

**Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting
October 13, 2017
Town Council Chambers**

Present

Councillor D. MacInnis, Chair
Mayor L. Boucher
Councillor M. Farrell
G. Kell
G. Mattie
D. McCallum

Also Present

J. Lawrence, CAO
S. Day, Director of Planning
E. Stephenson, Active Living Coordinator
D. Halfpenny, Administrative Assistant

Sean Fraser, MP
Councillor D. Roberts.

Absent

K. MacDonald

Call to Order

Councillor D. MacInnis, Chair called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

Approval of Agenda

“It was moved and seconded that the Agenda of October 13, 2017 be approved.” Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

“It was Moved and Seconded that the Minutes of the meeting held on August 10, 2017 be approved.” Motion carried.”

J. Lawrence, CAO explained that as the current allocated budget may not be spent within this fiscal year due to the restrictions of a new committee setting clear direction and having the necessary time to call for any tenders and to have work completed. He advised he would support an initiative to maintain any unused funding to continue with the development of approved projects. He noted that for the first two or three years he expected that there will be a learning curve and he is fine with playing a vetting role.

Motion

“It was Moved and Seconded that the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommend to Council that that any unused funding be maintained beyond the fiscal year, in reserves, if necessary to complete approved projects.” Motion carried.

E. Stephenson advised that she had received notification that the funding application had been received for the ramp grant.

CAO J. Lawrence reported that he had received acknowledgement that the funding application had been received for the audible traffic crossing signals, with a request for further information. He noted the additional information had been sent as requested and acknowledged as received.

G. Mattie, County Councillor, commented that it is important to keep the constituents in the loop. He noted that citizens were asking questions about progress.

Discussion followed and all agreed that Public Relations is important.

Mayor L. Boucher stated that all meetings are open to the public and that formal invitations to the press can be sent when announcements are being made.

Definitions of Accessibility

The Chair, Councillor D. MacInnis reported that D. McCallum with input from had K. MacDonald completed and circulated a draft of the ‘Definitions of Accessibility,’ to be used as Terms of Reference for the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

G. Mattie stressed the need for plain language that everyone can read and understand. He noted that if twenty persons were asking to define accessibility twenty different answers would be received.

D. McCallum explained that the Terms of Reference for the Committee is an evolving opinion that can be left open to evolve naturally. She stated that she welcomed G. Mattie’s input into creating a plain ‘Definitions of Accessibility,’ document that would be used for the general public. It could then be posted online, taped, etc. She advised that universal design should be used to embed the language into Town documents.

S. Day, Town Planner noted that currently universal design has not been used in Town documents and asked that as such could the Town bring someone in to do a session with Department Heads on Universal Design.

Discussion followed and all thought that it would be helpful and enlightening to have a session on Universal Design.

D. McCallum asked if it would be helpful if she compiled a list of potential guest speakers who would be able to advise about Universal Design for J. Lawrence’s consideration.

CAO J. Lawrence agreed this would be very helpful.

D. McCallum and G. Mattie agreed to work together to draft a positive, plain language, one page document of definitions of accessibility to be used for the public.

Mayor L. Boucher agreed that the terms of reference definitions of accessibility needed a companion piece for the general public. She commented that to move forward and get the definitions approved as presented in D. McCullum's draft would allow the committee to shift their focus to getting to a place where a whole host of things can move forward to make Antigonish more accessible to citizens, visitors and the business owners of Antigonish. She noted that the public needs to be kept informed and to be given avenues to provide input.

Discussion followed regarding opportunities for those with accessibility issues to provide input to the committee.

Motion

"It was moved and seconded that the Accessibility Committee recommend to Council that that draft of Definitions of Accessibility be accepted as written to become the Terms of Reference." Motion carried.

Sean Fraser, MP

The Chair welcomed S. Fraser, MP at 1:30 p.m.

S. Fraser, MP was introduced to those in attendance.

S. Fraser commented that he was pleased to see that the Town was making it a priority to use the Accessibility lense when applying for project funding. He mentioned the Splash Pad as an example of including consideration for accessibility in an application. He recognized the Town as having one of the first Accessibility committees.

S. Fraser acknowledged that D. Wilson, Deputy Clerk had provided him a list of questions posed by the Accessibility Committee for consideration in preparation for today's meeting.

Regarding the first question he noted that the applications for federal grant funding for the two (2) accessibility projects had been received and advised that the procedure was for the applicant to hear about funding within 90 days. He advised that the Town of Antigonish would therefore learn if there funding request had been approved by approximately October 25th. He commented that if further information is asked for it is often a good indicator that there is an interest in funding

S. Fraser, MP provided an outline of sources for federal programs funding that the municipality may be able to tap into.

- Employment and Social Development Canada's - New Horizons for Seniors
- Farm Credit Canada - FCC AgriSpirit Fund
- Infrastructure Canada- New Building Canada Fund - Small Communities Fund

He commented that the Library of Parliament is a great resource to answer any questions.

S. Fraser agreed with the Terms of Reference and applauded the Town for the creation of an Accessibility Advisory Committee. He acknowledged that that the Town is doing a lot right in making accessibility part of public consultation and identifying problems and finding solutions.

S. Fraser noted that the only thing he would recommend is to work with those with accessibility issues to increase employability options. He stated this would be monumental in changing lives, he stressed meaningful, quality jobs enhance the lives of people living with challenges and remove discrimination in the workplace. He advised this would be a big help to removing barriers. He commented that his office would work with the Town and its Accessibility Advisory Committee to promote such an endeavor.

J. Lawrence advised that the next step for the Town would be to assign the Special Projects Coordinator S. Scannell who works on various projects with the Downtown Business Association, the Chamber of Commerce and other groups on a regular basis to meet with S. Fraser to discuss the plan further.

S. Fraser commented that the Canada Student Jobs program would be a funding opportunity that would work well for this type of project and that he would be receptive to meeting with S. Scannell in December prior to intake of the applications in the new year for the program.

S. Fraser commented on the federal government's leadership role in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and provided details of federal, provincial priorities. He encouraged the Accessibility Advisory Committee to contact MLA R. Delorey as he advised funds will be coming available soon. He commented that it seems projects approved such as funding for the Splash Pad provide a lot of value for the investment.

S. Fraser noted that the focus of the Special Olympics is the athletes and their accomplishments. He commented that making the Town more accessible for these athletes is wonderful. However, he advised he was more comfortable with keeping the politics in the background and the spotlight on the athletes.

Other Business

National Building Code- Accessibility Ramps

Discussion focused on adding a variance to the National Building Code to provide short term, temporary solutions to ramps for older buildings that cannot meet the necessary grade to put in an accessible ramp.

Mayor L. Boucher noted that the GAP program is used in HRM but the city can only turn a blind eye to the project. She explained that temporary ramps are placed over existing stairs, and the person is then assisted into the establishment. She acknowledged that this in no way replaces an approved accessibility ramp as it is taken inside after use and would not work for all disabled persons.

S. Fraser recommended that a collaborative effort with other municipalities would be beneficial in clarifying the challenges to providing short term, temporary solutions and how to have them added to the National Building Code. He advised he would then be able to make a caucus ask to make necessary changes which would benefit older communities until permanent accessibility options can be put in place. He acknowledged that providing access to the maximum number of businesses for events such as the Special Olympics which is being hosted by the Town of Antigonish in 2018 would be mutually beneficial to the participants and the businesses. He noted that this would be an initiative that could be mentioned at the Special Olympics opening to welcome the participants.

S. Day will look into how changes could be implemented in the National Building Code to facilitate the short term temporary ramps. He advised that heritage buildings, economic conditions and special concerns often prohibit the owner from installing an accessibility ramp.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities

D. McCallum spoke about entrepreneurial opportunities for people with accessibility issues and challenges.

G. Kell advised of challenges with being an entrepreneur.

Discussion followed on funding options such as through NOBL and CBDC and the rules for obtaining loans, companies that facilitate mentoring programs, and promotion of such programs.

G. Mattie provided examples of local success stories which occurred when employers gave disabled persons an opportunity to explore their skills. He mentioned that not only did the employee benefit but the overall moral in the business increased.

Motion

“It was moved and seconded that the Accessibility Advisory Committee recommend to Council that J. Lawrence direct S. Scannell to explore the promotion of work opportunities for persons with accessibility issues.” Motion carried.

Chair D. MacInnis stated he will follow up with D. Wilson regarding inviting R. Delorey, MLA to the November Accessibility Advisory meeting.”

Adjournment

“It was Moved and Seconded that the meeting be adjourned.” Motion carried.

Meeting Adjourned at 2:25 p.m.

Next regular meeting scheduled for November 2, 2017 at 12 noon in Town Council Chambers.