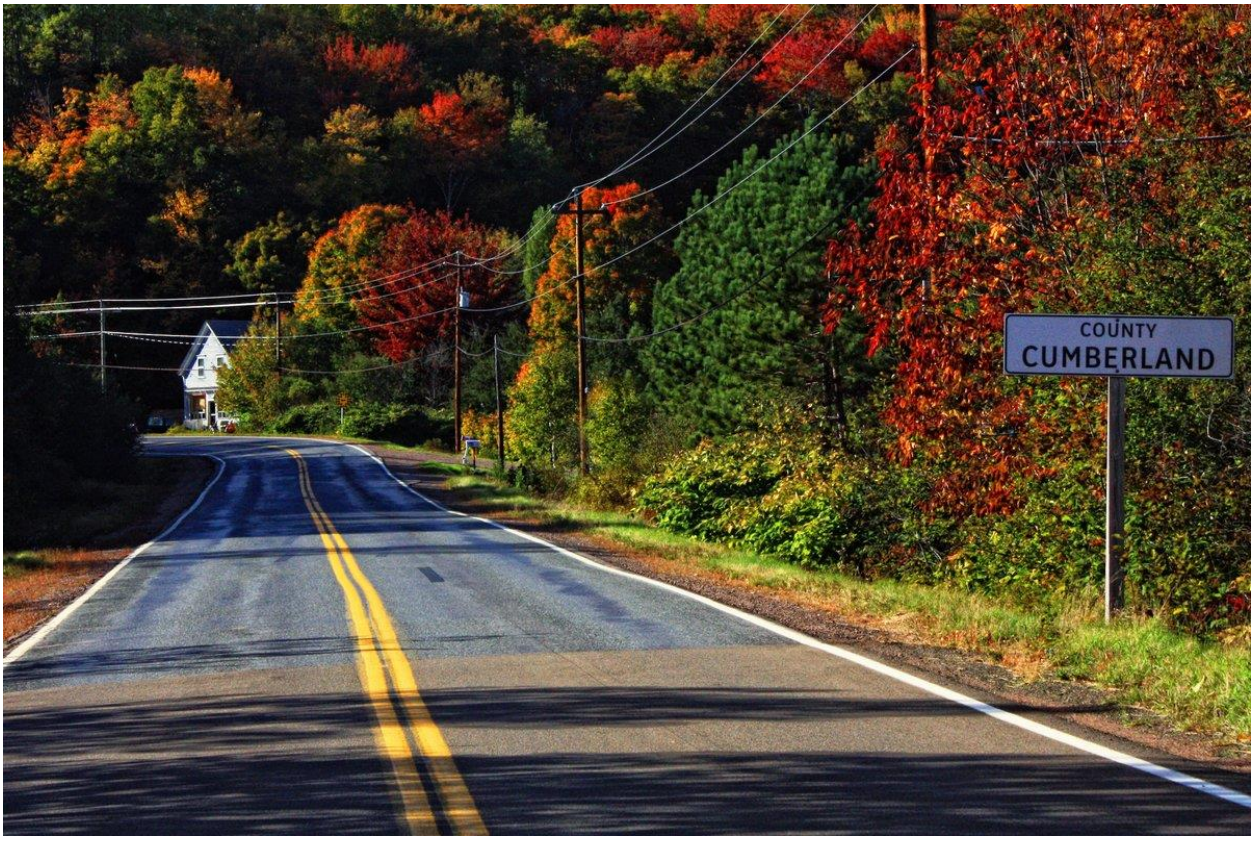
Accessibility Advisory Committee for the Municipality of the County of Cumberland, Village of Pugwash, and Village of River Hebert
March 25, 2022

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Welcome



The Municipality of the County of Cumberland, Village of Pugwash and Village of River Hebert invite you to read our Joint Accessibility Plan in which we find ways to identify, prevent, and eliminate accessibility barriers to infrastructure and services, committing to a more equitable, inclusive, and accessible Cumberland for all.

The Joint Accessibility Plan has been developed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee ("the Committee"), which is a collaboration between the Municipality of the County of Cumberland ('the Municipality'), the Village of Pugwash, the Village of River Hebert, the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate within the Department of Justice, and members of the public. The Municipality formed the Committee to create the Joint Accessibility Plan ("the Plan") and organize actions to improve accessibility. The Committee meets the Accessibility Act's requirement of having at least one half of its members being persons with disabilities or representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities. Members of the public have been engaged to provide input for the Plan and will continue to be consulted as the Plan evolves. The Plan is to be reviewed and updated at least every three years in accordance with Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act, or more often as new provincial accessibility standards are implemented.

Definition of Terms

Accessibility: The quality of being easy to obtain or use. Accessibility refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities.

Accommodation: An adjustment made to make things equitable and fair taking individual needs and abilities into account.



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

Barrier (to accessibility)**:** "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 practice." –Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

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

Built Environment: Human-made space in which people live, work, and recreate.

CCTS: Cumberland County Transportation Services

Disability: A condition that makes it harder for a person to participate, sometimes or always. Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act defines disability as "a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society."

Equality: Everyone is treated the same way.

Equitable: Everyone is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities.

Infrastructure: The "underlying structure" that makes a place liveable and keeps its systems working.

Municipality: The Municipality of the County of Cumberland.

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

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

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

Tactile: Related to the sense of touch.

Universal Design: Design that aims to ensure any environment can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability. It is a core principle of accessibility, along with a "whole journey approach" and "seasonal maintenance".

Villages of Pugwash and River Hebert: Incorporated Villages that are part of the Municipality that independently own and are responsible for real property and services.

WCAG: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wild Web Consortium, the main international standards organization for the Internet.

Whole Journey Approach: The "whole journey approach" acknowledges that all parts of an accessible journey are interlinked and equally important. A single obstacle or element in a person's journey can make it impossible to complete. For this reason, it is important to take this holistic approach when auditing municipal buildings and outdoor spaces.

About Cumberland

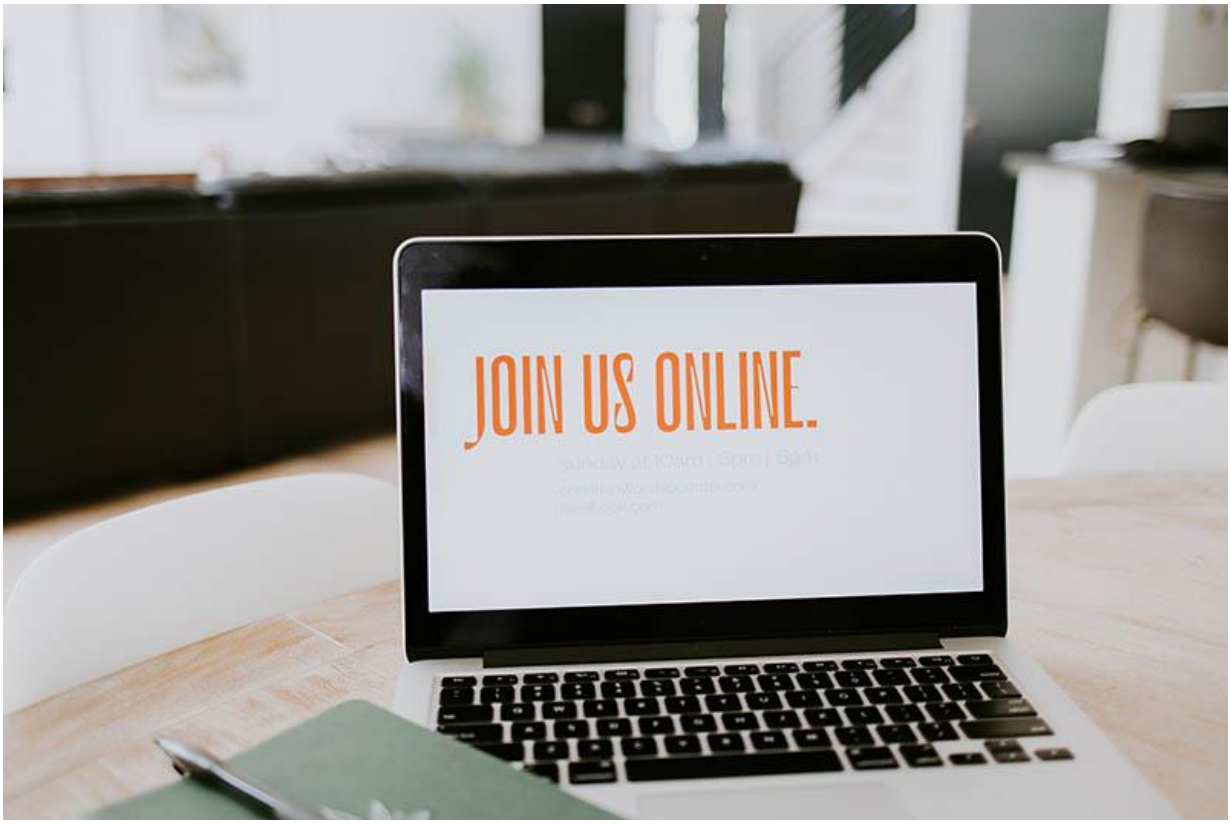
The Municipality of the County of Cumberland is a largely dispersed and rural population of approximately 19,402 people [1]. It includes two former towns (Springhill and Parrsboro), the Villages of Pugwash and River Hebert, and many small communities and dispersed areas, all with different characteristics and services. The Municipality shares a border with neighbouring province of New Brunswick and includes all of Cumberland County excepting the Town of Amherst and the Town of Oxford (an additional population of 10,603 people combined [1]). It is the largest municipality in Nova Scotia by land area at 4,255km^2.

The prevalence of disability in Cumberland County is 32% [2], higher than both the provincial rate and the national rate. This is only expected to increase as the population continues to age.

There are no publicly funded transportation services in Cumberland County and walkability is a challenge in most communities. Of those employed (49%), over 90% drive to work [3]. One in three people in Cumberland County live in deep poverty [4] [5].

Between them, the Municipality and Villages operate three municipal service centre buildings, a Village Hall, a community centre, libraries, fire halls, car parks, recreational facilities, parks, trails, and a variety of other municipal infrastructure.

Community Engagement



The Committee began consulting the community about accessibility in early 2020. To date the Committee has held an online public survey and hosted many online committee meetings open to the public. The Committee will also seek further feedback from the public following the release of the initial Plan in early 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has made in-person engagement methods difficult, but the Committee hopes to incorporate more of these as the Plan is updated and evolves.

The survey was aimed towards residents of the Municipality affected by disability, and its purpose was to find how the Municipality might be a more accessible to its residents, visitors, and staff with disabilities. Of 37 respondents, 48.6% were a person with a disability, 34.3% were a family member, friend, or caregiver of a person with a disability, and 14.3% were an employee or volunteer at an organization that provides disability services. 71.4% of respondents were residents of the Municipality, and 31.4% worked in the Municipality. The survey did not require disclosure of the nature of disability the respondents had experience with, but those who did identified with a variety of disabilities affecting mobility, vision, hearing, speech, vision, cognition, strength, balance, and health, including mental health, to

varying degrees. The Committee heard in the survey the need to consult directly with people with various disabilities to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to inclusion.

Accessibility as a Right

When asking what the Municipality's top accessibility priorities should be, The Committee heard that all community services and infrastructure should be accessible to everyone, not to be prioritized. Indeed, the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act recognizes accessibility as a human right and sets a goal of an accessible Nova Scotia by 2030. Also noted was how much of the infrastructure is interconnected and need to be looked at as a whole journey. For example, inaccessible stairs leading to an accessible door make for an inaccessible building. Winter maintenance is also a large factor to accessibility, as is good lighting and signage. Priority rankings give an idea of where accessibility barriers are most sharply encountered currently but will not serve to exclude lower-ranked items from becoming accessible also.

Where We Most Need Improvement

Sidewalk improvements were rated as the highest priority (94% chose "first priority" when given the choices "first priority", "lower priority" or "unsure"). Following sidewalks (94%) in priority rankings were library buildings (84%), service buildings (72%), parks (71%), trails (63%), sports and recreation (62%), digital information (55%), fire hall buildings (45%), Dr. Carson & Marion Murray Community Centre (43%), and Glooscap Campground & RV (26%). Although the Committee wanted to know where efforts were most needed, we acknowledge that all aspects of accessibility are important and often interconnected.

Please see Appendix A – What We Heard for specific public feedback on sidewalks, buildings, trails, playgrounds, parks, businesses, communication, information, training, and awareness.

Areas of Focus



The Plan includes the following areas of focus.

- **Goods & Services:** Equitable access to goods & services delivered by the Municipality.
- **Built Environment:** Accessible buildings and public spaces.
- **Information & Communication:** Clear and accessible information and communication from the Municipality.
- **Employment:** Equitable access to municipal jobs with fair employment practices.
- **Transportation:** Equitable access to transportation service for everyone.

Provincial standards for these areas are being developed by the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate. As standards are implemented, those standards will be integrated into the Plan.

Goods and Services



Our Vision

Residents and visitors of all ages and abilities have equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Municipality of the County of Cumberland.

Our Starting Point

Overview

The Municipality provides many services such as:

- Customer Service counters in several locations.
- Providing information and communication to the public (see Information and Communications section).
- Maintaining streets and sidewalks in some areas, including snow and ice removal (see Built Environment section).

- Recreation Facilities and Programming.
- Building and Development Permits.
- Tax and water bill inquiries.
- Maintaining other services such as water, sewer, and streetlights, in some areas.

Achievements

- Council meetings are now live streamed and recorded with closed captioning, making them more accessible.
- One of our building inspectors has Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification.
- Since the accessibility survey, front-line staff have been offered training including:
    - Providing accessible services
- Tax payments can now be made in a variety of ways, including online, by mail, and by phone, and through pre-authorized payment, banks, cheque, and credit card.
- Some of the documents on our municipal website are now a text-recognized PDF format, which is an improvement over previously scanned image PDFs.
- We have an adapted equipment loan program.
- An accessible playground is being built in Parrsboro, and a playground with many accessible features was recently built in Springhill.
- We are collaborating with Develop Nova Scotia, Municipality of the County of Colchester, Xplornet Communications, and the Province of Nova Scotia to bring better rural internet to the region. Improvements have already been made in some areas, with plans to offer coverage in virtually all areas of the two counties over the next several years.

Barriers

- Buildings in which goods services are offered may not be fully accessible.
- Staff are not adequately trained in providing accessible services or events.
- Lack of accessible and affordable transportation to services and events.
- No resources or funds are designated to offer alternative communications to people who need them (for example, a sign language interpreter).
- The Municipality's website and many online documents are not accessible.
- Lack of adequate and affordable rural internet to access services and information online.

Policies

It is recommended that the Municipality of the County of Cumberland review in its policies to consider that all goods and services are delivered without bias and that no resident is denied a service because of a disability.

Actions

Ensure that municipal services and events are accessible to everyone by way of:

Top Priorities

- Appointing an Accessibility Coordinator to:
  - Work with the accessibility advisory committee to lead future updates and development of the Joint Accessibility Plan.
  - Receive and respond to concerns, complaints, and suggestions about accessibility and the Joint Accessibility Plan.
  - Continue improving organizational awareness of accessibility.
  - Monitor progress in implementing the Joint Accessibility Plan and ensure the Plan's priorities and actions are reflected in the Municipality's budget cycle and other planning documents.
  - Assist the public and employees with accessibility accommodation.
  - Assure that budgets, planning documents, and processes align with the Plan.
- Ongoing staff training in providing services and programs to all people including those with disabilities.
- Planning accessible public meetings and events by referring to 'Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events' [6] and 'Guide to Planning Accessible Online Meetings and Events' [7], Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, Department of Justice.
- Welcoming service animals and support persons.

Future Actions

- Create internal and public communications that are accessible to all.
- Accessible digital content, technologies, and platforms.
- Clear and accessible wayfinding signage to municipal services and events.
- Accessible buildings and spaces conducive to positive customer experiences, including sitting areas, well-lit and sensory sensitive spaces, and accessible washrooms.

- Assistive devices at service counters and other civic spaces to aid in communication with citizens who are hard of hearing or deaf.

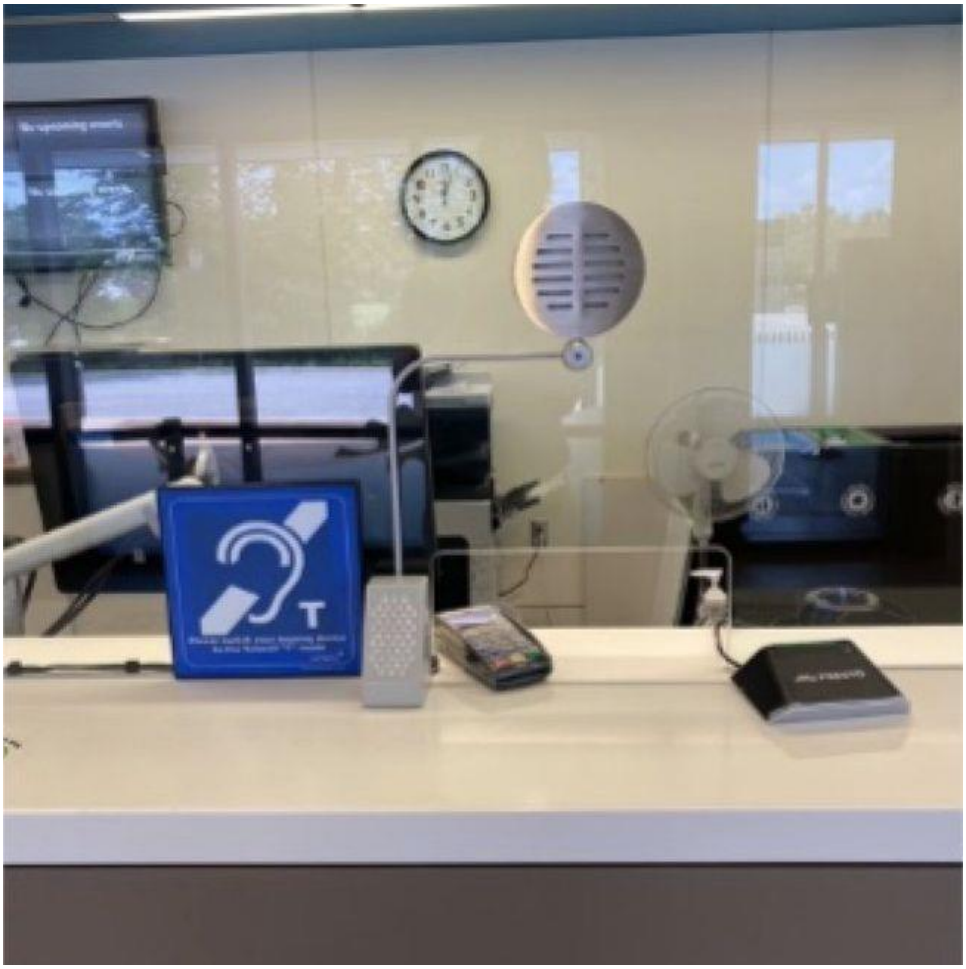


Figure 1 Service counter with a speech transfer system, international ear signage, and hearing loop aerial - Town of Oakville, Ontario.

- A robust winter maintenance program.
- Accessible and affordable transportation options to municipal services and events.
- Promote and better organize our adaptive equipment program.
- Applying an accessibility lens to procurement.
- Applying an accessibility lens to all policy, procedures, and practices.
- Considering accessibility barriers and vulnerable populations in emergency management planning and prioritization of critical infrastructure.

Further Considerations:

- Establish an accommodation fund to provide services for residents who need accommodation, such as Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) and American Sign Language (ASL).
- Provide sign language interpreters, on request, to enable people to participate in recreation and library programs.
- Where applicable, include an "Accessibility Lens"/Impact Analysis in reports to council and in consultant reports delivered to staff and council.

Built Environment



Our Vision

Our public buildings and public spaces will be as accessible as possible to all ages and abilities, in spaces we own, lease, or operate. We will also encourage citizens and the business community to make other public and private spaces accessible.

Our Starting Point

Overview

The Municipality owns, leases, and operates public facilities including three municipal service centre buildings, a community centre, village hall, libraries, fire halls, many roads and sidewalks, parks, trails, streetlights, and a variety of other municipal infrastructure.

Achievements

- A new accessible washroom was included in renovations to the Upper Nappan Service Centre.
- An accessible playground is being built in Parrsboro.
- A playground with many accessible features was recently built in Springhill.
- Accessibility audits have been conducted on some buildings and sidewalks.

Barriers

- Some sidewalks and walkways are uneven, cracked and crumbling.
- Sidewalks sometimes end abruptly or do not exist where needed.
- Sidewalks are sometimes narrow or obstructed.
- Curb cuts at crosswalks are sometimes not done effectively or are absent.
- Some crosswalks are not clearly marked and do not have light, sound, or tactile indicators.
- Rural road shoulders are narrow with steep drops in places, unsuitable for pedestrian use, including scooters.
- Lighting may be poor around some sidewalks, walkways, footpaths, boardwalks, parking areas, and building entrances.
- Some municipal building entries are not accessible.
- Some public washrooms are not fully accessible to people of all ages and abilities.
- Stairs indoors and out are often lacking contrast strips and tactile indicators.
- Service counters may not be an accessible height.
- Cars and pedestrian traffic compete for street priority and snow clearance.
- Sidewalk snow clearing does not always meet accessibility requirements.
- It can be very expensive to update (retrofit) existing buildings to make them more accessible.
- Accessibility projects compete with other budget demands.

Policies

It is recommended that the Municipality of the County of Cumberland review its policies to consider the following:

- Provide basic access for people of all ages and abilities to public buildings, public washrooms, and at public parks with a natural slope of less than 5 percent.
- Improve sidewalks, crosswalks, and curb cuts, and maintain them with accessibility in mind.

Actions

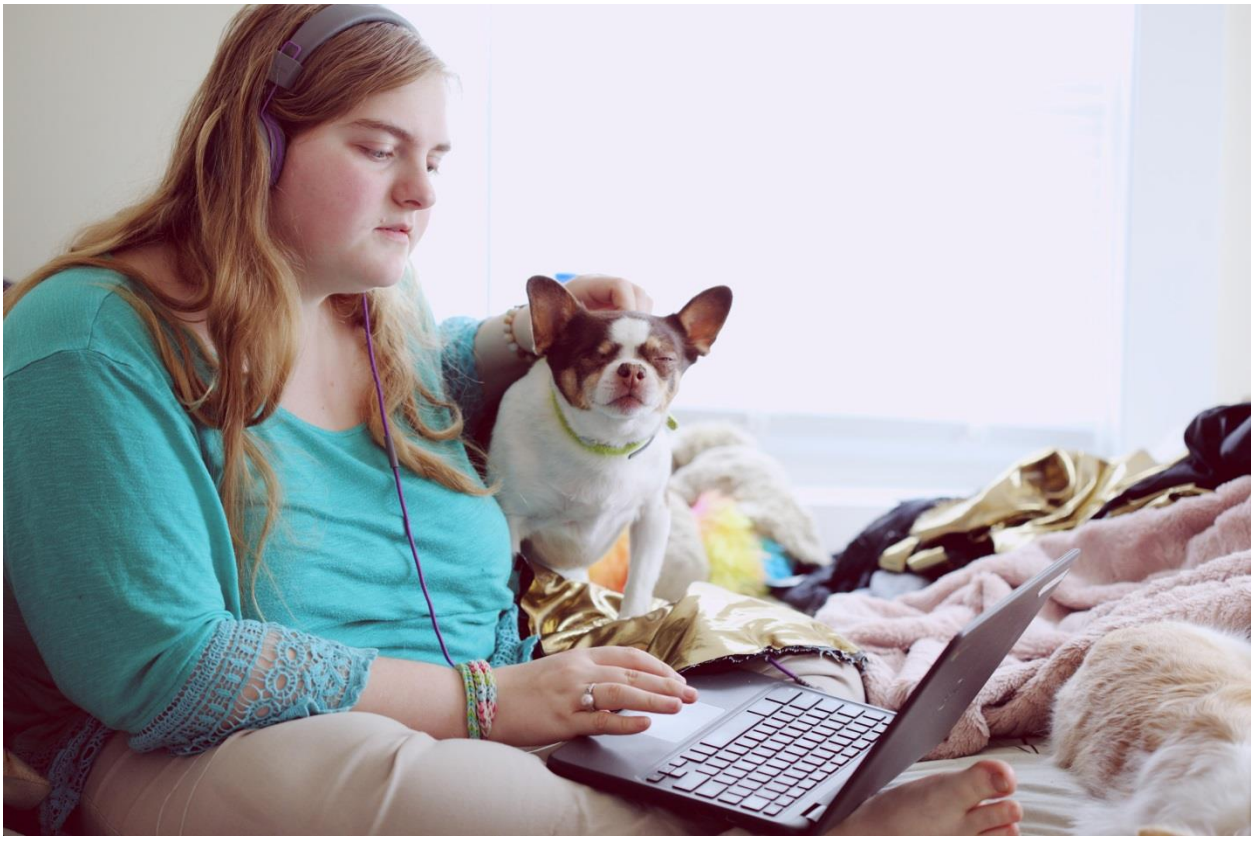
Top Priorities

- New municipal buildings (including retrofits) and outdoor spaces including sidewalks will comply with the Accessibility Act's Built Environment Standard (when implemented).
- New or rehabilitated sidewalks, roads, and trails to comply with the Accessibility Act's Built Environment Standard as closely as possible (when implemented).
- Continue accessibility audits of municipal buildings, sidewalks, and other outdoor spaces to identify deficiencies and needs. When auditing consider:
    - Whole Journey Approach
    - Universal Design
    - Seasonal Maintenance
- Ensure emergency management and building evacuation plans are reviewed with accessibility and vulnerable populations in mind.

Future Actions

- Improve and maintain the accessibility of municipal buildings and outdoor spaces including sidewalks to comply as closely as is feasible with the Accessibility Act's Built Environment Standard (when implemented).
- Conduct a "gap analysis" of where sidewalks, crosswalks, and lighting are not present currently and may be needed.
- When closing sidewalks for construction, ensure an accessible detour is offered.
- Work with library partners to ensure library collections are more accessible.

Information and Communications



Our Vision

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

Our Starting Point

Overview

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

- Our website, social media, newspaper, mail, and email.
- Public meetings of Municipal Council and Committees of Council.
- Open houses and other public meetings.
- Kiosks (display structures) to promote events and special municipal meetings.

Achievements

- People can listen to or watch Council meetings with closed captioning live online during the meeting, and recordings of the meetings can be accessed on the municipal Facebook page.
- Since the accessibility survey, training has been offered to staff and council by the committee on digital accessibility, including:
    - Assistive Technology and the Benefits of Digital Accessibility
    - Accessibility using Audio Video
    - Creating Accessible Documents using MS Word
    - Creating Accessible PDFs
- A reference guide for creating accessible MS Word documents was distributed to staff
- The Emergency Management Office (EMO) Coordinator has worked with seniors and seniors' housing to develop a contact list for use in the event of an emergency.

Barriers

- There is currently no process for hearing-impaired individuals to attend or participate in public meetings, including meetings of Municipal Council and Advisory Committees.
- The Municipality's website is not accessible to people with visual impairments.
- Although training has been offered, not all staff are sufficiently trained in accessible communications.
- Plain language is not consistently used in written material.
- The Municipal Government Act sets limitations for certain public notices—for example, advertisements must be published in newspapers, which may not be accessible to people with visual impairments.
- Many people do not know that others face barriers to accessibility.

Policies

It is recommended that the Municipality of the County of Cumberland review its policies to consider the following:

- Provide information in an accessible format, or with communication supports that consider a person's specific needs, on request. Build a campaign to promote this service to the public.
- Ensure the Municipality's digital presence (e.g., website and social media) and Information Technology systems are designed for people of all abilities.

- Hold all in-person public meetings in barrier-free locations observing the 'Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events', Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, Department of Justice.
- Hold all online public meetings and events observing the 'Guide to Planning Accessible Online Meetings and Events', Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, Department of Justice.
- Continue to train staff in better ways to communicate with people of all abilities, and to provide information in an accessible format.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Ensure the Municipality's web presence meets the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- Ensure digital communications and documents are screen readable. Encourage partner agencies to achieve the same standard of communication.

Future Actions

- Improve signage and wayfinding for municipal buildings and public facilities by implementing signage and wayfinding consistent with accessibility best practice. Prioritize having signage and wayfinding where necessary, but not in excess.
- Provide modified editions of key municipal resources—in large print and/or in plain language—on request. Examples include recreation guides, emergency management information, and bylaws.
- Train staff in digital accessibility, plain language, and inclusive communications.
- Issue meeting agendas with enough lead time to review and book communication accommodations, if needed.

Further Considerations

- Provide American Sign Language (ASL) and/or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services at Municipal Council and other Municipal-hosted public meetings, on request.
- 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.

Employment



Our Vision

The Municipality of the County of Cumberland is committed to be an equitable employer who values diversity and supports all employees to succeed. We will remove barriers to employment for people of all abilities who seek a career with Municipality of the County of Cumberland. Our workforce aims to reflect the Municipality's diverse population. We will make our employment practices and workplaces more accessible for new and existing employees of all ages and abilities.

Our Starting Point

Overview

The Municipality employs approximately 90 people year-round, and more in the summer months. There are 9 elected representatives on Municipal Council, including the mayor.

Achievements

- Members of Council receive tablets for reading agendas and Municipal documents. This makes reading more accessible because users can zoom in on text and change the font size.
- The Municipality offers medical accommodations.

Barriers

- The Municipality states that it is an equal opportunity employer in the 'Employment Opportunities' section of its website but does not claim to be equitable employer.
- Workplaces in the Municipality are generally not very accessible.
- Staff are generally not trained to recognize barriers that may limit job opportunities for qualified individuals.
- Jobs are posted in traditional ways, including web pages, which may not be accessible to some individuals.

Policies

It is recommended that the Municipality of the County of Cumberland review its policies to consider the following:

- Be an equitable employer that values diversity and supports its employees to succeed.
- Offer accommodation during recruitment.
- Offer accommodation to employees of all ages and abilities. This includes providing assistive devices and a workplace environment so that employees can succeed at their jobs.
- Work with employees to build an understanding of the value of accessibility and inclusion.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Develop an Employment Equity Statement.
- Clearly state in job postings that they are open to people with disabilities and that accommodations are available in the workplace.
- Improve support and flexibility in the workplace by ensuring municipal staff and council with disabilities have access to adaptive technologies and accommodations. Plan accessible meetings and events for staff and council by referring to 'Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events' [6] and 'Guide to Planning Accessible Online Meetings and Events' [7], Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, Department of Justice.

Future Actions

- Investigate strategies to reach a wider and more diverse audience with job postings.
- Build capacity among staff and senior leadership to cultivate a culture of inclusion that supports a diverse staff and council, including those with disabilities.
- Establish a centralized accommodation fund to pay for assistive devices or accommodations employees need to succeed at their jobs. Promote this fund on the job posting.

Transportation



Our Vision

The Municipality will ensure that people of all ages and abilities have equitable access to regulated transportation services (the Municipality does not have any publicly funded transportation service). Regulated transportation service in the Municipality currently include Cumberland County Transportation Services (CCTS) and taxi service.

Our Starting Point

Overview

Cumberland County Transportation Services (CCTS) is a non-profit rural transportation service seeking to provide reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation to residents of Cumberland County to where they need to go, when they need to get there. The service is incredibly valuable to those in the county without transportation, especially those with disabilities. Some challenges remain with needing to book appointments far ahead, and although subsidized, cost is still an issue for many. Taxi service makes up the balance of local public transportation, with some accessible options.

Achievements

- CCTS served 4,256 clients in the span of one year (April 2020-March 2021), and:
  - 15% were in wheelchairs, 85% were not in wheelchairs,
  - 57% were travelling for medical reasons, 21% for work, 13% shopping (including grocery), 6% social, 1% education, and 2% for other reasons,
  - 14% were seniors (65+), 1% youth (under 18), and 85% general population,
- CCTS has four accessible vehicles and one non-accessible vehicle in its fleet.
- CCTS offers a pre-booked door-to-door-service.
- CCTS is undergoing a public awareness campaign.

Barriers

- CCTS vehicles must be booked at a minimum 24 hours in advance (due to the requirements of its Motor Carrier License) and often a week or more in advance, especially if going beyond Cumberland County.
- Cost of transportation is a barrier to many, even though fares are subsidized.
- Some residents may be unaware of Cumberland County Transportation Services.
- Some have a misconception that CCTS transit service hours match office hours.
- Other than taxi, there are no other transportation services for getting around the local area.

Policies

It is recommended that the Municipality of the County of Cumberland review in its policies to consider the following:

- Continue to support Cumberland County Transportation Services.

Actions

Top Priorities

- Promote CCTS on the Municipality's 'Accessible Cumberland' webpage.
- Municipal staff will work with CCTS staff to review accessibility at frequent stops, including snow removal.

Further Considerations

- Explore subsidized transit and taxi fares, especially to municipal services and events.

Implementing the Plan

Responsibilities

- Municipal Council is responsible for
  - Adopting and overseeing the Joint Accessibility Plan.
- The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for
  - Implementing the Joint Accessibility Plan.
  - Appointing a staff member as Accessibility Coordinator.
- The Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for
  - Developing and updating the Joint Accessibility Plan.
  - Monitoring success of the Plan.
  - Feedback and recommendations to Council.
- The Accessibility Coordinator is responsible for
  - Supporting the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and leading it in its responsibilities.
  - Monitoring progress in implementation of the Plan.
  - Assuring that Municipal budgets, planning documents, and processes align with the Plan.
  - Continuing efforts to improve organizational awareness of accessibility.
  - Supporting staff who may need accessibility accommodations to succeed at their jobs.
  - Receiving and responding to public concerns, complaints, and suggestions.

Schedule

Actions in this Plan identified as 'Top Priorities' will be implemented by March 31, 2024.
Actions in this Plan identified as 'Future Priorities' will be implemented before March 31, 2030.

Monitoring

- The Cumberland Accessibility Advisory Committee will prepare an Accessible Cumberland Report Card for council by March 31 of each year beginning in 2023. This report card will measure the performance of the policies and actions in this Plan. The Committee may also make recommendations to improve the Plan.
- The Accessibility Advisory Committee will conduct a yearly public survey and include those results in the report card.
- The Plan will be updated every 3 years or more frequently as new provincial standards are implemented.

- The Accessible Cumberland Report Card will be a public document. It will be posted on the Municipality's website.

Evaluating

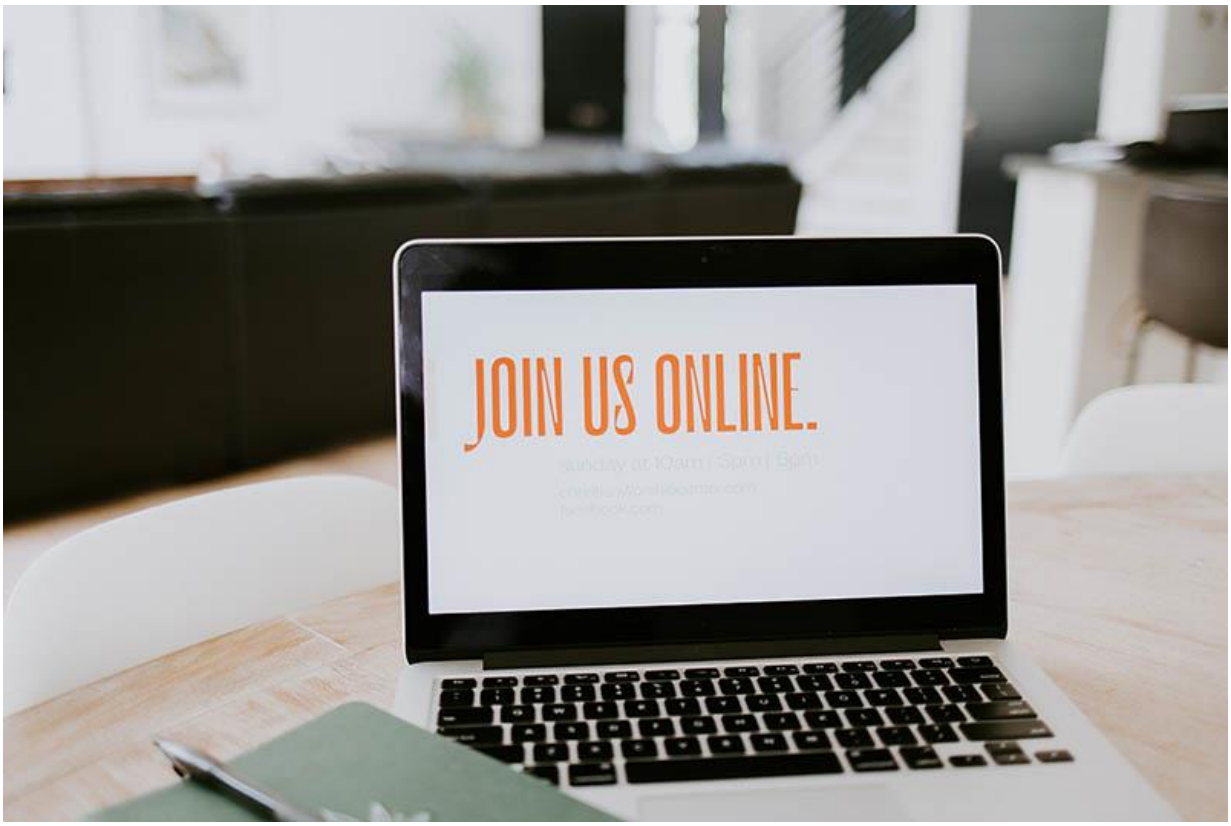
The Municipality will lead a public review and evaluation of the Plan before March 31, 2024.

Responding to Questions and Complaints

- Anyone can lodge a complaint, pose a question, or express a concern about accessibility in the Municipality of the County of Cumberland. These should be directed to the Accessibility Coordinator.
- The Accessibility Coordinator will respond within a reasonable time. Before responding, the Accessibility Coordinator will consult with the staff person responsible for the area of inquiry. The Accessibility Coordinator's response will contain the reasons for the decision.
- Anyone can appeal to Council if they are not satisfied with the response from the Accessibility Coordinator. Council may refer any appeal to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for additional review and recommendations before issuing a final response to the complainant.
- The Accessibility Coordinator will 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 Committee's continual review of the Joint Accessibility Plan and may inform future changes.

Appendices

A - What We Heard: Public Engagement Results



We began consulting the community about accessibility in early 2020. To date we have held an online public survey and hosted many online committee meetings open to the public. We will also seek further feedback from the public following the release of our initial plan in early 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has made in-person engagement methods difficult, but we hope to incorporate more of these as the plan is updated and evolves.

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those who did identified with a variety of disabilities affecting mobility, vision, hearing, speech, vision, cognition, strength, balance, and health, including mental health, to varying degrees. We heard in the survey the need to consult directly with people with various disabilities to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to inclusion.

Accessibility as a Right

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Sidewalk improvements were rated as the highest priority (94% chose "first priority" when given the choices "first priority", "lower priority" or "unsure"). Following sidewalks (94%) in priority rankings were library buildings (84%), service buildings (72%), parks (71%), trails (63%), sports and recreation (62%), digital information (55%), fire hall buildings (45%), Dr. Carson & Marion Murray Community Centre (43%), and Glooscap Campground & RV (26%). Although we wanted to know where our efforts were most needed, we acknowledge that all aspects of accessibility are important and often interconnected.

Sidewalks

Besides ranking highest in survey priority ratings, sidewalks were the accessibility barrier most commented on in our survey. Sidewalks were found to be in poor condition (crumbling and uneven), lacking continuity, or lacking altogether. SOAR (Springhill Oxford Amherst and Region) Community Health Board sent a letter to the Committee calling for a sidewalk between the Town of Amherst and the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre. Durham and Church Streets in Pugwash were other locations identified as needing a sidewalk. Survey respondents also pointed out a need for wide paved shoulders on rural roads where sidewalks do not exist. Existing sidewalks needing improvement in the Municipality are in Springhill, Parrsboro, and Pugwash. Curb cuts in some places are not sufficiently flush to the street and are lacking tactile contrasted indicators. Some crosswalks should be marked more clearly and with light and sound indicators.

Buildings

Deficiencies of buildings included automatic door buttons not functioning, and insufficient space to push an automatic door button and move out of the doorway with a wheelchair as it opens in the case of a second entry door. A respondent who uses a wheelchair said that counters and cash areas; that they are too high or distanced from the person in the chair. The two floors of the Upper Nappan Service Centre both have ground level access, but there is not an elevator or other way to go between floors indoors. It was suggested that although the Dr. Carson & Marion Murray Community Centre in Springhill is a great facility, the washrooms should have been designed without entry doors.

Trails, Playgrounds, Parks, & Businesses

The need for accessible trails, playgrounds, and parks was noted. The need for local businesses to be accessible in their public and private spaces was suggested.

Communication and Information

Many respondents were unsure how we were doing with digital accessibility of information on our website, but the need to improve in all areas were noticed by some, especially our calendars of community events and council, by-law and policy documents, the website itself, and the lack of adequate rural internet to access municipal information and services. Adequate rural internet availability and affordability has become ever more important during the COVID-19 pandemic as its importance to education and basic services increases, leaving rural residents at a strong disadvantage without it. Making recorded information and braille available were suggested, with the option of alternative formats posted on our website.

Training & Awareness

Finally, respondents saw the need for staff training and awareness around disability; service and infrastructure have been negatively impacted due to lack of accessibility knowledge.

B - Reference Links

- Nova Scotia Accessibility Act
  - PDF
  - ASL
- The Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Municipalities
- Nova Scotia Access By Design 2030
- Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces
- Phase I Built Environment Recommendations
- Wolfville: Access by Design, and Accessibility Plan for 2019-2022
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines
- Rick Hansen Foundation

C - Accessibility Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

https://www.cumberlandcounty.ns.ca/images/accessibility/Terms_of_Reference_Accessibility_Advisory_Committee.pdf

D - Accessibility Advisory Committee Members

Maggie Pitts (Chair)
Catherine Aquino Russell
Lisa Betts
David Buell
Brian Mooring
Melanie Prendergast
Helen Sims
Brandi Tuzo

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