



ACCESSIBLE ANTIGONISH COUNTY

MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF
ANTIGONISH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

02

Executive Summary

03

Vision & Commitment to
Accessibility

04

Nova Scotia Accessibility
Legislation

05

Current Accessibility
Initiatives at or Supported
by the MCA

07

What The Words Mean
(Glossary of Terms)

13

Key Areas for Action
Between 2022-2025

20

Implementation, Ongoing
Engagement and
Monitoring

21

A Word of
Acknowledgment

Welcome, Bienvenue, Pjila'si,

On behalf of Council and staff of the Municipality of the County of Antigonish I am pleased to support Accessible Antigonish County, a plan to make our community accessible. This plan is a starting point, it captures work complete, our commitments for more and outlines the next steps for what implementation will look like. We are proud of how welcoming, open, inclusive our community is and it's important we identify and work on the challenges that are preventing folks from feeling safe, included, and able to freely access our services and programs. Accessibility is a priority for our Council, and we look forward to getting to work and to hearing from you as we move forward.

Sincerely,
Warden Owen McCarron,
Councillor District 6

The Municipality of the County of Antigonish Accessibility Advisory Committee worked hard to make this plan practical, inclusive and action focused. This plan will serve as a foundation for what we do between now and 2025 and then influence 2025-2030. As chair of this committee and Councillor of District 8, I am also a first voice. I navigate our community everyday and physically our community is not accessible. We have a lot of work to do, starting with municipal infrastructure, planning and services. We acknowledge this is difficult work, and resources are limited, we must work together to identify, advocate and access more. Along with the Warden, Council, staff, and the Accessibility Advisory Committee I encourage you to reach out at and share your thoughts, challenges, and successes in Antigonish regarding accessibility.

Sincerely,
Councillor Gary Mattie, District 8
Chair of Municipal of the County of Antigonish's Accessibility Advisory Committee



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017 Nova Scotia became the third province in the country to develop and enact Accessibility Legislation. This plan is part of the public sector responsibility within that legislation. Accessibility of the built environment; goods and services availability; how information and communications are developed and delivered; and employment opportunities collectively form the foundation of this plan. Accessible Antigonish outlines what the municipality has responsibility and ability to do in each of these areas, as well explores how to engage and educate on accessibility. The commitment expressed in this plan is in recognition of a need, and

the right to access in each of the key areas. Implementation of this plan will align with Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act striving for a municipality and a community that is accessible to all by 2030. Recognizing that Nova Scotia had the highest rates of disability in Canada, this plan is to help bring focus to the key areas where improvement can have the biggest impact. Income, affordability, diversity, racism, and cultural inclusion are all issues in our community; they are not the explicit focus of this plan but are inherent considerations when moving to implementation.

VISION & COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY

The Municipality of the County of Antigonish respects diversity among community members. We recognize members of our community have a diverse range of hearing, movement, sight, and cognitive abilities. We are committed to striving for inclusive access to our programs, services, spaces, and buildings. The municipality ultimately wants our community to be welcoming, safe, supportive, and respectful.

We value providing service and access with dignity, integrity, and comfort for all. Dignity and wellbeing are paramount. The Municipality recognizes accessibility as a human right, and we are committed to working to equity and inclusion through identification and dismantling of barriers and meeting the requirements and recommendations of the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act.

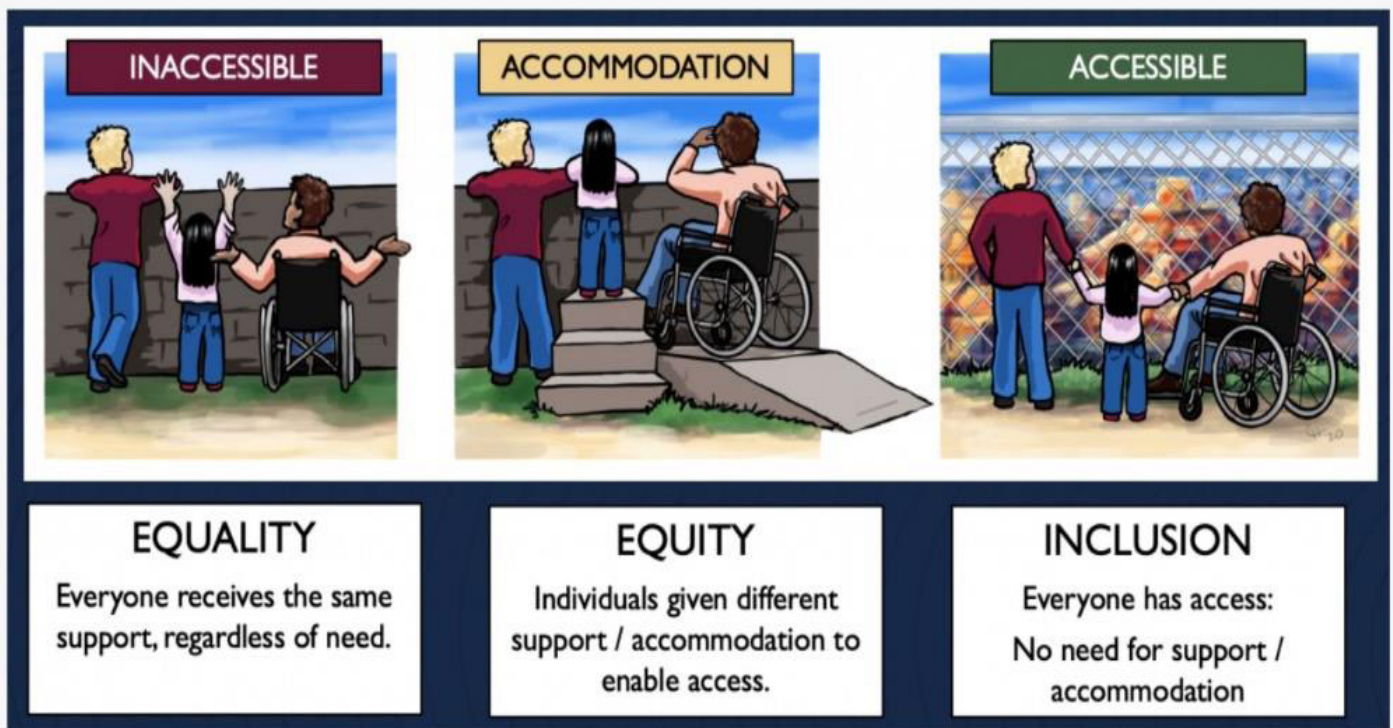


Image by Cora Hays, 2020

The municipality is committed to removing barriers and creating accessibility in the following key areas as outlined in the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, based on standards set by the province:



01
Built Environment



02
Education & Awareness



03
Transportation



04
Information & Communication



05
Employment



06
Goods & Service

NOVA SCOTIA ACCESSIBILITY LEGISLATION

Nova Scotia became the third province in Canada to adopt accessibility legislation in April 2017 with the passing of the Accessibility Act. This Act was developed over a two-year period starting in 2015 with public consultations.

The Accessibility Act, S. N.S. 2017, c. 2. Subsection 39(2) provides:

39... (2) A municipality, university or organization shall prepare and make publicly available an accessibility plan within one year of being prescribed as a public sector body.

The act prescribes each municipality to create an accessibility plan, to be developed in partnership with your accessibility advisory committee. All plans will be developed with standards provided by the province in six key areas listed above. The municipality will play a support role through advocacy for more supports and resources to support accessible work in our community.

CURRENT ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVES

at or supported by the MCA



Built Environment

- Mobi Mats at Pomquet Beach Park and Cape Jack Beach
- Accessibility Audit in 2018.
- Enhanced facilities at Pomquet Park Beach (partnership with Lands & Forestry) accessible toilet, changeroom and boardwalk improvements.
- Municipal Administration building, 285 Beech Hill Rd, new entrance, parking, accessible entrances, counter service space, adapted service options for recreational equipment pick up, signage.
- Accessible Public Washroom at 285 Beech Hill Rd, Municipal Admin Building (in progress).
- Work with People's Place Library.
- Addition of tactile paver panels on newly constructed municipal sidewalks.
- Accessible sidewalk extension at Mount Cameron/Landing.
- County Court House entrance.

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Education & Awareness

- Access Awareness Day, with accessibility challenge, May 2019
- Staff and Councillor trained in Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Standards for built environment.



Transportation

- Development and support of Antigonish Community Transit.
- Funding of accessible bus.



Information & Communication

- Website plans to increase accessibility are ongoing.



Employment

- Creating work environment that is inclusive with accessible furniture and equipment.
- Recognizing accessible workspaces that are not in Council Chambers or offices. As a result of the pandemic equipment and programs were identified and put in practice to support work from home.



Goods & Service

- Mobi-mats and Mobi Chair at Pomquet Park Beach
- Expansion of free equipment loan program. Some new major pieces of adapted equipment include an adult bike, PFDs, and beach wheelchair. Also added to the loan program were paddle boards, mountain bikes, lawn games, etc.
- Recreation program supports of bringing in additional resources, human and equipment based to provide one on one supports to participants as needed and as available.
- Individual support by staff to complete forms and apply for programs and supports.
- Development of alternative pay methods including phone and direct pay options.
- Financial support programs i.e.: low-income tax exemption, funding to support recreation program access.

WHAT THE WORDS MEAN

(Glossary of Terms)

The following words are used in the plan or are part of implementation. This list is not exhaustive and to support learning and understanding we will continue to add to the list. The accessible advisory committee had discussions about the terms, barrier free, barrier friendly, able bodied, disabled and recognizes that individuals' strong feelings about the language used when discussing accessibility.

The definitions and language used throughout the plan is meant to be respectful and inclusive and encourages respectful and educational based discussion and debate.

A.

Accessibility

Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act suggests that accessibility is defined as “address(ing) the identification, removal and prevention of barriers in the policies, programs, practices and services.”

The Rick Hansen Foundation elaborates on this definition as the “degree to which a product, device, activity, facility, service or environment allows everyone to participate fully and is available to everyone on an equal basis.” They add that “something cannot be considered accessible if there have only been efforts to make it accessible to one group, such as those who are blind or people who are wheelchair users.” Meaningful accessibility meets the real needs of any user and responds to their entire experience, rather than simply completing a checklist of minimum requirements. As examples, an accessible meeting space is not useful if it is only accessed by a flight of stairs, and a ramp does not provide meaningful access if it is located at a separate entrance around the back of a building.

Accessibility Act

Also known as Bill 59, is the Nova Scotian legislation passed in April 2017, which aims to make the province inclusive and barrier-free by 2030.

Accessibility Audit

A professional inventory, review and evaluation and sometimes grading of infrastructure, services, systems, policies, programs, and practices on how accessible things are. There are standards being developed by the province of Nova Scotia that along with the Rick Hansen Foundation Certification standards that will inform and guide the accessibility audit.

Accommodations

Modifications which have been made to facilities, objects, environments, or systems that enable persons with disabilities to be on an equal level to other individuals.

Adaptive Technology

Technology developed as a tool to increase accessibility of existing technology. Used in education and information sectors to support inclusion.

ASL

American Sign Language.

Auditory

Related to hearing or sensing sound.

B.

Barrier

Something that makes it harder for some people to participate. Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act defines a barrier as "anything that hinders or challenges the full and effective participation in society of persons with disabilities, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice."

Braille

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

C.

CART

Communication Access Realtime Translation.
CSA: Canadian Standards Association.

Closed Captioning:

A text version of the spoken component of a televised speech, movie, show or recorded visual presentation. Text can appear at the bottom of the screen.

CSA B651-18

A set of standards, released by the Canadian Standards Association, which outlines a set of technical recommended requirements for accessible design within built environments including sidewalks, buildings, signposts, etc.

D.

Disability

Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act states that disabilities "include 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."

The World Health Organization offers a holistic explanation of disability, stating, "In recent years, the understanding of disability has moved away from a physical or medical perspective to one that considers a person's physical, social, and political context.

Today, disability is understood to arise from the interaction between a person's health condition or impairment and the multitude of influencing factors in their environment."

Disabilities may be permanent, temporary (such as a broken bone), or situational (such as a driver unable to see through direct sunlight).

E.

EMO

Emergency Management Office.

Equitable/equity

A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same; equity means everybody is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities. Infrastructure: The “underlying structure” that makes a place liveable and keeps its systems working (e.g., roads, sewers, clean water, electricity, and more).

F.

First Voice

First Voice is the shared perspective, story, insight, and knowledge from an individual or group of individuals that lives or has lived the experience, or life or community of the subject or question.

I.

Inclusion / Inclusivity

To provide space and supports that allow authentic engagement and use of programs, products, services. It considers physical ability, cognitive ability, financial, cultural, social, and other needs which extend past

those of the perceived ‘average’ or ‘typical’ user. It is an active commitment to value, respect and welcome all.

M.

MCA AAC

Municipality of the County of Antigonish Accessibility Advisory Committee, the committee developed to advise and assist with development of the Accessibility Plan and with municipal policies, programs, and services for persons with disabilities.

Mobi Chair

MobiChair® is a high-quality floating beach wheelchair that floats thanks to its flotation wheels and armrests, the ultimate partner for leisure time and entertainment. DMS’ Mobi-Chair® floating beach wheelchair is designed with everyone in mind: wheelchair users, people with special needs, or even children can benefit from the convenience, portability, and comfort of the Mobi-Chair®.

Mobile Data Computer Software

Computerized software used in public transit vehicles and taxis to communicate digitally with a central dispatcher.

Mobi Mat

Deschamps Mats Systems Inc. designs, produces, and delivers Mobi-mat® accessibility mats and sand fences for cities, national parks, commercial and residential throughout the United States and Canada. Portable Beach and Ground Reinforcement Access Mats designed for greater accessibility on soft soil for pedestrians, wheelchair users, strollers, ATVs, and small crafts. <https://shop.mobi-mat.com/>

N.

NSFM

Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities.

P.

Pedestrian

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

Plain language

Language a reader or listener can understand easily and completely. Ensuring that writing is clear, concise, well-organized, and able to be properly understood by a diverse group of individuals, regardless of their intellectual or educational backgrounds.

R.

Retrofit

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

RHF

Rick Hansen Foundation.

RHFAC

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

T.

Tactile

Related to the sense of touch.

Tactile Ground Surface Indicators

A system of textured ground surface indicators found on footpaths, stairs, bus stations platforms and more to aid pedestrians who are visual impaired.

U.

Universal Design

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or service in that

environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. (<https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/>)

There are seven principles of universal design.

Principle 1: Equitable Use

Principle 5: Tolerance for Error

Principle 2: Flexibility in Use

Principle 6: Low Physical Effort

Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use

Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and

Principle 4: Perceptible Information

Use

W.

WCAG

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

KEY AREAS FOR ACTION BETWEEN 2022-2025



Built Environment

Our Commitment and Goal

Our buildings and spaces will be accessible, including our public washrooms, ramps, municipally owned roads, trails, and sidewalks. We will work with Eastern District Planning Commission to provide information on accessibility for new developments and new builds. The municipality encourages residents, the business community, and developers to work in making our community accessible.



Areas of Action

- The Municipality of the County of Antigonish will complete detailed accessibility audits of our municipal infrastructure using the RHFAC tools in 2023.
- Develop an action plan for built environment of municipal infrastructure.
- Accessible washroom upgrades at the municipal administration building
- Implement a safety and maintenance program to help report accessible issues and link to repairs or work.
- Installation of tactile warning surfaces on sidewalk installations and building entries and will include color contrast that is maintained over time.
- Upgrade municipal infrastructure signage using wayfinding and Nova Scotia approved symbolism as developed with accessible signage standards.
- All new builds or major retrofits will incorporate principles of universal design.
- Development of an annual funding program to support accessible building upgrades for non-profits.
- Work with Eastern District Planning Commission to develop and share accessible standards for build environment for the private sector to align with the provincial goals for 2030.
- Create interior spaces that are sensory friendly for service delivery.
- Define municipal role in accessible housing.
- Develop action plan for increasing accessibility in built environment where ownership or operation is shared with municipality or municipal programs are offered (i.e., Antigonish Arena, beaches, shared trails).
- Participate in and share Nova Scotia's provincial parks and recreation accessibility educational program when available.
- Develop and share a list of funding opportunities/ resources for local organizations and businesses to improve accessibility.





Education & Awareness

Our Commitment and Goal

The municipality will create opportunities for Council, staff, and the community to learn and build capacity regarding accessibility. Committed to facilitating learning and training opportunities on how to be an ally and strive for excellence in accessible service delivery.

Areas of Action

- Develop accessibility resources and checklists for staff to increase understanding, competence, and knowledge of accessible issues.
- Develop education and training opportunities for municipal staff on built environment accessibility approaches and standards, service delivery, and information and communication development and delivery.
- Engage on a regular basis with first voices to hear of accessibility challenges and successes.
- Support opportunities and workshops for community learning on accessibility.
- Develop a training module for new staff and council orientations.
- Develop an education series with First Voices documenting through video accessibility, it's challenges and successes in our community.
- Work with / support community organizations to develop first voice events and opportunities for the community to learn about accessibility rights and issues



Transportation

Our Commitment and Goal

To support accessible transportation options in the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, including accessible active transportation options.



Areas of Action

- Name site specific barriers to accessible vehicles at municipal properties and identify steps to make changes.
- Identify and improve virtual and supportive service delivery; options that don't require transportation to municipal sites.
- Provide accessible transportation to municipal events, and processes. i.e., elections, public engagements.
- Support awareness and share information of accessible transportation options in the community.
- Develop standards for construction and maintenance of municipal owned roads, trails, sidewalks, and parking lots to ensure they are accessible.
- Document standards for storm and climate related clearance and repair; snow, ice, water, downed trees etc.
- Ensure implementation of the Municipality's Active Transportation Plan includes inclusive accessible design.



Information & Communications

Our Commitment and Goal

The Municipality will use accessible formats and platforms to share information about services and programs. Communication strategies will plan for simultaneous distribution of messages.

Areas of Action

- Review virtual communication paths, including web and social media and develop best practices for delivering information on these platforms while working to eliminate barriers.
- Audit website for accessibility using Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and ensure that website and web-based meetings and

engagement are accessible (HTML, Word documents, accessible PDFs, ASL /audio versions, compatibility with screen readers and other assistive technology).

- Create standards and provide training for municipal staff in preparing public information and communications.
- Development of a resource tool that provides information, contacts, resources, and tools about accessibility in Antigonish in one place.
- Develop standards for all municipal written/ owned documents. (Use an accessible font (such as Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Futura, Univers,

or Franklin Gothic) in at least 12 to 14 point, and follow accessibility guidelines (such as the [CNIB's Clear Print Guidelines](#)) for all communications, Use headings and structure in your documents. Use alt text for all images. Check the colour contrast if using coloured text.) Use plain language in all materials and communications

- Investigate options for ASL for public events, and announcements.
- Develop standards for signage and wayfinding connected to the built environment based on provincially developed accessible signage guidelines.



Employment

Our Commitment and Goal

The municipal work environment will be accessible. Our employment policies and practices, including recruitment and hiring will be supportive of all.

Areas of Action

- Review employee handbook and human resource policies with accessible lens, clearly naming opportunities to improve accessibility.
- Provide training for Municipal staff on hiring and employing persons with disabilities.
- Assess current position descriptions and employee activities finding areas and corresponding actions needed for improvement.
- Develop strategies and standards

for recruitment and advertising new employment opportunities with the municipality to ensure accessible platforms and formats are used.

- Work with an occupational therapy

consultant to support a safe, accessible, and productive workplace for new staff.



Goods & Services

Our Commitment and Goal

The Municipality of the County of Antigonish provides a variety of goods and services to its residents. Services will be supported by policies and procedures that bridge from accommodation to accessibility. No community member will be denied service because of a disability and the municipality will strive to provide goods and services without bias.

Municipal goods and services to the public include the following:

- Water and wastewater.
- Solid Waste Collection and Management
- Tax Account Management
- Land Use Planning and Building Services in partnership with Eastern District Planning Commission.
- Maintaining municipally owned roads and sidewalks.
- Emergency Management Service
- Recreational programming and equipment.
- Community event support
- Municipal communications
- Governance and public access to Councillors and governance meetings i.e.: Committee of the Whole, Asset Management and Council.
- Public Engagement on community development and change.

Areas of Action

- Inventory accessibility knowledge, experience, and training of municipal staff team; and identify areas for training and education.
- Develop an understanding and a plan to provide sensory-friendly service hours.
- Document service standards and practices for storm and climate related clearance and repair; snow, ice, water, downed trees etc.; and maintenance.
- Establish a list of community resources or competent person(s) to provide sign language interpretation at community events, and on request at county led programs, sourcing ASL resources.
- Audit website for accessibility using Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and ensure that website and web-based meetings and engagement are accessible (HTML, Word documents, accessible PDFs, ASL /audio versions, compatibility with screen readers and other assistive technology).
- Ensuring access points of service are accessible i.e., the municipal building(s).
- Develop and use engagement plans that support equitable participation through choice of location, delivery, and facilitation.
- Maintain up to date list of recreation equipment, programs, and services for people of all abilities.
- Establish a list of community resources or competent person(s) to provide sign language interpretation at community events, and on request at county led programs, sourcing ASL resources.
- Audit website for accessibility using Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and ensure that website and web-based meetings and engagement are accessible (HTML, Word documents, accessible PDFs, ASL /audio versions, compatibility with screen readers and other assistive technology).
- Ensuring access points of service are accessible i.e., the municipal building(s).
- Develop and use engagement plans that support equitable participation through choice of location, delivery, and facilitation.
- Maintain up to date list of recreation equipment, programs, and services for people of all abilities.

IMPLEMENTATION, ONGOING ENGAGEMENT AND MONITORING



The Municipality is responsible for adopting and overseeing the MCA Accessibility Plan. This plan will be supported by the CAO, Accessibility Coordinator, and the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MCA AAC). The advisory committee will provide feedback and recommendations to Municipal Council as they monitor the plan and continue to develop engagement opportunities to hear from our community.

Once this plan is adopted an implementation plan will be developed, aligning with budget development to map out that actions between 2022-2025. The MCA AAC will prepare an Accessibility Report for Council by March of each year (to align with fiscal year), this report/report card will be a shared publicly.

This plan will be reviewed and revised in 2025.



A WORD OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thank You!

The Municipality of the County of Antigonish would sincerely like to thank all that contributed time, life experience, knowledge and research to the development of this Accessibility Plan. This plan is just a start, but a start that will create change and build a foundation of accessibility. Of special note, thank-you to the following people who are our inaugural Accessibility Committee Members:

Tiffany MacNeil
Community Representative

Carleton MacNeil,
Co-Chair, Community
Representative

James T Williams
Community Representative

Amanda Casey,
Community Representative

Johnnie Rodgers
Community Representative

**Deputy Warden Hughie
Stewart**

Councillor Gary Mattie
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Sustainable Communities,
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