

# Town of Antigonish Accessibility Plan

April 2023



This document was developed by **UPLAND Planning + Design** and **RHAD Architects** for the **Town of Antigonish**.

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# Contents

1.	Meanings	5
2.	Introduction	8
3.	Community Engagement	13
4.	Awareness & Education	16
5.	Goods & Services	23
6.	Information & Communications	29
7.	Transportation	36
8.	Employment	47
9.	Built Environment	52
10.	Implementation Plan	64
11.	Other Projects	75
12.	Sources	76
13.	Appendix A: Accessibility Audit	79
14.	Appendix B: Engagement Participants	102
15.	Appendix C: Additional Considerations	104

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# 1. Meanings

## **Ableism / Ableist**

Ableism is a form of discrimination based on the belief that people with disabilities have less worth than people without disabilities.

## **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."

## **ASL**

American Sign Language or ASL is a complete, natural language that has the same linguistic properties as spoken languages, with grammar that differs from English. ASL is expressed by movements of the hands and face. It is the primary language of many North Americans who are Deaf and hard of hearing, and is used by many hearing people as well. There is no universal Sign Language, and there are many regional variations, including Maritime Sign Language (MSL) which is used within the Maritimes, particularly among older residents. There are also Indigenous Sign Languages, used long before the creation of ASL.

## **Auditory**

Relating to sound or the sense of hearing.

## **Barrier**

Nova Scotia's *Accessibility Act* defines barriers 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 system of raised dots that people who are blind can read with their fingers.

## **Cane-detectable**

To be cane-detectable, protruding objects in the path of travel must be located within the detection range of a long cane which is used by some blind people to help with navigation. This means that objects (such as street furniture, trees, or columns) are placed close enough to the ground that a cane can detect them, or a railing or other barrier is placed around the protruding object.

## **CART**

Communication Access Real Time (CART) is a communication technology often used by individuals who are hard of hearing, Deaf, or for whom English is not their first language. A trained operator's shorthand transcription is translated to standard English and projected on a screen or sent to individual's devices. This can be used for in-person meetings or conference calls.

## **CSA B651 Guidelines**

The [CSA B651 Guidelines](#) (Accessible Design for the Built Environment), is a document published by the CSA Group which includes technical standards and specifications for making buildings and other facilities accessible to people with disabilities. It covers many different types of buildings and facilities.

These standards are considered to be minimum levels, and serve as a guideline. This document does not have the force of law unless mandated by legislation.

## Deaf and deaf

**Deaf** (big-D) is a sociological term referring to those who are medically deaf or hard of hearing and identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people. Their preferred mode of communication is sign.

**deaf** (small-d) is a medical term referring to those who have little or no functional hearing (those who identify as deaf, Deaf, or deafened). It can also be used as a collective noun to refer to those who are medically deaf but do not necessarily identify with the Deaf community.

People who are **hard of hearing** have hearing loss ranging from mild to profound, and use speech as their usual means of communication. This is both a medical and a sociological term.

People who are **deafened** have become deaf later in life and may not identify with either the Deaf or hard of hearing communities.

**D/deaf** is used as a collective noun to refer to both those “Deaf” people who identify with Deaf culture and those “deaf” people who do not.

## 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.”

While this document uses the term “people (or person) with disabilities”, some people do not identify with this term (see also: “Deaf and deaf” on page 6 and “Neurodiverse or Neurodivergent” on page 7) or may prefer to refer to themselves as disabled, crippled, handicapped, or any number of language variants. When referring to someone’s disabilities, ask them about the language they would like you to use.

## Equitable

For something to be equitable people must not simply be treated the same, but have their differences accommodated.

## Equity-seeking Groups

Equity-seeking groups or marginalized groups include communities that experience social, political, and economic discrimination and exclusion because of unequal power relationships.

## Neurodiverse or Neurodivergent

These terms can be used to describe a variety of conditions related to cognitive abilities. Neurodiversity considers these conditions to be normal variations in the human brain, rather than abnormal or unhealthy.

## Pedestrian

For the purposes of this document, a pedestrian includes anyone walking on foot or using an assistive device such as a walker, wheelchair, or scooter.

## Plain Language

Plain language (also called plain writing or plain English) is communication an audience can understand the first time they read or hear it. It uses clear, straightforward expression, with only as many words as are necessary.

## Retrofit

To add a component or accessory to something (such as a building or street) that did not have it when it was originally built or manufactured.

## Tactile Indicators

Tactile indicators or Tactile Attention Indicators (TAI), Tactile Walking Surface Indicators (TWSI), Directional Tactile Indicators or Pavers, go by many names. These refer to raised tiles installed within a surface to indicate a warning or direction to people who are blind or have low vision. These are typically yellow, to improve contrast, and include two main types:

- A grid of raised domes which indicate a hazard, such as a roadway or set of stairs
- A series of raised lines indicating the direction to key amenities, such as an entrance, front desk, or transit stop

## Universal Washrooms

Universal access washrooms should be fully accessible for people with disabilities and gender neutral. These washrooms allow room for a support person or child of any gender, and create a safe and inclusive space for trans and gender non-conforming people who prefer to use a gender-neutral single-stall washroom. These washrooms also offer privacy for anyone who needs it, including people who need to perform injections, people with a colostomy bag, and people practicing religious rites such as ablutions.

## Walkability

Walkability determines how easy, safe, and comfortable it is to walk within a certain area or to a certain location. Factors affecting walkability can include sidewalk conditions, block size, traffic, and the number of amenities available within a short walk.

## WCAG

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) has the goal of providing a single shared standard for web content accessibility that meets the needs of individuals, organizations, and governments around the world.

## 2SLGTBQIA+

2SLGTBQIA+ is an acronym for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the countless other ways in which people choose to self-identify.

## 2. Introduction

### Defining Accessibility

[\*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.”

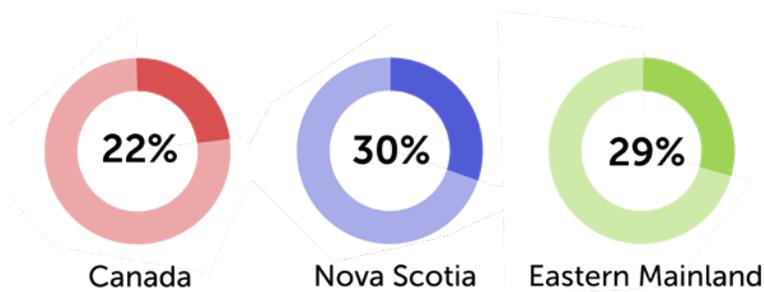
The World Health Organization offers a holistic explanation of disability, stating, “In recent years, the understanding of disability has moved away from a physical or medical perspective to one that takes into account a person’s physical, social and political context. Today, disability is understood to arise from the interaction between a person’s health condition or impairment and the multitude of influencing factors in their environment.”

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

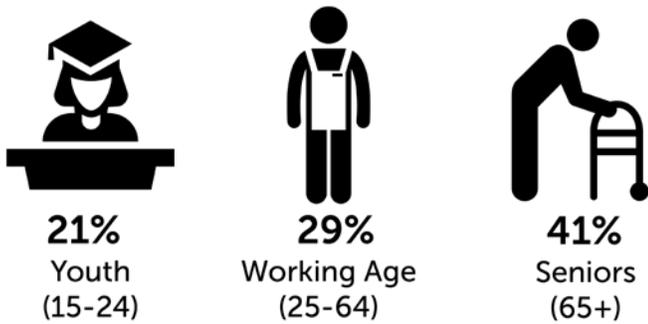
### Demographics

Data from 2017 shows that in Canada, just over 22% of people aged 15 and over identify as having a disability. Among the provinces, Nova Scotia had the highest rate of disability, with almost 1 in 3 residents aged 15 and over identifying as a person with disabilities. The Eastern Mainland region, which includes the Town of Antigonish, had a similar rate at 29%.



Rate of disability by location (ages 15 and up), 2017

Although Nova Scotia has one of the highest proportions of seniors in the country, disability rates are higher in all age groups compared to the rest of Canada. In Nova Scotia as well as nationally, women are more likely than men to have a disability.



Rate of disability by age group in Nova Scotia, 2017

There is limited data available at the local level but within Nova Scotia, the most common disabilities include those related to pain (20% of residents), flexibility (14%), mobility (13%), and mental health (12%).



Rate of disability by type in Nova Scotia, 2017

Regardless of ability to work, people with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed, and in Nova Scotia, only 55% of people with disabilities reported being employed, compared to 79% of people without disabilities. Nationally, people with disabilities are also more likely to be living in poverty, and this particularly affected lone parents, people living alone, and women.

## Accessibility Plan

The project team, led by the Town of Antigonish and the Town's Accessibility Committee, has developed this Municipal Accessibility Plan for the community. In line with *Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act*, this plan provides recommendations intended to remove and prevent barriers that disable people. The Plan recognizes the diversity among people with disabilities and aims to improve the independence and wellbeing of residents, community members, and visitors with disabilities.

Accessibility is a human right, as well as an important part of diversity and inclusion work. The aim of the Town of Antigonish's Accessibility Plan is to create a town that is safe for community members and visitors living with disabilities, prioritizing a dignified experience for everyone.

This process derives its principles for social justice from Nova Scotia's Access by Design, which include:

- Respect for difference
- Dignity
- Independence & autonomy
- Equitable access & opportunity
- Non-discrimination
- Full participation & inclusion in society

## Timeline

The planning process for this Accessibility Plan began in November, 2020, and the first round of stakeholder engagement took place in January, 2021. Through these conversations, community members offered feedback which prompted the project team to revise the process, including additional community engagement and promotions, resources for engaging individuals with lived experience of disability, and a longer project timeline. The updated process was approved by Council in February, 2021. The activities completed to date include:

- November, 2020: Project start-up
- December: Review of local policies and plans
- January, 2021: First round of stakeholder interviews and focus groups
- April: Engagement Strategy finalized with input from key informants
- April: Site visit and downtown tour with the Accessibility Committee
- May & June: Second round of stakeholder interviews and focus groups
- July to September: Development of the Draft Accessibility Plan
- October & November: Internal review of the Draft Accessibility Plan with the Town & Provincial Accessibility Directorate
- December, 2021 to February, 2022: Additional internal review with the Town & the Accessibility Committee
- Spring: Preparing the Draft Accessibility Plan for public release
- Summer & Fall: Engagement on the Draft
- Winter: Preparation of the final Accessibility Plan

## **Leaders in Accessibility**

Both globally and locally, the accessibility movement has been led by people with disabilities. In Antigonish changes have been implemented over time, thanks to the advocacy of residents with disabilities. To successfully implement this Accessibility Plan, it will be essential for the Town to learn from the expertise and experiences of these community members as well as local accessibility professionals.

The following is not an exhaustive list, but highlights some of the individuals and groups who have fought for accessibility improvements in the Town of Antigonish. The Town is grateful to these community leaders and wishes to honour their achievements and build trust by committing to creating a more inclusive community.

### **Advocates**

- Mary Isaac
- Anne Camozzi
- Jane Gorman
- Wayne Mattie
- Elizabeth Abler
- Garry Kell
- Gary Mattie

### **Organizations**

- L'Arche
- CACL (Canadian Association for Community Living)
- Park Bench Players
- Friendship Corner
- Challenger Baseball
- Antigonish Womens Resource Centre
- St Francis Xavier University (including the PEACH Research Unit & Intersectional Disability Studies Research Lab)
- Antigonish Town & County Library
- ACALA (Antigonish County Adult Learning Association)

Special thank you to all those individuals and groups who offered their time, expertise, and lived experience in an effort to help bring this plan to fruition. To see a full list of all who contributed, please go to Appendix B.

## History of the Disability Rights Movement

Throughout North America, disability rights activists have advocated to government to enact policies and legislation supporting the rights of people with disabilities. This movement is connected not only to ableism, but also the ways that classism, racism, colonialism, and immigration policy combine to marginalize people with disabilities, Black Canadians, Indigenous people, newcomers, and other equity-seeking groups. The disability rights movement has pushed back against laws which aimed to oppress, persecute, and institutionalize people regarded as “unfit” by the state.

### 1800s

Some sources begin this history with the opening of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto in 1850. This was the first of many institutions housing people with disabilities and people with mental illness. These institutions are remembered for the severe abuse and neglect that residents experienced, and government legislation allowed for involuntary sterilization, the last of which was not repealed till 1972.

### 1900s

In 1910, the *Canadian Immigration Act* prohibited entry of many people with disabilities who were considered by the state to be unfit to work or have insufficient money.

War Amps was established in 1918, one of Canada’s first organizations for people with disabilities. The group advocated for veteran pensions, one of the first social supports offered on the basis of disability.

In the 1930s, members of the League of the Physically Handicapped advocated for access to American public work relief programs, holding a sit-in which led to the hiring of 1,500 workers with disabilities. In 1948, the first International Wheelchair Games were held, later followed by the Paralympic Games.

In the 1950s and 60s, more advocacy groups were formed by people with disabilities, including the independent living movement. In 1976, Ontario passed a law protecting blind people’s right to have a guide dog in public places and housing. The same year, what is now called the Council of Canadians with Disabilities formed, acting as a spokesperson to the government.

In 1977, advocates staged another historic sit-in which led to an amendment of the *American Rehabilitation Act* extending civil rights to people with disabilities. The same year, the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#) passed, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, including mental and physical disabilities, as well as addictions. In the 1980s, the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) and the [Employment Equity Act](#) addressed further barriers.

# 3. Community Engagement

## Purpose

The stakeholder engagement conducted as part of this planning process helped us understand community members' priorities for accessibility within the Town of Antigonish, and where the current conditions limit the full participation and inclusion of people with disabilities. We recognize that people with disabilities have diverse needs related to their unique individual identities. Therefore, our engagement also explored where people with disabilities face additional barriers or discrimination on the basis of age, class, race, or otherwise. This input has been instrumental in informing the content of the report, and for the sake of confidentiality has been worked into the content without identifying information.

## What We Did

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with a range of participants including community members with lived experience of disability, service providers working directly with people with disabilities, professionals working in accessibility, and more. This engagement resulted in contact with 58 individuals representing 43 individuals or groups. We also reviewed some resident comments related to accessibility which had been submitted to the Town outside this process.

Participants with lived experience of disability were offered compensation for their time, recognizing that many of these individuals participated outside of any paid employment, and often shared intimate matters including personal experiences of discrimination and threats to their safety. We would like to thank all participants for trusting us with their stories and offering their time and expertise.

## Other Findings

In addition to this stakeholder engagement, the Accessibility Plan includes findings from the following studies completed by stakeholders:

- Research completed by Callie Scott, Dr. Amanda Casey & Dr. Mikiko Terashima, focused on accessibility within the Town & featuring consultation with 12 residents with disabilities
- Recommendations prepared by Antigonish Challenger Baseball, focused on the accessibility of recreation, based on online consultation with residents involved with Challenger Baseball

## Key Themes

Many stakeholders noted that Antigonish is a hub for the disability community because of the presence of institutions such as the Canadian Association of Community Living Antigonish and L'Arche Antigonish. Despite this, many stakeholders felt that the Town is generally not a welcoming space for community members with disabilities.

Through stakeholder engagement, it was clear that there is a perceived general distrust of the Town's processes among some community members. Council has made a commitment of transparency and it will be crucial for the Town to make more of an effort to establish a stronger foundation of accountability to strengthen and in some cases rebuild trust moving forward.

Themes identified throughout the initial engagement process included:

### **Awareness & Education**

- Need for public education on disability & accessibility
- Stigmas & discrimination faced by people with disabilities
- Lack of transparency & accountability from the Town
- Need for collaboration among local and regional institutions
- Lack of involvement of people with disabilities

### **Goods & Services**

- Barriers to accessing basic needs
- Limitations in programming
- Lack of supports for mental health & addictions
- Issues with winter maintenance

### **Information & Communications**

- Accessibility of information & promotions
- Access to internet & technology
- Need for inclusive public engagement
- Use of alternative community technologies

### **Transportation**

- Gaps in transit service & accessibility
- Issues with accessible parking
- Barriers within pedestrian infrastructure

### **Employment**

- Lack of supports for employees (both in job searches and employment)
- Lack of resources for employers

### **The Built Environment**

- Safety issues
- Barriers within local businesses and institutions
- Discrimination & accessibility barriers in housing
- Barriers in recreation facilities

A more detailed report of stakeholder input can be found in the [Engagement Summary Report](#), and a second round of engagement will give stakeholders and the public an opportunity to provide feedback on the content included in this Accessibility Plan.

For a full list of participants, see "13. Appendix B: Engagement Participants" on page 102.

## **Engagement on the Draft Report**

A second round of engagement provided an opportunity for community members to review the Draft Accessibility Plan and provide input on the document. This engagement took place in the fall of 2022, and resulted in 25 interactions.

Engagement on the draft included a public open house held at Antigonish Town & County Library on September 13th, 2022, and email correspondence with community members. Copies of the Accessibility Plan and Summary were available online, including large print and audio versions, and hard copies were made available at the Town Hall and Town & County Library.

Key themes identified through this round of engagement included:

### **Awareness & Education**

- Importance of public education and cultural shifts

### **Goods & Services**

- The need to advocate for a vulnerable persons registry
- The lack of accessibility requirements in funding criteria
- Cost of accessible recreation programs

### **Information & Communications**

- The benefits of ASL vlogs and alternative forms of communication
- Need for better transparency and accountability around accessibility

### **Transportation**

- Difficulties accessing accessible & reliable taxis
- Need for bike signals at key intersections
- Concerns around pedestrian injuries and fatalities
- Underutilized accessible transit services
- Issues with parking enforcement

### **The Built Environment**

- Priorities around retrofitting old buildings

### **General Feedback on the Draft Plan**

- Overemphasis on past achievements
- Need for recognition of local accessibility advocates

## 4. Awareness & Education

### Commitment

The Town of Antigonish will work with people with disabilities and organizations focused on inclusion to educate the community and spread awareness about the necessity and importance of accessibility.

### Responsibilities

Town responsibilities and offerings related to Awareness & Education include:

- Hosting the Accessibility Committee, as well as other Boards and Committees
- Creating policies, by-laws, plans, and strategies which influence accessibility
- Conducting regular public consultation in relation to policy, plans, development, and more
- Providing training for staff and Council
- Providing funding and partnerships to local organizations involved in accessibility

### Key Barriers

- A lack of understanding of the meaning and importance of accessibility
- Ignorance around the diversity and characteristics of various disabilities
- Stigma and discrimination associated with disability
- Other forms of discrimination, including racist and colonial systems
- A lack of involvement & representation of people with disabilities in local governance
- Limited collaboration between local institutions

### Key Achievements

- Park Bench Players (a local acting troupe dedicated to reducing stigmas around mental health) worked with the Town to install a new bench on Main Street, dedicated to the group
- In 2017, the Town formed the Antigonish Accessibility Committee, dedicated to advising Council, gathering information, and providing public education on accessibility matters

## **Policies**

### **P4.1 Engage community members with disabilities throughout all stages**

- Build relationships with community members with disabilities, and engage them throughout the process of implementing this Accessibility Plan
- Where feasible, offer compensation to people with lived experience of disability who participate in one-on-one engagement outside paid employment
- Follow recommendations included in the BC Centre for Disease Control's [Peer Payment Standards](#), or any other relevant documents

### **P4.2 Incorporate an inclusion lens in all policy and regulations**

- Consider the principles of an accessible and inclusive community throughout all activities
- Review all existing and future Town policy and regulations to ensure they align with goals set out in this Accessibility Plan
- Ensure Town policy and regulations work towards accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities, and other equity-seeking groups

### **P4.3 Collaborate with local partners, service providers, and others to enable accessibility**

- Place collaboration and community at the heart of all accessibility improvements
- Work with accessibility professionals and residents with disabilities to share knowledge and resources, and workshop solutions

**Potential partners:** Local advocates, local service providers, the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, Paqtnkek First Nation Community, St Francis Xavier University

### **P4.4 Communicate reasoning and benefits for accessibility improvements as they happen**

To improve awareness around accessibility:

- Publicize and promote any accessibility benefits associated with new investments or changes to Town policies or operations
- Communicate these benefits through staff reports, presentations, and budget documentation, as well as social media and press releases

### **P4.5 Continue to support Town staff and Council in participating in community initiatives**

The success of the Accessibility Plan depends on the strength of the Town's relationship building and community. To foster these relationships and encourage continuous learning:

- Continue to support staff and Council in their participation in community events and initiatives related to accessibility and inclusion

## Actions

### Education

#### A4.1 Provide training to public-facing Town staff and Council

- Offer inclusion training to Town staff and elected officials who interact directly with the public
- Provide education on how to respectfully and effectively communicate with people with various disabilities, and educate participants on the principles of diversity and inclusion
- Consider offering other professional development such as training in deescalation, non-violent communication, first aid, and mental health first aid
- Offer task-specific training depending on the staff role, such as how to be a sighted guide
- In consultation with the Accessibility Committee, set expectations for the level of training

**Potential partners:** ReachAbility NS, Alzheimer’s NS, The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, The NS Human Rights Commission, The Rick Hansen Foundation, The Immigrant Services Association of NS (ISANS), The Youth Project, St. John Ambulance, Centre for Nonviolent Communication

#### A4.2 Establish a public education campaign

- Explore methods and opportunities to educate the public on disability and address stigmas
- This could include social media campaigns, public workshops, talks and events hosted in partnership with local organizations

One form of awareness event is disability simulation, such as walk and rolls which invite participants to try getting around in a wheelchair for a day, or wearing goggles which simulate vision loss. There are varying opinions about these activities within the disability community, and some feel that these events can reinforce negative stereotypes. While some believe that these experiential learning activities can have positive outcomes, others suggest that the best way to identify improvements is simply to listen to and engage with residents with disabilities on their lived experience.

**Potential partners:** community members with disabilities, local organizations involved in accessibility & advocacy

### **A4.3 Review and examine new data & research**

To measure the success of any accessibility improvements and better understand needs of the local community and current guidelines and best practices:

- Collect and analyze data and research as it becomes available

This could include:

- Census data
- NS Health Authority Health Profiles
- National research including that published by local academics
- Reports published by local groups and service providers
- Voluntary questionnaires for Town employees



A person and their guide dog stand on a wharf  
Photo: Wikimedia user Raymond Shobe

## Government Roles

### A4.4 Review the role and administration of the Accessibility Committee

The Town of Antigonish established an Accessibility Committee in 2017, with the task of:

- Advising Council on accessibility matters
- Gathering information on accessibility best practices
- Providing a forum to hear and consider the views of any community member or group
- Educating the public on the [Nova Scotia Accessibility Act](#) and local accessibility issues

To ensure mandates of the Committee are being met and their actions are both transparent and accountable to the public:

- Review the Committee's responsibilities and reporting
- Review the Committee's meeting schedule
- Review the Committee's public communications
- Continue to monitor requirements established by any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations
- Continue to monitor the proportion of people with disabilities present on the Committee (as required by the *Accessibility Act Section 44 (2)*)
- Explore opportunities to work with other local Accessibility Committees

**Potential partners:** Accessibility Committees within the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, the Town & County Library, and StFX University

### A4.5 Encourage and support participation of people with disabilities throughout Town Committees and Boards

All aspects of local government should reflect the diversity of the community and be welcoming and inclusive for people with disabilities. Policy should be reviewed to ensure that the following practices are in place:

- Work with community members with disabilities to ensure that all Committees and Boards are accessible and respectful environments
- Share new openings widely through the Town's website, social media, local service providers and organizations, and fliers posted at key destinations
- Offer an opportunity for prospective participants to share any accessibility concerns or accommodation requests
- Consider establishing a budget for accessibility accommodations, including technology loans
- Offer flexible meeting formats (for example, providing agendas in advance, setting meeting durations, allowing participants to provide additional input following the meeting)

**Potential partners:** community members with disabilities, Town staff & Council, all participants on Town Committees and Boards

#### **A4.6 Establish clear staff responsibilities for an Accessibility Coordinator or appointed designate**

The role of an Accessibility Coordinator is recommended by the [Nova Scotia Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Municipalities](#). To explore this recommendation:

- Consider assigning the responsibilities of an Accessibility Coordinator to a staff member, a public-facing point-person for local accessibility concerns

Responsibilities of the Accessibility Coordinator could include:

- Lead implementation of the Accessibility Plan, and ensure this is aligned with Town budgets
- Source and apply for funding opportunities related to the implementation of the Plan
- Lead community engagement related to implementation of the Plan
- Monitor and report to Council on the progress of the Accessibility Plan implementation
- Work alongside the Chair of the Accessibility Committee and be the staff representative liaising between the Committee, staff and Council.
- Work with the Accessibility Committee to identify accessibility barriers as new Town policies, regulations, and programs are developed, and provide advice and direction to Council
- Respond to public complaints and concerns relating to accessibility
- Keep up-to-date on Provincial and Federal accessibility legislation, and coordinate with other departments to ensure the Town is in compliance with requirements
- Connect residents with local service providers
- Help residents with navigating Town processes, funding, and other resources

## Resources & Programs

### A4.7 Explore opportunities to fund accessible equipment

The cost of accessible equipment can be prohibitive for some people, and may limit daily activities for those who cannot afford it. To address this barrier:

- Explore opportunities to fund the purchase or repair of accessible or adaptive equipment through the Community Grants Program, including equipment or technology assisting with mobility, transportation, daily tasks, and sport and recreation



A person in an electric scooter walks their dogs.  
Photo: PxFuel

# 5. Goods & Services

## Commitment

The Town will work to ensure that all people with disabilities have equitable access to any goods and services provided by the Town. The Town will also advocate to the best of its ability and scope on behalf of community members with disabilities to ensure access to basic needs, and support local businesses and organizations providing these essential goods and services.

## Responsibilities

Town responsibilities and offerings related to Goods & Services include:

- Hosting Town meetings and events (including Council)
- Providing programming for the public
- Providing funding opportunities for organizations and local residents
- Connecting people to resources not offered by the Town
- Providing winter maintenance, including snow removal

## Key Barriers

- COVID-19 further isolated many people with disabilities
- Some face difficulties accessing basic needs due to availability, cost, or discrimination
- Programs and services do not have resources to support people with disabilities and other equity-seeking groups
- Accessibility is not prioritized enough in the Town's current processes

## Key Achievements

- In 2021, the Town partnered with Challenger Baseball to work towards improving access to accessible equipment
- The Town administers Community Grants to local organizations which respond to the needs of the community
- End Poverty Antigonish set up a Community Fridge where people can donate or accept free food and other goods (not a Town-led initiative)

## Actions

### Town Events & Programming

#### A5.1 Ensure accessibility of Town meetings and events

Public engagement policies should be updated to ensure public meetings and events are accessible. Policy should consider provincial recommendations such as:

- Consider the accessibility of venues
- Work with accessible transit providers to offer and promote free transportation where possible
- Arrange the space with accessibility in mind
- Explore options for offering disability supports and accessible communications (like ASL, closed captioning)
- Promote events in advance to allow participants to schedule transportation and request individual accommodations
- Provide accessibility information about the space (or online platform) in promotions
- Ensure all guests and participants are treated with respect

Working with local organizations and service providers working with people with disabilities may also be helpful where assistance is needed with:

- Planning or hosting events and meetings
- Distributing printed materials for events (such as event posters, surveys) at key destinations
- Assisting residents in accessing online services and events

**Potential partners:** Town & County Library, local community centres and service providers

**Guidelines:** [Nova Scotia Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events](#)



A sign language interpreter translates a presenter's talk.  
Photo: Nova Scotia Community College

### **A5.2 Provide additional programming for seniors within the community**

- Explore opportunities to provide new programming and recreation for seniors which encourages social engagement and community building

### **A5.3 Ensure Town programming has supports available for participants with disabilities**

While Town programming welcomes all participants, a review of offerings could ensure these programs also have the resources to support participants with disabilities. Supports could include:

- Short check-ins or orientations available for participants before program start date
- Extra staff available to support and encourage participants
- Smaller group options to support people with memory-related or developmental disabilities , people with mental illness, and people who are learning English
- Staff trained to offer clear and simple communication
- Accommodations available on request (such as ASL interpretation, adaptable equipment)
- Free or affordable registration fees wherever possible

**Guidelines:** Town and County's guide for inclusive recreation



A group of older adults walk with walking poles.  
Photo: Piqsels

## Financial Supports

### **A5.4 Support expanded sensory-friendly programs**

Sensory-friendly programs limit sensory input and improve accessibility for people with sensory issues (e.g. people with autism or anxiety), and can also improve the experience for people living with dementia. Within Antigonish there are currently quiet hockey games, and sensory-friendly hours at some grocery stores and the local library. This programming can include:

- Turning off background noise, announcements, and other sudden noises
- Dimming lights and turning off flashing or flickering lights
- Creating a scent-free environment

To support accessibility improvements for people with sensory issues, the Town should explore opportunities to support organizations offering sensory-friendly programming such as:

- Sensory-friendly hours
- Sensory-friendly spaces (such as a room or tent)
- Sensory-friendly kits for loan (including noise-canceling headphones, fidget toys, stress balls)

### **A5.5 Continue to provide funding opportunities for organizations offering essential services**

- Continue to provide funding opportunities through the Community Grants Program for organizations that provide free or affordable essential services to residents (including but not limited to transportation, food, housework, health care, and home care)

### **A5.6 Support new mental health services within the Town**

There is currently a lack of services and supports for people with mental illness living in Antigonish. The Town could support the provision of these services through the following:

- Define and permit mental health services and harm reduction services within the Land Use By-law, under the definition of "Health Care Services" or separately

### **A5.7 Establish accessibility & inclusion criteria for funding programs**

The Town offers several funding opportunities for local groups, including the Community Grants Program. Additional evaluation criteria should be added to ensure applicants consider accessibility and inclusion in their proposals.

## Town Services

### A5.8 Expand free equipment loan program

Equipment loan programs enable access to recreation and active transportation for low-income residents, let people try new things without a financial commitment, and allow children to easily switch out equipment as they grow. The Town's current program offers snowshoes, skis, and nordic walking poles to residents who fill out a request form, and the library system also has its own program. The Town could expand this program or partner with external organizations and/or businesses with offerings for all seasons such as:

- Bicycles (including e-bikes, fat bikes, tandem bicycles, tricycles, quadricycles, and accessories)
- Skateboards, scooters, roller skates, and walking poles (including adaptive models)
- Assistive devices such as wheelchairs or walkers, as determined by the Accessibility Committee
- Yoga mats, lawn games, sports equipment, boats and water equipment
- Play boxes at local parks, playgrounds, and fields
- Activities and sensory kits for pick-up at Town Hall and the local library

Other opportunities to expand the equipment loan program include:

- Explore partnering with the County to offer residents combined access to both programs
- Explore partnering with institutions such as libraries and community centres to provide pick-up and drop-off locations for equipment
- Consider hosting introductory sessions to help people learn how to use the equipment.

**Potential partners:** Antigonish Rent-all Equipment, Municipality of the County of Antigonish, regional libraries and community centres



Two people ride on a tandem bicycle.  
Photo: MaxPixel

### **A5.9 Update Winter Maintenance Strategy**

Winter maintenance is essential in cold climates like this, and the Town provides snow clearing services for roads and sidewalks throughout the community, which it prioritizes according to the street type. When winter maintenance is not managed effectively, harsh weather conditions can be a major barrier for many people with disabilities. People who use mobility devices, or have disabilities that affect their mobility, vision, or balance are often most impacted by these conditions. To ensure these maintenance activities prioritize accessibility:

- Consider updating and expanding the Town’s Winter Maintenance Strategy to clarify protocol and public communications around snow and ice removal and storage as well as other winter maintenance activities
- Within the Winter Maintenance Strategy, review opportunities to explore opportunities to prioritizing pedestrian facilities, ramps and accessible entrances, transit stops, and accessible parking and pathways
- Continue to assign appropriate Town budget for implementation of the Winter Maintenance Strategy

**Potential partners:** Antigonish Community Transit

**Guidelines:** Refer to any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations

### **A5.10 Advocate to provincial partners for a vulnerable persons registry**

Recent events have made clear the need to improve emergency planning and communications for people with disabilities. Having a local organization or provincial entity establish a vulnerable persons registry could help establish personalized emergency plans (including accessible transportation to comfort centres as needed) and enable regular check-ins. The Town should consider advocating to provincial partners to develop a voluntary list which provides participants’ names, addresses, and relevant disability information.

**Potential partners:** Nova Scotia Emergency Management Operations



Main Street Antigonish after a snowfall  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons user Brendan Riley

# 6. Information & Communications

## Commitment

The Town will ensure that people with disabilities can receive and understand information provided by the Town. The Town will also ensure that people with disabilities are directly consulted on Town matters and can easily share input and information.

## Responsibilities

Town responsibilities and offerings related to Goods & Services include:

- Promoting public notices through Town social media accounts
- Providing information through the Town website
- Offering public resources both online and in-print
- Communicating with the public directly through staff and Council
- Conducting regular public consultation in relation to policy, plans, development, and more

## Key Barriers

- Information is provided in limited formats and languages
- Alternative communication technologies are not available at Town buildings
- Online communications are not accessible to those without access to internet or technology
- Town processes and offerings are difficult to navigate
- A lack of information about the accessibility of events, programs, spaces
- Community engagement often excludes people with disabilities

## Key Achievements

- The Town has marketing & communications staff focused on promoting public information
- The Town & County People's Place Library helps users access information on local programs and events, provides access to wifi and technology, as well as support accessing services online

## **Policies**

### **P6.1 Build and maintain relationships with people with disabilities**

In order to improve communications with the community, it will be important to build trust and establish strong relationships with people with disabilities and other local residents:

- Recognize the importance of intangible staff responsibilities related to relationship building
- Prioritize the ongoing time commitment necessary to maintain these connections

### **P6.2 Identify accessibility champions in the community**

Collaboration is essential, and it will be beneficial to identify organizations and individuals within the town who are serious about accessibility and inclusion:

- Seek out these accessibility champions who can help advance goals and implement actions

### **P6.3 Directly consult equity-seeking groups and communities**

Engagement should aim to make all voices heard, particularly voices of marginalized groups. In ensuring that people with disabilities are engaged on all matters related to accessibility, it will also be important to act in accordance with the [Nova Scotia Accessibility Act](#), recognizing the diversity among people with disabilities. Because people with disabilities are not a uniform group, there are many connecting barriers to inclusion which may affect their ability to fully participate in society.

- Directly consult with equity-seeking groups and communities, throughout the implementation of this Accessibility Plan, as well as any other community engagement processes
- Explore physical, economic, geographic, cultural, and social barriers

Some guiding questions for this engagement could include:

- What activities, resources, services would you like to see?
- What stops you from accessing existing activities, resources, services?
- How can the Town's activities, resources, services work better for you?

## Actions

### General Communications

#### A6.1 Improve consistency of communications around Town Council, Boards, and Committees

Update Town policies to consider the following:

- Post agendas a minimum of 3 days before scheduled meetings and minutes a minimum of 1 week after approval
- Ensure the Town Council and Committee calendar is regularly updated
- Consider establishing policy for making public meetings available online (such as live streams, public video calls, or recordings).
- Allow the public to request meeting materials in alternative formats through the Deputy Clerk

#### A6.2 Ensure all Town communications are easy to read

Update communications policies to consider the following:

- Write Town communications in plain language so that text is clear for readers of all levels
- Follow clear print guidelines so that text is legible for people with low vision or colour blindness
- Wherever possible, incorporate visuals to accompany text

This action could be accompanied by:

- Training for communications staff in plain language and clear print standards
- The development of a Town Style Guide
- Procuring professional services to edit templates (such as forms and contracts)

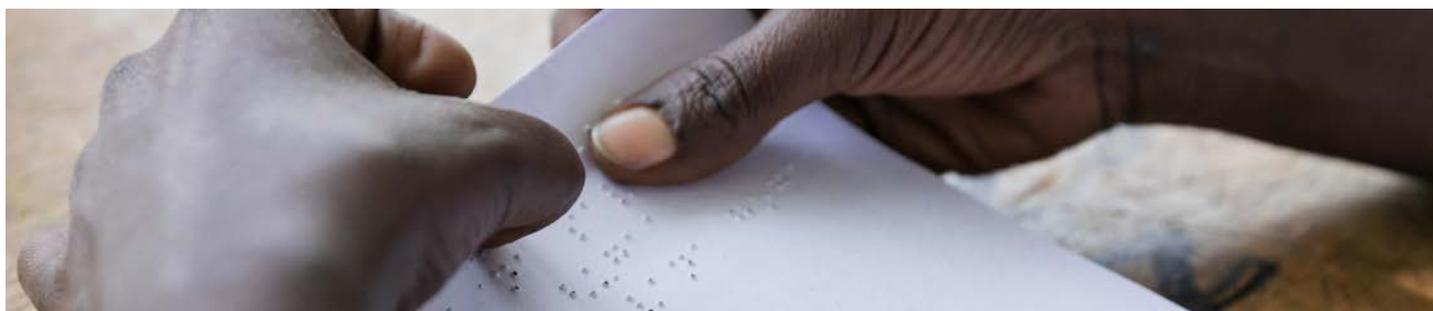
**Potential partners:** Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) clear print guidelines, Inclusion NS plain language translation services

#### A6.3 Provide alternative versions of Town resources on request

Update communications policies to consider the following:

Town resources such as permits, forms, and recreation guides which are available to the public in hard copy should also be provided in alternative formats on request. This could include:

- Large print
- Braille
- Audio files



Someone reads a page of Braille text.

Photo: Flickr user Global Partnership for Education

#### **A6.4 Share all information in multiple formats**

The Town currently provides information about local activities and services in a number of formats, and should continue to ensure that communications are available both on and offline where possible, to reach those who do not have access to internet or technology. The Town should review communications policies to ensure information is shared as widely as possible to promote local activities and services, and communicate important public notices. Options may include:

- Town website and social media
- Other local organization's websites, social media accounts, and mailing lists
- Newspaper and radio ads
- Posters and pamphlets in key locations around the Town (including Town Hall, libraries, places of worship, the hospital)
- Mail-outs to local residents (for essential information)
- Word of mouth through service providers

#### **Online Communications**

##### **A6.5 Integrate alternative formats of online documents**

Essential Town documents should be accessible to all community members, and ASL interpretation can make longer documents easier to navigate for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. One example is ASL vlogs; these are videos in which sign language interpreters sign the content of a document. Other formats could include large print and audio files. The Town could commission alternative formats of key online resources such as the Accessibility Plan, Municipal Planning Strategy, and key by-laws.

**Potential Partners:** Society of Deaf or Hard of Hearing NS, CNIB

##### **A6.6 Ensure the Town website is compliant with web accessibility standards**

The Town's website is used by residents, staff, business owners, and visitors, and contains information on the following:

- Council
- Regulations and policies
- Goods and services offered by the Town
- Activities and destinations within the Town
- Public notices

To improve accessibility of this important resource, the Town should:

- Work to get the website and any online forms up to accessibility standards
- Improve screen reader compatibility of digital documents published by the Town
- Test documents with end users wherever possible
- This action should be accompanied by training for relevant Town staff, as necessary

**Guidelines:** Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

### **A6.7 Post information online about the accessibility of Town facilities**

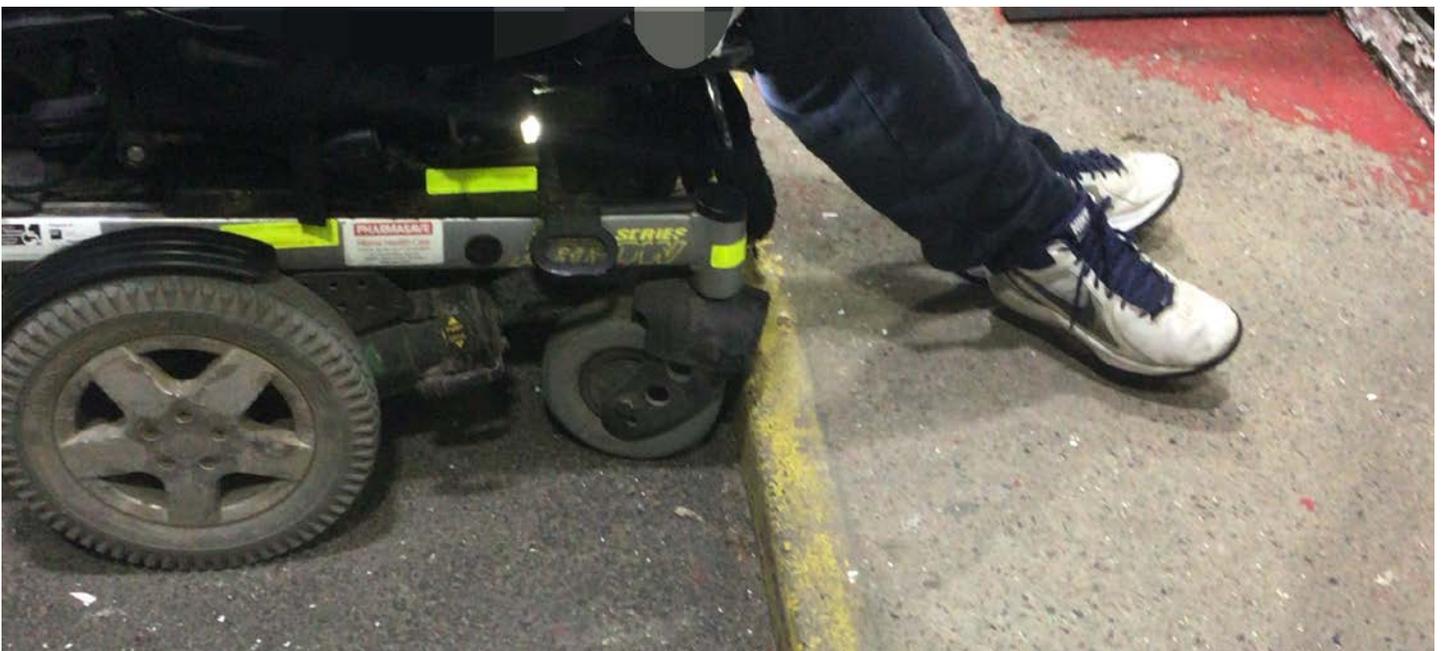
Providing accessibility information up front can help community members and visitors plan their schedule ahead of time, and it can also help orient new residents who do not know the area. The Town could expand on available information by providing some of the following on their website:

- The address of Town facilities, programs and events, accompanied by simple directions
- Any connected accessible parking, bus stops, pedestrian routes
- Number of universal access or accessible washrooms, as well as gender affirming washrooms
- Availability of alternative communication technologies
- Any barriers such as steps or manual doors
- Width of corridors and pathways
- Sounds and other stimulation (this could include listing quieter hours)
- Nova Scotia Health guidelines, as required
- Temporary barriers or changes, including construction or renovations
- Other relevant information

### **A6.8 Provide accessible captions for all social media posts**

The Town's social media accounts include Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. These accounts can be an effective way of communicating key information and often reach a wider audience than the Town website. To improve accessibility of these formats for people with sensory disabilities, communications policies should be updated to consider the following recommendations:

- Caption all photos posted to Twitter or Facebook with a short one- or two-sentence description of the image and its purpose
- Provide closed captions on all Youtube uploads



"[this] bump [is bad because I] can't get in [to the business]... [it] needs a ramp"  
Photo & caption: StFX Photo Voice research participant

## Technology

### A6.9 Provide alternative communication technologies in all Town buildings

Alternative communication technologies are used by people with sensory disabilities for communication, navigation, and emergency alerts. These include:

- Flashing intercoms and doorbells
- Visual fire alarms
- Assistive listening systems like audio loops and FM systems which improve sound for people who are hard of hearing
- Braille and raised lettering on signage
- Tactile indicators which warn of obstacles like stairs or roadways

As Town buildings are upgraded, the Town should consider installing accessible technologies where relevant, both in areas accessed by the public and by staff or volunteers. Improvements which address safety concerns should be prioritized.

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines



A sign indicates that an audio loop is available at a service counter.

Photo: Flickr user Melinda Young Stuart

### **A6.10 Improve the acoustics of Town meeting spaces**

Good acoustics are particularly important to people who are hard of hearing, as well as people who rely on audio cues in their environment such as those who are blind or have low vision. Good acoustics can also minimize distraction and sensory input for people with disabilities such as Autism or ADHD. Improvements should prioritize meeting spaces and could include:

- Carpeting (preferably a low pile which is wheelchair accessible)
- Curtains and upholstered furniture
- Double glazed windows and solid core doors
- Acoustic panels on ceilings and/or walls
- Layouts which provide separation between uses and separate loud technology, such as copiers
- Speakers and paging systems which are adjustable within each room or area
- Any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating

## **Community Engagement**

### **A6.11 Host inclusive and creative community engagement**

Effective engagement with community groups and stakeholders contributes to a shared vision. Good community engagement should be strategic and make it easy and interesting to participate.

There are many possible innovative methods for creative and effective engagement. The most appropriate methods will depend on a thorough analysis of the issues and the target audiences. To avoid engagement fatigue, where a community has been over-consulted on the same issues with little action in response, it is helpful to know the context surrounding the issue, and be clear about the scope of the engagement.

To ensure engagement is inclusive and equitable:

- Directly engage community members with lived experience of disability before completing any work on issues of accessibility (“P4.1 Engage community members with disabilities throughout all stages” on page 17)
- Provide multiple opportunities for community members to participate, including online and in-person options
- Consider the purpose of engagement, including key messages to share and questions that need to be answered
- Understand the history and context surrounding the relevant issues
- Review any input previously collected by the Town or other projects, studies, etc.

**Guidelines:** [Nova Scotia Guide to Hosting Accessible Meetings and Events](#)

# 7. Transportation

## Commitment

The Town will work with people with disabilities and community organizations to make it safer, easier, and more comfortable to get around within the town.

## Responsibilities

Town responsibilities and offerings related to Goods & Services include:

- Providing partial funding for community transit services
- Construction and maintenance of public roads within the Town (not including roads on private property such as StFX University campus, and Antigonish Market Square Mall)
- Creating standards and guidelines for the construction of private roads, pedestrian connections, and parking through the Land Use By-law, Subdivision By-law, Design Guidelines
- Construction and maintenance of Town-owned trails and paths
- Construction and maintenance of sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike routes on public roads
- Construction and maintenance of pedestrian amenities like seating, washrooms, and lighting
- Construction and maintenance of on-street parking and Town-owned public parking lots

## Key Barriers

- Roads and pedestrian infrastructure are in poor condition
- Pedestrian infrastructure is not accessible for people with disabilities
- Major gaps in the pedestrian network
- Traffic creates hazards for people with disabilities
- Community transit has limited service and issues with accessibility
- Limited access to transportation is a major barrier for employment
- Accessible parking is limited and poorly designed

## Key Achievements

- Seniors CARE Van and Antigonish Community Transit are financially supported by the Town to provide wheelchair accessible transportation
- The Town established free public parking for vehicles with an accessible parking plate or permit, under the most recent Parking Metre By-law
- The Town installed audible cues at signalized crosswalks, and flashing beacons at key mid-block crosswalks
- The Town approved budgeting for sidewalk improvements and intersection upgrades, including a review of traffic markings at crosswalks and the construction of curb cuts
- The Town is in the process of improving mobility in the Malcom Court area, including sidewalks designed with accessibility in mind
- The Town is in the process of developing 2 kilometres of multi-use paths and bike lanes, which will improve safety and comfort for pedestrians and cyclists and follow accessibility guidelines

## Actions

### Pedestrian Environments

#### A7.1 Apply traffic calming on residential streets

Traffic concerns are a major barrier for people with disabilities. It can especially dangerous for children with developmental or intellectual disabilities or for people with memory-related disabilities such as dementia who may tend to wander off, or for people with sensory disabilities who are not able to see or hear unexpected cars coming. Traffic can also be a major barrier to being physically active. Speed can be controlled through a combination of education, enforcement, and engineering. Priority locations for traffic calming include:

- Dangerous intersections, particularly those identified by residents with disabilities
- Streets where schools, community amenities, and trail heads are located,
- Streets where sidewalks are not feasible

To prioritize investment, the Town should work towards gathering traffic data and may consider an application process for residents to apply for traffic calming. A new policy should be considered for the development of traffic management which could consider the following:

- Visual elements such as street trees and reduced building setbacks in commercial areas
- Raised crosswalks and “bump-outs” that extend the sidewalk curb further into the crosswalk
- Speed bumps and speed tables
- Speed radar signs in areas with frequent offenses
- Strategic parking which allows people to park their vehicles before entering the downtown
- Reduced speed limits of 30km in all school zones and near community centres, 24/7

**Guidelines:** Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) Guidelines; Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; CNIB’s Clearing Our Path



A bump-out extends the sidewalk at a mid-block crosswalk.  
Photo: Wikimedia user Richard Drdul

## A7.2 Create a clear path of travel on all sidewalks

Throughout the Town, many sidewalks are in need of repairs and improvements. Maintenance is ongoing, but key priorities for accessibility fall into three categories:

- Narrow sidewalks
- Uneven surfacing
- Obstacles in the path

These problems make sidewalks less comfortable for everyone but can create serious hazards for people who use mobility devices like wheelchairs or walkers; people who are blind or low vision; and people who have pain-related disabilities which make bumps and cracks difficult to navigate. Where sidewalks are not usable, people who use wheelchairs may have to enter the roadway, putting them at further risk. Sidewalks should be upgraded to accessibility standards as they are scheduled for renewal, and safety concerns (such as curb cuts) should be prioritized, starting with the downtown core and supportive housing communities. The Town should adopt a standard for sidewalks which could include:

- Widen sidewalks where possible
- Repair sidewalk slabs which have raised or sunk when planning for upgrades/new construction
- Ensure sidewalk slabs provide an even surface
- Continue to sweep concrete sidewalk slabs to improve traction
- Provide good drainage on all sidewalks, streets, and parking areas
- Locate street furniture out of the path of travel and cut back any greenery or branches
- Ensure tree branches and brush are cut back to avoid overhead obstacles
- Ensure grate openings do not create hazards
- Review the sidewalk maintenance schedule
- Advocate to ensure privately-owned sidewalks are also accessible & consistent

**Potential partners:** Saint Francis Xavier University, Antigonish Market Square Mall

**Guidelines:** Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) Guidelines; Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; [CNIB's Clearing Our Path](#)



A sidewalk on Main Street Antigonish is raised above the adjacent bricks, creating a hazard.

### **A7.3 Ensure accessible pedestrian signals and clear path of travel at crosswalks**

While any intersection is legally considered a crosswalk in Nova Scotia, marked crosswalks have signs and painted lines indicating the crossing, and may include flashing lights. Many of the crosswalks in Antigonish are unmarked, and where marked crosswalks do exist the paint is often worn off through wear and tear. COVID-19 supply chain disruptions have created a shortage of road paint, leading to further maintenance delays. Accessible marked crosswalks should be provided at intersections and mid-block where there are major destinations.

To improve the safety and accessibility of crosswalks within Antigonish, crosswalk construction and improvements can be aligned with maintenance schedules. The Town should formally adopt a standard for crosswalks which could include:

- Provide and maintain level curb cuts at all intersections
- Install high-contrast tactile indicators at curb cuts
- Ensure curb cuts are aligned on either side of a crossing
- Prioritize the repainting of marked crosswalks
- Continue to install accessible pedestrian signals (APS) at all crossings
- Consider installing raised crosswalks at busy or mid-block crosswalks
- Ensure all crosswalk buttons are placed at an accessible height and area is clear of snow & ice
- Consider installing advanced crossing signals at busy intersections
- Extend crossing times to ensure slower pedestrians have time to cross safely
- Work with key partners to ensure privately-owned crosswalks are accessible & consistent

**Potential partners:** Saint Francis Xavier University, Antigonish Market Square Mall, St. Martha's Regional Hospital

**Guidelines:** Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) Guidelines; Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; CNIB's Clearing Our Path



Tactile indicators are placed at the curb cuts of a crosswalk in contrasting colours.

Photo: Flickr user Dylan Passmore

#### **A7.4 Expand the Town's sidewalk network**

Neighbourhoods and streets without sidewalks create physically isolated areas within the town and county. Many residents who live outside town boundaries rely on the Town of Antigonish to access services, schools, and employment, but are often forced to drive into town due to a lack of sidewalks. This is particularly difficult for people with disabilities affecting their mobility, and those who do not have access to a vehicle. To complete this network, the Town should consider the following opportunities:

- Work with the County and Province to strategically review the existing network and explore opportunities to construct new sidewalks connecting key areas and amenities within and surrounding the town
- Prioritize sidewalk extensions around Mount Cameron, Annie's Bluff, Hawthorne, Brierly Brook, Hospital Hill, Greenwold Avenue, and other fringe areas.

**Potential partners:** The Municipality of the County of Antigonish, NS Department of Public Works

#### **A7.5 Regulate construction zones and patios to limit pedestrian disruptions**

Temporary changes to the sidewalk network can create major disruptions, and alternate routes often do not consider accessibility. This includes areas where construction zones shut down sidewalks, and where seasonal patios pop up along the Main Street sidewalk. These can create barriers for people who use mobility devices where there is a height difference or narrowing between the sidewalk and temporary walkway, and people who are blind or low vision can have trouble navigating new turns. Patios themselves should also be accessible for people who use mobility devices, and provide sufficient clear width for anyone to move around.

To limit sidewalk disruptions, the Town currently requires tendered construction work to provide considerations for alternate routes, but construction on private property is exempted. The Town should consider developing By-laws and/or design guidelines which may:

- Require alternate route plans submitted by permit applicants looking to close sidewalks or crosswalks or patios
- Establish accessibility requirements for the design of alternate routes and patios (including cane-detectable barriers, clear width, and level connections to the sidewalk)
- Prohibit the encroachment or removal of accessible parking spaces
- Establish a process where applications for temporary routes or patios are reviewed by the Accessibility Committee

Prior to establishing any regulations, the Town should work with local businesses and the local planning commission to ensure any new requirements are feasible and enforceable.

**Potential partners:** Local restaurants and bars, developers, and construction companies

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; [CNIB's Clearing Our Path](#)

## **A7.6 Make accessibility improvements to the Landing Trail**

Trails are used for a variety of transportation modes and purposes, so a variety of trail types is ideal for any community. However, trails which are paved, wider, and more level, can be used by a wide range of people, including those with mobility concerns or those who use mobility devices, those who are blind or low-vision, families with strollers, small children, as well as cyclists and skateboarders.

The Town owns and manages a small number of trails and pathways, including a portion of the Landing Trail. In order to create accessible trail options, the Town is currently working with the County to improve accessibility on the Landing Trail through:

- Resurfacing of the Town's trailhead area and parking
- Establishing a maintenance agreement between trail managers

The Town should continue to work with other trail managers to explore additional accessibility improvements. These could include:

- Directional signage
- Universal washroom facilities
- Various seating options and shelter from the elements
- Accessible viewing platforms

Accessibility should also be a consideration for future trails and pathways.

**Potential partners:** The Municipality of the County of Antigonish

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating; CNIB's Clearing Our Path



The Landing Trail in Antigonish is a wide gravel path.

### **A7.7 Integrate Vision Zero principles into road design**

People with disabilities have been found to be at higher risk of pedestrian collisions, and avoiding future injuries and fatalities is a priority for the Town. Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. This strategy sees these collisions as preventable and takes a systems approach to improving road design. Vision Zero principles can be integrated into road design and road improvements to help protect pedestrians.

## **Public Spaces**

### **A7.8 Provide seating and amenities within public spaces**

To improve the accessibility of trails and streets, the Town should pair sidewalk improvements with street furniture and other amenities. These amenities improve accessibility and comfort for all community members and provide places to stop and rest. They can also reduce the stigma associated with “loitering” often placed on marginalized groups, and instead support the public use of public spaces. Lively and active streets provide “eyes on the street” which create safe and welcoming communities.

Where feasible, benches along trails should be placed approximately 600 metres apart, and within community cores benches should be placed approximately 400 metres apart. In order to be useful, benches must be carefully placed with special consideration to comfort and view. The following criteria could be considered:

- Place seating on a firm and level surface
- Face south for peak solar exposure
- Provide windbreaks such as plant beds to provide protection from the elements
- Do not block pedestrian thoroughfare
- Provide a clear space next to the seating, to accommodate all sizes of assistive devices
- Select benches which do not have center arm rests or spikes
- Provide a variety of seating options where possible, including with and without armrests
- Where picnic tables are placed, they should be wheelchair accessible designs

Other amenities could include:

- Charging stations for equipment such as phones, electric scooters, wheelchairs, and e-bikes
- Bicycle parking and storage which is easy to use and does not require lifting
- Bike repair stations
- Waste stations

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; [CNIB's Clearing Our Path](#)

### **A7.9 Provide year-round universal public washrooms**

Without the presence of accessible, gender-affirming washrooms, many people are excluded from public spaces. Everyone depends on washrooms, but these facilities are especially important for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities (including invisible disabilities such as Crohn's or IBS), individuals experiencing homelessness, seniors, trans and gender non-conforming individuals, women, and children. Where possible, public washrooms should be placed within community cores, at trailheads, and in major parks and recreational facilities.

The Town of Antigonish currently operates one public washroom within Columbus Field on the edge of downtown, which is open throughout the summer months. This public washroom offers two gendered washrooms with stalls, and one accessible stall in each washroom. The Town should consider improvements to this washroom facility which could include:

- Grading or a ramp up to the washroom from the park
- Installing automatic door openers
- Changing out sink faucets to improve accessibility
- Ensuring obstacles like garbage receptacles do not block access to the entrance, sinks, or accessories
- Ensuring all accessories are placed at an accessible height within reach of toilet and sinks
- Providing additional features such as a shelf and hook for personal items, power outlets near toilets, sharps container, sanitary disposal, and adult change tables
- Providing change tables in both washrooms, if they are to remain gendered
- Improving colour contrast between floor, walls, and washroom stalls
- Extending operation and maintenance beyond summer months or exploring alternatives

The Town should also explore new potential locations for universal public washrooms:

- Aim to provide universal washrooms in all Town-owned public buildings
- Ensure new public washrooms are single-stall and clearly marked with a simple toilet symbol
- Ensure new public washrooms are fully accessible, and follow any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations and guidelines set out in the current CSA B651
- Consider providing complimentary menstrual products within all gendered and non-gendered public washrooms
- Where public washrooms are located, consider installing drinking fountains which are cane-detectable and accessible for people who use wheelchairs

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; [Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating](#); CNIB's Clearing Our Path

## Transit

### A7.10 Continue to assist in funding local transit providers

Transit is an important part of the transportation system in Antigonish, and many community members with disabilities depend on accessible transit to access work, school, medical appointments, events, and other destinations. Both the Antigonish Community Transit Society and the Seniors CARE Van offer wheelchair-accessible vehicles and provide an essential service for people with disabilities. Antigonish has both fixed-route buses (which service bus stops on a set schedule) as well as door-to-door transit which can be scheduled ahead of time by the rider.

Funding for community transportation is limited, and COVID-19 impacts further limited transit funding and ridership, forcing transit providers to reduce service. Current gaps in transit service include:

- Accessibility (buses have limited accessibility for wheelchairs and are in need of upgrades)
- Frequency (there are long wait times between fixed-route buses)
- Scheduling (fixed-route buses only run on limited days and times)
- Geographic reach (door-to-door buses only service the local region)
- Booking time (door-to-door buses have to be booked far in advance)

To support expansion of accessible community transit services and ensure that people with disabilities have access to transportation, the Town should:

- Continue to assist in funding local transit providers where possible
- Explore opportunities to increase support for both operational and capital costs.

**Potential partners:** Antigonish Community Transit, Seniors CARE Van



Two Antigonish Community Transit buses are parked at Market Square.

### **A7.11 Continue engagement with the taxi industry to share community concerns**

Taxis serve an important function in Antigonish’s transportation system, and gaps in the current offerings leave some residents without reliable access. Although this service is run by private companies, the Town could engage with the taxi industry to help share local concerns and challenges, such as the lack of wheelchair accessible vehicles, and limited night-time service.

## **Parking**

### **A7.12 Improve the physical accessibility of parking lots**

Through the Land Use By-law, the Town should include requirements for clearly marked pedestrian connections within parking lots, to ensure the safety of pedestrians exiting or entering the lots. Other considerations for parking lot design could include:

- Accessible parking spaces and access aisles, located on pathways & close to exits
- Adequate lighting along pathways
- Curb cuts and tactile indicators at crosswalks
- Level and slip resistant surfacing
- Adequate drainage
- Directional signage
- Clearly marked speed limits

The Town can lead by example by adopting a standard for Municipal parking lots and updating Town-owned parking lots during regular maintenance.

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating



Two accessible parking spaces share an access aisle and connect to a pedestrian pathway.  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons user Will Buckner.

### A7.13 Complete a parking review

Accessible parking is a priority for the Antigonish community, and existing accessible parking spaces are inadequate in both location and design. An Accessible Parking Strategy should be conducted which could:

- Identify key locations for accessible parking spaces and passenger drop-off and pick-up zones, close to accessible entrances
- Include options for accessible on-street parking along Main Street, with access to major amenities such as Town Hall, the Town & County Library, medical offices, and major stores
- Establish design guidelines for accessible parking spaces (including proper signage, access aisles, curb cuts, and appropriate dimensions)
- Consider feasibility of winter maintenance and impacts of traffic and deliveries in siting new accessible parking spaces
- Review parking enforcement policies
- Complete this Strategy in consultation with people with disabilities and the Accessibility Committee

**Guidelines:** Current CSA B651 guidelines; any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating



An accessible on-street parking space on Main Street Antigonish has no curb-cut or access aisle.

# 8. Employment

## Commitment

The Town will adopt inclusive and accessible employment practices and provide resources for local employers to improve employment outcomes among people with disabilities.

## Responsibilities

Town responsibilities and offerings related to Goods & Services include:

- Employing Town staff & Council
- Providing funding opportunities for local service providers, including those offering employment supports
- Supporting recruitment of local physicians through a Community Navigator
- Providing assistance and resources for individuals looking to start a business locally, including online and in-person support with navigating permits and other requirements
- Connecting residents to employment services
- Assisting new residents in orienting themselves with the Town and its services

## Key Barriers

- Limited employment supports for people with disabilities
- Many employers have a knowledge gap around accessibility
- Discrimination in hiring and employment
- Lack of clarity around responsibility and roles for accessibility issues
- Hiring processes are not accessible for people with disabilities
- Inadequate wages and benefits, lack of flexibility in the work environment

## Key Achievements

- A number of local employment agencies and service providers assist community members with barriers to accessing employment
- The Town recently conducted a review of HR policies and salaries with the goal of ensuring an equitable and inclusive workplace

## Policies

### P8.1 Commit to becoming an accessible workplace

The Town should:

- Work with employees to build understanding of the value of accessibility and inclusion
- Make changes within hiring and employment practices to ensure the Town is an accessible workplace for people with disabilities, noting the limitations of Town Hall in its current state
- Aim to have the workplace reflect the diversity of the local population, at all pay levels

### P8.2 Update accessibility policies and information within employment documents

The Town should complete a review of any training manuals, human resources documents, manager policies, and other relevant documents to add information related to accessibility in the workplace. This information could include:

- Information on who to contact for accessibility accommodations (at any point in employment)
- Obligations for managers to assist in meeting accommodations requests
- Considerations for all managers and employees to establish flexible meeting formats (for example, providing agendas in advance, limiting meeting durations, allowing participants to provide additional input following the meeting)
- Employee expectations for maintaining a respectful environment free of discrimination



Antigonish Town Hall on Main Street.

## Actions

### Local Employers

#### A8.1 Support the importance of town halls with local employers

Employers have a big role to play in accessibility and inclusion. While many employers may wish to make changes to advance inclusion in the workplace, there is often a gap when it comes to knowledge and resources. To address this gap, the Town could work with local partners like the Chamber and Nova Scotia Works to support town hall events with local employers. These events could include information through guest presentations and training focused on:

- The benefits and assets of diverse hiring
- Laws around inclusion and accessibility and what they mean
- Accessibility of the built environment and where to start
- Best practices for inclusive and accessible workplaces
- Funding opportunities and resources for hiring people with disabilities, including the national [Opportunities Fund](#) and [Nova Scotia Wage Subsidy Program](#), and the [NS ACCESS-Ability Fund](#)

**Potential partners:** Antigonish Chamber of Commerce, the COADY Institute, Nova Scotia Works, Antigonish Womens Resource Centre, Antigonish County Adult Learning Association (ACALA), Syrian Antigonish Families Embrace (SAFE), Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, Inclusion NS, Autism Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, St Francis Xavier University, the Town & County Library, Antigonish Market Square Mall, St. Martha's Regional Hospital, Paqtnkek First Nation Community

#### A8.2 Develop resources for employers looking to improve accessibility

To accompany Town Hall events, the Town should work with the Chamber of Commerce and other local partners to develop and share information on accessible workplaces. Reports, brochures, and other resources could include the following:

- Starter checklist of accessibility considerations for the built environment
- List of funding options for accessibility improvements
- Contact list for recognized programs and service providers involved in accessibility
- Opportunities for supported employment programming and job coaching
- Profiles of local employers offering strong examples of inclusive workplaces

**Potential partners:** Antigonish Chamber of Commerce, local accessibility professionals, local design and construction professionals, local employers

### **A8.3 Support the development of a local accessibility trade network**

An accessibility trade network would be an opportunity to help local residents, businesses, and other organizations access services locally, similar to Efficiency Nova Scotia's [Efficiency Trade Network](#). The Town could consider supporting a local organization such as the Chamber of Commerce in developing this network.

Public listings should be available online and in print and could include recognized professionals and businesses offering accessibility services such as:

- Education and training
- Accessibility accommodations (including ASL interpreters or CART operators)
- Accessibility audits and assessments
- Design services
- Contracting
- Other consulting services
- Supply and repairs for accessible building features, technology, assistive devices

**Potential partners:** Antigonish Chamber of Commerce, local businesses offering accessibility services

## **Employment Support Services**

### **A8.4 Continue to support local employment services**

Local employment services offer assistance and mentorship to community members in search of employment. Some groups with lower employment outcomes like people with disabilities and newcomers to Canada often require supports which respond to their unique needs. To address this need, the Town should:

- Continue to support employment support programs
- Refer residents to employment services as needed

**Potential partners:** Nova Scotia Works, Antigonish County Adult Learning Association (ACALA), The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, L'Arche Antigonish, Canadian Association of Community Living Antigonish (CACLA), other local organizations providing employment supports

## Employment within the Town

### A8.5 Establish inclusive hiring practices

Accessibility improvements have to begin before the date of hiring. This means that accessibility and inclusion have to be considered in drafting and promoting job postings, as well as throughout the interview process. To ensure that Town staff is reflective of the diversity of the local population, the Town should ensure the human resources policy is updated to consider the following recommendations:

- Explicitly state within all job listings that accommodations are available upon request, both for the duration of the hiring process and employment
- Provide details on accessibility of the workplace and any accommodations currently in place
- Provide information on benefits and salary ranges
- Extend closing dates on all job listings, where possible
- Promote job listings both online and offline
- Promote job postings through local organizations working directly with people with disabilities
- Work with local employment programs to connect with potential employees
- Provide all candidates with details in advance on the interview format and accessibility of the interview location, as well as standard interview question
- Work with new employees to accommodate their accessibility requirements

**Potential partners:** Local employment programs, service providers working with people with disabilities, Autism Nova Scotia coordinator for Ready, Willing & Able

**Guidelines:** Ready, Willing & Able inclusive workplace resources

# 9. Built Environment

## Commitment

The Town will work towards making all Town-owned facilities accessible for people with disabilities to access independently and without segregation. The Town will also work with local stakeholders to enable accessibility in commercial and institutional spaces, and to provide a range of accessible housing options for people with disabilities.

## Responsibilities

Town responsibilities and offerings related to Goods & Services include:

- Constructing and maintaining Town-owned buildings
- Constructing and maintaining Town-owned facilities, including parks, playgrounds, sports fields
- Regulating development and land use through the [Municipal Planning Strategy](#), [Land Use By-law](#), [Subdivision By-law](#), and other policies and regulations
- Issuing development and building permits and other authorizations
- Collecting property taxes
- Providing financial support and resources for residents and local business owners

## Key Barriers

- People with disabilities are limited in where they can go
- The built environment is difficult to navigate
- A lack of housing options for people with disabilities
- Requirements and regulations provide only a minimum standard of accessibility
- Accessibility is not prioritized from the start of construction, renovation, and maintenance
- Accessibility is not considered in the location of amenities

## Key Community Achievements

- Following advocacy from local residents, a ramp and automatic door opener were installed at Town Hall's side entrance in 2020
- The Town & County People's Place Library moved into its current home in 2011, and local residents have since identified necessary accessibility improvements to the space
- In 2021, the Town partnered with Challenger Baseball to work towards accessibility improvements at the Town's recreation facilities, through the Accessible Antigonish initiative
- An accessible swing set was installed in Columbus Park in 2021
- In 2020, the Town partnered with the County to hire a consultant to develop the Best Practices Guide for the Planning, Delivery and Evaluation of Accessible and Inclusive Recreation Services
- The Sandlot opened in 2019, identified as the Town's first accessible ballfield, and is used by Challenger Baseball, a local program for children with disabilities
- The Antigonish Heritage Museum's is working on accessibility improvements for the front door and washroom facilities

## **Policies**

### **P9.1 Consider accessibility throughout all stages and aspects of design**

When developing new facilities or renovating existing ones, it is helpful to think of accessibility as a principle of design, rather than an added feature. Universal design principles should be incorporated from the concept phase, and carried through into the construction phase, as well as any operations and maintenance policies.

The Town should consider the following for the development and renovation of Town-owned facilities:

- Commit to incorporating accessibility and universal design throughout the process
- Working with experienced professionals wherever possible
- Prioritize eliminating safety hazards for people with disabilities
- Consideration accessibility of the space surrounding the facility (including pedestrian connections, transit, parking, and landscaping)

### **P9.2 Prioritize accessibility considerations within land use documents**

Land use in Antigonish is governed by the [Municipal Planning Strategy](#), [Land Use By-law](#), and [Subdivision By-law](#). Together, these documents lay out what can be developed on the land.

Following recommendations provided by the Eastern District Planning Commission's Regional Planning process, the Town should review these land use documents and consider the following:

- Review the priorities and direction for "Support(ing) Accessibility and Equity" currently included in the Municipal Planning Strategy
- Establish new regulations which set out accessibility goals and actions for the Town.
- Ensure land use documents follow any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations.

### **P9.3 Ensure Town-owned buildings are scent-free environments**

One component of accessibility is ensuring that spaces are safe and comfortable for people with environmental sensitivities or allergies. Exposure to certain chemicals or products can trigger illness, including fragrances, scents, smoke, certain cleaning products, carpet, moulds, poor air quality, and more. Recognizing the serious ways that these exposures can impact people with environmental sensitivities, the Town should:

- Establish scent-free policies at all Town buildings
- Consider any potential negative impacts of cleaning and maintenance practices

## Actions

### Upkeep & Enforcement

#### A9.1 Continue to enforce Town Regulations and Building Code

Existing regulations and the [National Building Code Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations](#) offer very limited accessibility requirements, and buildings which meet these requirements are not necessarily accessible. In most cases, the responsibility of the Town's Enforcement Authority is to ensure that structures meet the requirements in place at the time of construction, which means that many spaces have been built to now outdated requirements and standards.

However, it is important to ensure that new structures within the Town are compliant with Building Code regulations before new accessibility requirements come into place through the Province, and any new regulations adopted by the Town which relate to accessibility should be reasonably enforceable within the Town's given budget and resources.

#### A9.2 Establish a maintenance schedule for accessible features

An accessible built environment requires regular maintenance, and some features intended to improve accessibility require extra upkeep and repairs. The Town is currently completing an Asset Management Plan which includes recommendations for facility improvements. As a part of this process, the Town should consider opportunities to:

- Develop a maintenance schedule and standard for all accessibility features on Town facilities to ensure that key amenities, such as automatic door openers or level curb cuts, are regularly tested and maintained
- Maintain a list of suppliers and repair companies for specialized features and technologies

### Land Use

#### A9.3 Consider accessibility barriers in the siting and purchase of new Town facilities

The Town should consider establishing a policy for municipal site selection which establishes criteria for new public Town-owned facilities, including:

- Community engagement processes
- Accessibility of the site and surrounding built environment
- Access and proximity to pedestrian and active transportation routes
- Access to public transit
- Potential for accessible parking and drop-off spots
- Proximity to community cores and key destinations

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations

## Commercial & Institutional Spaces

### A9.4 Continue to improve accessibility of all Town facilities

Town facilities should be accessible for both the public and employees. The built environment is the first barrier many people with disabilities experience in employment, and these improvements often require the most initial capital investment. The Town is currently in the process of improving the accessibility of its facilities, and as a part of this should consider the following guidelines:

- Implement recommendations identified in the Accessibility Audit of Town Hall (“12. Appendix A: Accessibility Audit” on page 79)
- Seek professional services to complete thorough accessibility audits of all Town-owned facilities (including the jointly owned Town & County Library)
- Use worksheets included in the Nova Scotia Interim Accessibility Guidelines for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces as a guide where professional audits are not immediately feasible
- Prioritize accessibility improvements which address safety concerns for people with disabilities

**Potential partners:** Accessibility & design professionals, the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, the Municipality of the County of Antigonish, the Town & County Library

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; current CSA B651 guidelines



“It’s a bad sidewalk ... I have trouble walking over that sidewalk because of all the bumps...makes me feel bad because anyone who uses a corrective walker or crutches or wheelchair it would be hard for them to get over that because the sidewalk is not very smooth... someone who has mobility issues could fall easily and hurt themselves”

Photo & caption: StFX Photo Voice research participant



“[Flowers overflowing, making walkway narrow]..it’s kinda bad cause if we are there on the sidewalk with the cart people have to step off the sidewalk and back up on the sidewalk”

Photo & caption: StFX Photo Voice research participant

### **A9.5 Design all spaces to recommended dimensions**

Very few areas are designed with consideration for larger power chairs, electric scooters, and even strollers, but assistive devices are expanding in size as technology advances and becomes more affordable and accessible. While many regulations and standards for accessibility include minimum required dimensions for spaces like doorways, ramps, corridors, and seating, these are often insufficient to accommodate all assistive devices and residents of all sizes. Wherever possible, the Town should:

- Create spaces which are accessible to people of all sizes and with all styles of assistive devices

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; current CSA B651 guidelines

### **A9.6 Ensure development and upgrade of Town-owned facilities follow universal design**

Universal design is a system for designing environments or products which can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, abilities, or disability. The principles of Universal Design aim to serve the broadest range of users possible, and should be considered throughout all stages of the design process. These principles include:

- Equitable use
- Flexibility use
- Simple and intuitive use
- Perceptible information
- Tolerance of error
- Low physical effort
- Size and space for approach and use

To ensure that development and upgrades to facilities consider these principles, the Town should:

- Work with consultants and design professionals familiar with the application of universal design



"...[the rocks are] good...if you're walking to Timmies, once you hit that rock then you know you can follow around the rock and you can know when it's time to turn so you're not walking through the parking lot...[makes me feel] safe "

Photo & caption: StFX Photo Voice research participant

### **A9.7 Review Evacuation Plans for all Town-owned buildings**

The Town should review existing Evacuation Plans and consider the following recommendations:

- Provide evacuation chairs on each level of a flight of stairs
- Train all building operators and staff on how to assist people with disabilities, and include clear instructions within the Evacuation Plan
- Establish areas of refuge with accessible communication systems
- Ensure evacuation routes are logical, well lit, and provide sufficient clear width
- Provide clear signage and instructions, including alternative formats such as tactile lettering
- Provide emergency equipment at an accessible height
- Ensure visual and audio fire alarms are provided throughout buildings (“A6.9 Provide alternative communication technologies in all Town buildings” on page 34)

Other practices could include:

- Create a voluntary register of building users needing assistance in the event of an emergency
- Practice regular drills
- Establish protocols for informing people who are deafblind of an emergency
- Provide training to any fire wardens on how to be a sighted guide (“A4.1 Provide training to public-facing Town staff and Council” on page 18)

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; current CSA B651 guidelines; Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating



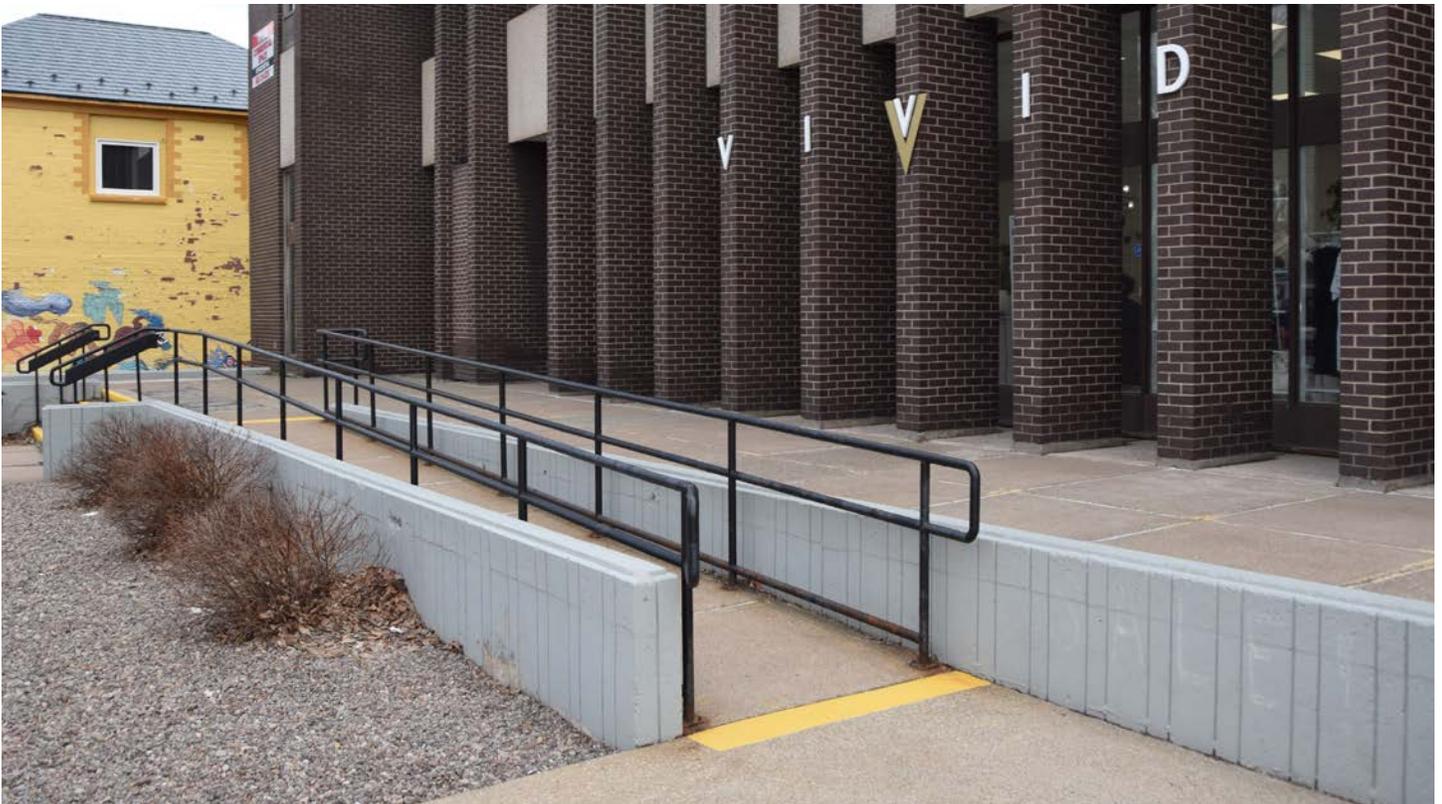
Entrance to the jointly-owned Antigonish Town & County Library, off Main Street.

### A9.8 Allow and promote accessible ramps

Many of the old buildings in downtown Antigonish are built right to the sidewalk and have steps leading up to the entrances. While some of these businesses have established separate accessible entrances, this segregates people with disabilities. To permit and encourage property owners to establish accessible entrances, the Town is currently in the process of amending the encroachment regulations included in the [Land Use By-law](#) to provide an exemption for accessible ramps along the street where they do not encroach on the clear width necessary to maintain accessibility on the sidewalk. Once this amendment is complete, the Town should promote the change to property owners and businesses within the downtown, along with information about installing a ramp, and guidelines for building entrances, referring to current CSA B651 guidelines, including:

- Ramp and stair design (with consideration for width, grade, turns, landings, and railings)
- Door width, accessible hardware (such as D-handles), and weight
- Automatic door openers (in accessible locations), emergency power and delayed action closers
- Signage and lighting

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; current CSA B651 guidelines; Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating



A ramp to a hair studio on Main Street Antigonish is built as a straight path with a gentle slope and handrails on either side.

### **A9.9 Advocate for and support accessibility improvements within key sites**

While accessibility improvements to Town-owned facilities is a good place to start (“A9.4 Continue to improve accessibility of all Town facilities” on page 55), many key amenities within the community are not owned by the Town. While local government has limited control over these spaces, the Town could consider to:

- Work with businesses and property owners to encourage and support accessibility improvements
- Ensure that businesses and property owners are aware of accessibility requirements
- Prioritize updates to pedestrian infrastructure and parking at these locations

Priority sites for the community include:

- Saint Francis Xavier University campus
- Antigonish Market Square Mall
- St. Martha’s Regional Hospital
- The Antigonish Farmer’s Market
- Cultural and spiritual spaces (places of worship, Indigenous sweat lodges, among others)
- Service providers (including the Antigonish Community Food Bank and John Paul Centre)

**Potential partners:** Saint Francis Xavier University, Antigonish Market Square Mall, St. Martha’s Regional Hospital, The Antigonish Farmers’ Market, local places of worship, Paqtnkek First Nation Community, the Municipality of the County of Antigonish

### **A9.10 Establish incentives for accessible development and retrofits**

Commercial spaces and community amenities make up a large portion of the Town’s built environment, and should be accessible for all members of the public. The Town could establish policy for supporting accessibility improvements to these spaces through financial and procedural incentives. This policy could consider:

- Grants or low-interest loans for retro-fits or purchases which improve accessibility (see section 57(3) of the *Municipal Government Act*)
- Reduced permit fees (see section 172(2)E(i) of the *Municipal Government Act*)
- Bonus density allowances (see section 220(5)K of the *Municipal Government Act*)



The Antigonish Farmers’ Market is surrounded by a gravel parking lot.

## Recreation

### A9.11 Undertake Accessible Antigonish recommendations

In 2021, the Town of Antigonish partnered with Challenger Baseball to improve the accessibility of local recreation facilities. Challenger Baseball conducted community engagement and developed a set of recommendations, the costs of which could be shared equally between the two organizations. Once fundraising has begun for Challenger's portion of the expenses, the Town should begin to implement these recommendations.

**Potential partners:** Challenger Baseball, financial donors

### A9.12 Improve the accessibility of Columbus Field

Columbus Field is a key piece of property for the Town, and provides essential outdoor space for the community. Although there have been some improvements, the space still has some major barriers to accessibility which need to be addressed. Columbus Field has been identified as a floodplain, so the Town should work with experts to ensure investments are durable. Based on the Accessible Antigonish recommendations from Challenger Baseball, the Town should consider:

- Remove the curb around the main play space
- Install new accessible equipment and play spaces
- Replace wood chips and pea gravel in the play space with a stable surface suitable to play areas (such as rubber playground surfacing)
- Pave all pathways throughout Columbus Field
- Improve access to courts and splash pad
- Complete washroom improvements ("A7.8 Provide year-round universal public washrooms" on page 42)

**Potential partners:** Challenger Baseball

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; [Everyone Can Play Guide to Inclusive Playspaces](#); [Let's Play Toolkit](#)



The main play space in Antigonish's Columbus Park is surfaced with pea gravel and surrounded by a low plastic barrier.

### **A9.13 Complete upgrades to Central Field and the Sandlot**

The Central Field Sports Complex includes several sports fields located next to Dr. John Hugh Gillis Regional High School. To improve these spaces, the Town should refer to the Accessible Antigonish recommendations brought forward by Challenger Baseball, including:

- Pave existing pathway to the Sandlot in accordance with NS Building Code standards
- Construct paved pathways between fields and storage areas
- Improve access to the river, including paths and a small fishing dock
- Establish universal access washroom facilities
- Construct a storage shed at the Sandlot

**Potential partners:** Challenger Baseball, Strait Regional Centre for Education

### **A9.14 Provide accessible play spaces**

Play spaces developed or renovated by the Town of Antigonish should be designed to meet a high standard of accessibility, and consider the following recommendations:

- Ensure spaces are easy to get to, considering location, layout and directional signage
- Provide quiet spaces where kids can play alone
- Provide options for sensory play such as musical elements, sand boxes, and water features
- Provide features which encourage development of motor skills, coordination, and balance, such as balance bars and swings
- Provide enclosed areas which provide a safe space for children with developmental or intellectual disabilities who may wander off
- Design spaces to include accessible surfacing and equipment
- Offer equipment which can be used by kids with varying abilities and sizes
- Include natural elements like plants, trees, and boulders

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; Best Practices Guide for Accessible and Inclusive Recreation for the Town and County of Antigonish; [Everyone Can Play Guide to Inclusive Playspaces](#); [Let's Play Toolkit](#)



"This is [a] swing...[I] can't use it...hard to push the wheelchair [on the woodchips]...[and] can't get on it... lots of people who [are] in wheelchairs who want to use the swing, but can't because it moves when you try to get on it, it's not safe"  
Photo & caption: StFX Photo Voice research participant

## Signage & Navigation

### A9.15 Post directional signage at all Town-owned buildings to assist with navigation

Signage is one component of navigation which assists people in navigating spaces. Additional signage could be provided at Town buildings and recreation facilities to help people find entrances, meeting rooms, washrooms, equipment, elevators, and other key resources. This could include building maps at the entrance, signage throughout corridors or hallways, as well as door signage. This addition is helpful for people who are new to the space, as well as people with memory issues. Signage should consider the following basic standards:

- Posted at accessible heights, out of door swings
- Use consistent design and placement
- Avoid shadows or glare through placement and materials
- Use clear print to improve visibility for people with low vision
- Use plain language and make use of icons and graphics to communicate text clearly
- Include key information in raised lettering as well as Braille
- Consider providing navigation through QR codes, BlindSquare beacons, or other technology

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; Current CSA B651 guidelines; CNIB's Clearing Our Path; Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Rating; [Braille Literacy Canada's Accessible Signage Guidelines](#)

### A9.16 Ensure outdoor lighting is adequate and consistent

Street lighting creates a more welcoming and accessible environment for all street users, and it can also address perceptions of personal safety, especially for vulnerable residents including people with disabilities, people of colour, women, and people walking alone. It is important that lighting be installed correctly to ensure that lighting is even and minimizes glare and shadows.

Lighting is installed throughout the Town, but the Town should continue to review the need for additional lighting where a concern is identified, particularly along busy routes where there is low visibility. New sidewalks or pathways should be oriented to make use of existing lighting, where possible. Where lighting is installed or replaced, the Town should consider:

- Ensure lighting along pathways is continuous and even
- Select lighting which minimizes the creation of shadows
- Ensure light levels are adequate (at least 50 lx at ground level)
- Illuminate elements such as stairs, ramps, rest areas, and signage

The Town could also establish lighting requirements within the [Subdivision By-law](#).

**Guidelines:** any current Nova Scotia accessibility recommendations or regulations; Current CSA B651 guidelines; CNIB's Clearing Our Path

## Housing

### **A9.17 Enable diverse housing options**

Through the [Land Use By-law](#), the Town should consider opportunities to further enable access to an increased variety of housing options, particularly those which are accessible and affordable. This could include:

- Allowances for single-storey homes
- Expand the definition of “Special Care” within the Land Use By-law to include supportive housing, transitional housing, emergency shelters, and similar uses
- Allowances for alternative forms of housing such as grouped housing
- Enable the adaptive reuse of large homes, churches, halls

### **A9.18 Enable supportive housing throughout all residential zones**

Throughout Nova Scotia, some people with disabilities are forced to live in institutionalized housing such as nursing homes, where alternatives that meet their needs are not available. There is currently a long wait list of people with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 60 waiting for housing in the province, where funding for in-home care is insufficient. Community-based supportive housing, such as small options homes, could provide access to suitable housing.

To address this issue, the Town could advocate to the Province and housing providers for the development of new supportive housing units. The Town could also define forms of supportive housing within the [Land Use By-law](#), and allow these as dwellings throughout all residential zones:

- Supportive housing facilities with less than 5 beds should be treated as a single-unit dwelling
- Facilities with 5-8 beds should be treated as a duplex dwelling
- Allowances for 1 or more staff bedrooms

# 10. Implementation Plan

## Phasing

The recommendations included in this Accessibility Plan will go through the Municipal budgeting process and be implemented over time. The Town will develop a phased budget allocation for implementation of the Accessibility Plan and an accessibility lens will be applied to future project planning and capital work moving forward.

Phasing is intended as a guide only, and the Town should take advantage of opportunities wherever funding is identified, and where priorities of the public or Council shift. Some items can be implemented in stages where multiple recommendations are included within one item.

Phasing for this Accessibility Plan groups recommendations by:

### Priority Items (2023-2026)

- Items which don't require significant financial investment
- Items which include minor adjustments to existing built environment and infrastructure
- Items which will enable or simplify other recommendations
- Items which address major safety concerns
- Items which have strong public support (particularly among residents with disabilities)

Consolidation with the Municipality of the County of Antigonish may affect implementation timelines of some priority items such as amendments to current policies and by-laws and investments in capital projects, to avoid duplicating efforts.

### Medium-term Items (2026-2035)

- Items which are lower priority and less urgent
- Items with higher costs

### Opportunity-based Items

- Items which can be grouped with other upgrades (such as completing road upgrades as repaving is scheduled)
- Items which cannot be implemented until other conditions change

### Quick Wins

- Items which are simple and low cost

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Phasing</b> Priority (2023-2026) Medium-term (2026-2035) Quick Win Opportunity-based
	<b>Awareness and Education</b>
1. Engage community members with disabilities throughout all stages.	Priority
2. Incorporate an inclusion lens in all policy and regulations.	Priority
3. Collaborate with local partners, service providers, and others to enable accessibility.	Priority
4. Communicate reasoning and benefits for accessibility improvements as they happen.	Priority
5. Continue to support Town staff and Council in participating in community initiatives.	Priority
6. Provide training to public-facing Town staff and Council.	Priority
7. Establish a public education campaign	Priority
8. Review the role and administration of the Accessibility Committee.	Priority
9. Encourage and support participation of people with disabilities throughout Town Committees and Boards.	Priority
10. Establish clear staff responsibilities for an Accessibility Coordinator.	Priority
11. Review and examine new accessibility data & research on guidelines and best practices.	Medium-term
12. Explore opportunities to fund accessible equipment.	Medium-term

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Phasing</b> Priority (2023-2026) Medium-term (2026-2035) Quick Win Opportunity-based
	<b>Goods and Services</b>
1. Ensure accessibility of Town meetings and events.	Priority
a. Promote events in advance to allow participants to schedule transportation and request individual accommodations.	<b>Quick Win</b>
2. Ensure Town programming has supports available for participants with disabilities.	Priority
3. Continue to provide funding opportunities for organizations offering essential services.	Priority
4. Update Winter Maintenance Strategy.	Priority
5. Provide additional programming for seniors within the community.	Medium-term
6. Support expanded sensory-friendly programs.	Medium-term
7. Support new mental health services within the Town.	Medium-term
8. Expand free equipment loan program.	Medium-term

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Phasing</b> Priority (2023-2026) Medium-term (2026-2035) Quick Win Opportunity-based
	<b>Information &amp; Communications</b>
1. Identify accessibility champions in the community.	Priority
2. Establish a clear process for responding to complaints.	Priority
a. Create a category for accessibility complaints within the Concerned Citizen Report.	<b>Quick Win</b>
3. Communicate reasoning and benefits for accessibility improvements as they happen.	Priority
4. Improve consistency of communications around Town Council, Boards, and Committees.	Priority
a. Ensure the Town calendar is regularly updated.	<b>Quick Win</b>
5. Provide alternative versions of Town resources on request.	Priority
6. Share all information in multiple formats.	Priority
7. Post information online about the accessibility of Town facilities.	Priority
a. Include on the Town’s website the availability of alternative communication technologies.	<b>Quick win</b>
8. Provide accessible captions for all social media posts.	Priority
a. Caption all photos posted to Twitter or Facebook with a short one- or two-sentence description of the image and its purpose.	<b>Quick Win</b>
9. Host inclusive and creative community engagement.	Priority
10. Build and maintain relationships with people with disabilities.	Medium-term
11. Directly consult equity-seeking groups and communities	Medium-term
12. Ensure all Town communications are easy to read.	Medium-term
13. Ensure the Town website is compliant with web accessibility standards	Medium-term
14. Provide alternative communication technologies in all Town buildings.	Medium-term
15. Improve the acoustics of Town meeting spaces.	Medium-term

## Recommendation

## Phasing

Priority (2023-2026)  
Medium-term (2026-2035)  
Quick Win  
Opportunity-based

### Transportation

1. Regulate construction zones and patios to limit pedestrian disruptions	Priority
2. Continue to assist in funding local transit providers.	Priority
3. Improve the physical accessibility of parking lots.	Priority
4. Complete a parking review.	Priority
5. Apply traffic calming on residential streets.	Medium-term
6. Expand the Town's sidewalk network.	Medium-term
7. Make accessibility improvements to the Landing Trail.	Medium-term
8. Provide seating and amenities within public spaces.	Medium-term
9. Provide year-round universal public washrooms.	Medium-term
10. Create a clear path of travel on all sidewalks.	Opportunity-based
11. Ensure accessible pedestrian signals and clear path of travel at crosswalks.	Opportunity-based

Recommendation	<b>Phasing</b> Priority (2023-2026) Medium-term (2026-2035) Quick Win Opportunity-based
	<b>Employment</b>
1. Update the Town’s accessibility policies and information within employment documents.	Priority
a. Include information on considerations for all managers and employees to establish flexible meeting formats.	<b>Quick Win</b>
2. Continue to support local employment services.	Priority
3. Establish inclusive hiring practices.	Priority
4. Commit to becoming an accessible workplace.	Medium-term
5. Host town halls with local employers.	Medium-term
6. Develop resources for employers looking to improve accessibility.	Medium-term
7. Support the development of a local accessibility trade network.	Medium-term

Recommendation	<b>Phasing</b> Priority (2023-2026) Medium-term (2026-2035) Quick Win Opportunity-based
	<b>Built Environment</b>
1. Consider accessibility throughout all stages and aspects of design.	Priority
2. Prioritize accessibility considerations within land use documents.	Priority
3. Ensure Town-owned buildings are scent-free environments.	Priority
a. Establish scent-free policies at all Town buildings.	<b>Quick Win</b>
4. Continue to enforce Town Regulations and Building Code	Priority
5. Establish a maintenance schedule for accessible features.	Priority
a. Develop a maintenance schedule and standard for all accessibility features on Town facilities to ensure that key amenities, such as automatic door openers or level curb cuts, are regularly tested and maintained.	<b>Quick Win</b>
6. Review Evacuation Plans for all Town-owned buildings.	Priority
7. Allow and promote accessible ramps.	Priority
a. To promote and encourage property owners to establish accessible entrances, complete amendments to encroachment regulations included in the Land Use By-law.	<b>Quick Win</b>
8. Post directional signage at all Town-owned buildings to assist with navigation.	Priority
9. Enable diverse housing options.	Priority
10. Enable supportive housing throughout all residential zones.	Priority

Recommendation	Phasing Priority (2023-2026) Medium-term (2026-2035) Quick Win Opportunity-based
	Built Environment
11. Consider accessibility barriers in the siting and purchase of new Town facilities.	Medium-term
12. Continue to improve accessibility of all Town facilities	Medium-term
13. Design all spaces to recommended dimensions.	Medium-term
14. Ensure development and upgrade of Town-owned facilities follow universal design.	Medium-term
15. Advocate for and support accessibility improvements within key sites.	Medium-term
16. Establish incentives for accessible commercial development and retrofits.	Medium-term
17. Undertake Accessible Antigonish recommendations.	Medium-term
18. Improve the accessibility of Columbus Field.	Medium-term
19. Complete upgrades to Central Field and the Sandlot.	Medium-term
20. Provide accessible play spaces.	Medium-term
21. Ensure outdoor lighting is adequate and consistent.	Medium-term

## Evaluation Metrics

These are intended to be monitored over time, in addition to tracking overall progress on implementation of the Accessibility Plan. Depending on the data source, some metrics may require annual tracking while others may be updated every 5 years (such as the census). These evaluation metrics may shift depending on the availability of data and the feasibility of tracking.

### Awareness & Education

- Number of people with disabilities engaged through Town consultations
- Number of partnerships and collaborations with service providers and advocates
- Number of self-identifying people with disabilities participating in Town Committees and Boards

### Goods & Services

- Participation of people with disabilities and seniors in Town programming
- Change in self-reported health (according to Community Health Surveys)

### Information & Communications

- Number of accessibility complaints resolved
- Town uptake of alternative communication technologies
- Number of Town documents available in alternative formats (such as accessible PDF, large print, ASL vlog)

### Transportation

- Number of avoidable injuries or collisions reported on Town property
- Change in self-reported physical activity rates (according to Community Health Surveys)

### Employment

- Employment rate among people with disabilities
- Number of people with disabilities employed by the Town

### Built Environment

- Proportion of Town-owned buildings and facilities with completed accessibility audits
- Number of accessibility upgrades to Town-owned buildings and facilities

## **Review Process**

This Accessibility Plan will be a living document, and regular reviews will ensure the plan stays up-to-date with current priorities and needs of the community. The review process includes:

### **Annual Report Cards**

The Accessibility Committee will prepare an annual accessibility report card for Council at the end of each fiscal year starting in March 2023. This report card will measure the implementation of the Accessibility Plan as well as the success of these measures, using the evaluation metrics. The advisory committee may also make recommendations to improve the plan. These Accessibility Report Cards will be public documents and will be posted on the Town website once accepted by Council.

### **Plan Reviews**

A complete review of the Accessibility Plan will be completed at least every three years as required by the Accessibility Act. This review will be led by the Accessibility Committee and may be completed internally by Town staff or outsourced to a hired consultant.

## Roles

There are several groups that will share responsibility for implementation of the Accessibility Plan, and their roles vary:

### Accessibility Committee

- Meet regularly
- Advise / make recommendations to Council and staff on accessibility matters
- Complete annual Accessibility Report Cards for presentation to Council
- Lead regular reviews of the Accessibility Plan

### Staff

- Coordinate & lead implementation of the plan, including tracking evaluation metrics
- Establish Accessibility Coordinator to serve as public-facing point person for accessibility
- Direct Accessibility Coordinator to attend Accessibility Committee meetings and liaise with staff
- Respond to public accessibility complaints and coordinate actions to address concerns
- Contribute to annual Accessibility Report Cards and regular reviews of the Accessibility Plan
- Any other agreed upon responsibilities as outlined in recommendation A4.6 on page 21

### CAO

- Oversee implementation of the Accessibility Plan
- Ensure requirements of the *Accessibility Act* are met

### Council

- Approve and adopt the Accessibility Plan
- Approve and adopt annual Accessibility Report Cards and plan reviews
- Provide adequate funds and resources to implement the plan & meet requirements of the *Accessibility Act*
- Direct public concerns related to accessibility to relevant staff

## Process for Responding to Complaints

A new Accessibility Complaint Form has been developed which will be available on the Town's website and at Town Hall. The form is based on the structure of the existing concerned citizen report form, and will create a forum for community members to communicate accessibility issues as they arise, and correspond with Town staff as they address the matter.

# 11. Other Projects

## Opportunities

Through the analysis and public consultation that was part of the process of developing Accessibility Plan, other plans and strategies were identified that could support the goals of accessibility. This list includes some of these identified initiatives. This list is not intended as a detailed or mandatory work plan for the Town, but rather as an aspirational list to help direct the Town's efforts over the coming years. Projects are not listed or ranked by any sort of priority.

### Develop an Active Transportation Plan

Active transportation offers opportunities for mobility, exercise, and leisure, and these objectives can be supported through an active transportation network that accommodates various modes of transportation including walking, rolling, snowshoeing, skiing, paddling, and more. A strong active transportation network connects communities and key destinations. Active Transportation Plans can also identify strategies for breaking down barriers to active transportation through infrastructure and amenities, education and programming, and marketing and promotions.

Developing an Active Transportation Plan is an ongoing priority for the Town, and this should align with the Accessibility Plan, and incorporate supporting policy recommendations for the [Municipal Planning Strategy](#), [Land Use By-law](#), and [Subdivision By-law](#).

### Complete a Housing Needs Assessment & Affordable Housing Strategy

With increasing immigration, an aging population, and increasing housing costs, the housing needs in Antigonish are changing. A Housing Needs Assessment could combine community engagement with an analysis of demographic and economic data to determine gaps in the housing market, based on current need and supply. Once this process is complete, the Town could explore creating an Affordable Housing Strategy. A Strategy would use the findings of the Needs Assessment to prepare recommendations and targets to increase the availability of affordable housing suitable for all residents, including those with disabilities.

This process could be completed as a partnership with local partners, and should involve consultation with residents who have experienced housing barriers, local housing providers, and service providers offering supports for low-income residents.

**Potential partners:** Antigonish Affordable Housing Association, A Roof Over Your Head, Celtic Community Homes, Paqtnkek First Nation Community, L'Arche Antigonish, Canadian Association for Community Living Antigonish (CACLA), RK MacDonald Nursing Home, Parkland Antigonish, The Maples, other housing and service providers.

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