

Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, February 4, 2021 @ 3:00 P.M.

Minutes

Present: Councillor Ralph Gidney, Chairperson
David Rudderham, Vice Chairperson
Councillor Vicki Amirault
Wayne Huskins
Kelly Oxner
Tyler Roy
Elise Johnston, Accessibility Coordinator, Region of Queens
Mike MacLeod, Director of Planning and Development, Region of Queens

1.0 Call to Order

By Chair Ralph Gidney at 3:02 P.M.

2.0 Changes/Approval to Agenda

- Add item 6.3 Parking issues by Elise J.

It was moved by Mike M. and seconded by Vicki A. that the Agenda be approved as amended. MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

3.0 Approval of Minutes of January 20th 2021.

Elise requested that Minutes be as clean as possible, using Plain Language for simplicity and comprehension.

It was moved by Wayne H. and seconded by Kelly O. that the Minutes be approved as circulated. MOTION CARRIED unanimously.

4.0 Presentations: None.

5.0 Planning

5.1 Continued review of Municipal Accessibility Plan, category numbers 2 for Education and 3 for Employment by Elise J.

5.1.a) **Education** as a category should be looked at from the Municipal support perspective even though the curriculum and most everything is controlled by the Ministry of Education. We can 'connect the dots' and be a resource person for students and families outside of school. A recent example is when the middle school asked for help on the design of their accessible picnic tables.

Also of note is the recent announcement of a partnership between the Rick Hansen Foundation School Program and the Ministry of Education. While connections were being made by Elise to her teacher friends, we are glad to see this support at a provincial level.

The Region of Queens will consider 'education' as Public Awareness, so looking at other examples in the province such as The Club Inclusion created by the NS League for Equal Opportunities. Can we replicate this here? Kelly suggested taking these ideas to the high school, especially Dave White who runs internships within the O2 program to create inclusive opportunities with local entrepreneurs. Also Laura Fryday, who runs the Resource Centre, is keen to discuss family supports for when students graduate.

Kelly suggests a Sub-committee of community members to develop partnerships to bring down barriers. Elise recognises the different groups in terms of ages and stages of life, support needs.

As part of **public awareness, we will consider two tiers**. Elise will be sure to post public meeting minutes on the new website and discuss other media streams for private discussion groups and blog type of information. We can invite participation through the organizations such as QASL, Department of Community Services, schools and similar. Kelly reminds us of the DEVI school in Mill Village.

Dave asked about guidance counselors at the high school and there was discussion around support from within the school with an accessibility focus as well as from outside through NSWorks for broader employment consultations.

5.1.b) **Employment**

Kelly says that we looked at the built environment in such detail and need to do the same regarding Employers. Does installing a ramp make us truly accessible? We need to educate employers and to explore the challenge of really diving deeply into the attitudinal barriers and creating accommodations to allow people with disabilities to show their abilities. We could have another sub-committee to work on this specifically.

Elise mentioned conversations she's had with NSWWorks on programs on supported employment as well as employer training, and that there's conceptual agreement to work together on these. Meanwhile we can share any options to the community as our links build.

Kelly told a story of someone that was NOT accommodated for employment because it was easier to not bother. (E: This is a prime example of the outdated "medical model" = fix the person vs. the "social model" = fix the context.) This is where we can provide resources to help find solutions. Elise said she wants to highlight to employers the legal 'Duty to Accommodate' which statistically is not expensive. Kelly sees the interactive chat groups as a great place for stories to be shared from people that have come across barriers and possibly given up seeking employment.

We will educate employers using Chamber of Commerce, starting with presentations. Elise has some ready and is waiting on a date. She will share them with the committee meanwhile.

The draft plan lists the Municipal policies in place and **recommends a Human Resource** to help fulfill the Duty to Accommodate.

A Human Rights Commission video on Diversity Awareness Training exists and needs to be seen by all staff and really broader audience as well.

There is a Diversity and Inclusion Awareness Committee in place who will be interviewing selected candidates for the Coordinator

position next week. We will have overlap in many areas and look forward to working together in employment issues in particular.

Wayne asked whether the municipality has any **count of employees with disabilities**. Not yet, but Ralph saw this forthcoming in terms of new applicants. Meanwhile, we should have an anonymous survey to know our baseline in order to aim to represent our diverse community. Mike noted that this would be a good place to overlap with the Diversity team.

Wayne asked that we **recruit more creatively**, actively searching out diversity. Kelly repeated that there are groups that could be targeted such as the high school O2 program, etc. and that we need to ask WHY people aren't applying to the region to look at honest answers.

Kelly: "Be the Champion of Change". Wayne: "Walk the Talk!"

Elise: Wolfville's Accessibility Plan has an item saying they'll track their numbers of employees and establish an **Accommodation Fund** to pay for assistive devices as the need arises. The duty to accommodate has a limit of undue hardship which is quantified as a percentage of profits, in terms of small businesses.

Small businesses will also have lessened legal requirements based on number of employees and square footage, the ethical and business reasons could encourage embracing accessibility. Again, it was **agreed that the Municipality needs to be a Role Model and lead by example** in terms of job development, recruitment and accommodation.

The visibility of people with disabilities is low, partly due to the past opportunities available (Dave) and too many people hold trauma from historical perceptions and experiences (Kelly). We can create change in the community the way QASL's Carnival did.

6.0 Reports/Updates

6.1 QPEC questions for Meaghan

- The difficult access to toilet paper – Elise will continue to research sensor-operated options and price options. It is not just for the accessible stalls or even people with disabilities, but they are the worst offended when they have to ask for help.
- The timing of the power-operated front door is still problematic and the wall-mounted button is too low profile to reach for all users. Tyler would ideally need sensor-operated sliding doors, but at least another style of button.
- Unanimous response was back to being a Champion of Change. Yes, there will be management issues, but for such basic personal need and primary access into the building, let's do what needs to be done! Meanwhile how can this be improved now? Elise & Tyler will schedule a QPEC visit.

6.2 **Community Health Board grant** of over four thousand dollars was approved for mental well-being through hobby development, especially for people with disabilities who have been even more isolated than usual with Covid. Elise can send details to everyone as they become available.

6.3 **Parking.** Note that a review of the provincial process for defining and distributing disabled permits has been requested. Elise now has details on the number of meters and accessible stalls in order to make our request for free parking. The committee will discuss this farther.

7.0 To Do List

Elise to continue working on:

- Contacts with High Schools: Dave White & North Queens.
- Digital media: post all minutes & discuss best options with Heather Cook, Communications Officer for Queens.
- Cost sensor-operated sliding doors for QPEC
- Find toilet paper dispenser solutions to offer.
- Schedule a site visit with Tyler to QPEC.
- Anonymous survey for regional staff; recruitment strategies.

8.0 Adjournment - at 4:30 P.M.

Next meeting to be March 4th, 2pm at the Hub in Caledonia.