

Town of Oxford

Accessibility Plan



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome Message	3
Town of Oxford Accessibility Advisory Committee	4
Glossary of Terms	5-7
Introduction	8
Goals of the Accessibility Plan	9
Services and Built Environment	10
Recreation	11
Information and Communication	12
Transportation	13
Employment	13
Implementing the Plan	14-15
Responsibilities	14
Monitoring	14-15
Feedback and Public Engagement	15
Reference List	16

WELCOME MESSAGE

The Town of Oxford is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive community for everyone. This includes working toward accessibility for individuals with disabilities in all facilities and outdoor spaces in the Town of Oxford and the mandated goal of full accessibility by March 31, 2030.

Since October 28, 2021, the town has been actively working on an Accessibility Plan to comply with universal accessibility standards. This plan is being implemented gradually to make it both practical and cost-effective. As required by section 44(2) of the Accessibility Act, the Oxford Accessibility Advisory Committee is made up of diverse members, with at least half being individuals with disabilities or representatives of organizations that support them.

The work of the Town of Oxford staff, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, and community members resulted in this plan. As part of this effort, the Accessibility Committee organized an Accessibility Expo in 2022. This event allowed community members to visit booths hosted by local organizations, ask questions, and share their concerns about accessibility in the Town of Oxford.

In addition to the Accessibility Expo, the committee developed and distributed an accessibility survey. This survey allowed community members to anonymously highlight barriers they encountered within the Town.

The Town of Oxford and the Accessibility Advisory Committee are committed to addressing accessibility challenges. We aim to identify, remove, and prevent barriers while adhering to Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act. We consider our Accessibility Plan a living document and invite your feedback and suggestions to help us improve it continuously.

If you have any questions, comments or feedback regarding this plan, please contact our office. You can reach us by email: info@oxfordns.ca. For feedback through our website, visit: <https://oxfordns.ca/how-do-i-report-a-complaint>. While this may not be a complaint, it is our universal form for suggestions, feedback and town-related inquiries.

The Town of Oxford Accessibility Advisory Committee



Committee Members Present (from left to right): Tracy Briggs, Megan Marchant, Amanda Purdy, Danielle Laurie, Oliva Canning-Sweet, Theresa Ryan and Mandy Blake.

Committee Members Absent: Padraic Moore and Ashlyn Brownell

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accessibility Act (2017)

The provincial law enacted to achieve accessibility by preventing and removing barriers for people with disabilities. The law defines the role and responsibilities of the Accessibility Directorate and the Accessibility Advisory Board, and addresses standards, compliance, and enforcement. Please see: (nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf)

Accessibility Advisory Committee

A volunteer committee established by a municipality to advise municipal council about identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers to people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives, and facilities. The committee plays a pivotal role in helping the municipality become a barrier-free community that complies with the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act (2017). At least one half of the members of the advisory committee must have a disability or represent an organization that represents people with disabilities.

Accessibility Lens

An Accessibility Lens is a tool for identifying and clarifying issues affecting people with disabilities used by policy developers and analysts to assess and address the impact of all initiatives (policies, programs, or decisions) on people with disabilities. It is also a resource in creating policies and programs reflective of the rights and needs of people with disabilities.

Barrier

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

Braille

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

CCTS

Cumberland County Transportation Services

CSA

Canadian Standard Association

Disability

As defined in Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act: "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." A condition that makes it harder for a person to participate. The condition may always interfere, or only sometimes.

Equitable/Equity

A commitment to fairness. Equitable access is different from equal access. Equality means everybody is treated the same; equity means everybody is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities. Equity recognizes and values differences, removing systemic barriers and accommodating individual differences, as needed.

EMO

Emergency Management Office.

Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan

A multi-year plan setting specific priorities and commitments for achieving accessibility within the Government of Nova Scotia. The first plan was published in 2018 and covers the years 2018-2021. (novascotia.ca/accessibility/plan).

Infrastructure

The "underlying structure" that makes a place livable and keeps its systems working (e.g., roads, sewers, clean water, electricity, and more).

Meaningful

In the context of our Accessibility work, the term meaningful is used to ensure the efforts being made are deemed valuable by those affected by the efforts.

NSFM

Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities.

Pedestrian

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

Plain Language

Clear, conversational communication that makes sense to the intended audience. The goal of plain language is to communicate so clearly that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use the information (plainlanguagenetwork.org/).

Prescribed

Means “prescribed in the Accessibility Act General Regulations.” The Accessibility Act enables the government to use the regulations to identify which organizations must comply with certain requirements. These requirements include forming an Accessibility Advisory Committee and developing an accessibility plan within one year. The use of the word “prescribed” in legislation is intended to give wide authority for regulations to be made that set down a specific rule or direction.

Retrofit

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

RHF

Rick Hansen Foundation.

RHFAC

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

Tactile

Related to the sense of touch.

Whole Journey Approach

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

WCAG

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

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Oxford Accessibility Plan was developed through collaboration among staff, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, and community members. The Oxford Town Council continues to gather feedback and recommendations to identify, eliminate, and prevent barriers for individuals with disabilities in municipal programs, services, and facilities.

Nearly one in three people in Nova Scotia lives with some form of disability, the highest rate in Canada. Disabilities can include physical, visual, hearing, mental health, intellectual, or learning challenges. Many individuals experience multiple disabilities, while some have disabilities that remain undiagnosed.

Like many other municipalities in Nova Scotia, the Town of Oxford is committed to ensuring fair access to community life and opportunities for people of all abilities. The town is also dedicated to helping individuals maintain their dignity and independence.

It's important to ensure our community is accessible to everyone, especially those who face difficulties with space, services, or information. This means identifying and removing barriers, preventing new ones, and complying with Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

The committee and staff have put a lot of effort into developing and overseeing this plan. It outlines the actions we'll take to make the Town of Oxford more accessible for all.

GOALS OF THE ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

Our goal is to ensure fair access for everyone by concentrating on key areas that identify, prevent, and remove barriers. This will enable people with disabilities to fully participate in our community. The Accessibility Plan is built on shared standards. The Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Plan (2018–2021) highlights six main areas to enhance accessibility, which include:

- Services & Built Environment
- Recreation
- Information and Communication
- Transportation
- Employment

SERVICES AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Our aim is to ensure that people of all ages and abilities have fair access to the services offered by the Town of Oxford.

Our goal is to ensure that all public buildings and spaces are accessible to people of all ages and abilities, regardless of whether we own, lease, or operate them. We will also encourage residents and businesses to enhance accessibility in both public and private spaces.

Some of the key services, public buildings, and spaces that the Town of Oxford has identified as essential to public accessibility in delivery of services include:

- Streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks
- Access to buildings providing stable ramps and railings
- Snow and ice removal
- Directional municipal signage
- Communication Services (website, printed resources, and customer service counter)
- Parking lots and parking spaces
- Black River Park
- Oxford Ball Field and Soccer Fields
- Capitol Theatre
- Arena
- Library
- Medical Centre

The Town of Oxford is committed to providing all goods and services fairly, ensuring that no one is denied service due to a disability. We will continue to enhance and improve the delivery and availability of goods and services in all key areas of the Town of Oxford.

RECREATION

The Town of Oxford offers recreational activity services through the guidance of the Municipal Physical Activity Leader. We want to make sure that everyone, regardless of age or ability, can access our recreational programs and services.

Here are some key areas we focus on to make recreational activity services more accessible to the public:

- Streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks
- Snow and ice removal
- Access to all town-owned facilities for programs, events, and daily operations
- Clear signage for all areas of the town and town-owned facilities
- Access to updated information via the town website, in print, and verbally via the customer service counter
- Parking lots and parking spaces
- Green spaces, parks, fields, and trails

The Town of Oxford is committed to providing all recreational activity services fairly, ensuring that no one wishing to participate is unable to play. We will continue to enhance and improve the delivery and availability of recreational activity services in all key areas of the Town of Oxford.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

The Town of Oxford is committed to ensuring that information and communication is clear and accessible to people of all ages and abilities. We will also raise awareness about accessibility, help identify barriers and promote understanding of accessibility rights for everyone.

The Town of Oxford delivers information to the public in many ways, including:

- Our website, social media, newspapers, mail, and email.
- Meetings of Town Council which are open to the public and streamed live on social media.
- Meetings of Committees of Council are open to the public
- Open houses, town hall meetings and other public meetings
- Displays and bulletin boards to promote events (Theatre, Post Office, Library, and local businesses)

The Town of Oxford is committed to providing all information and communication fairly, in accessible formats and with communication support as needed. We will continue to:

- promote access to updated information and communication services at accessible locations.
- promote our digital presence through our website and social media and continue to enhance delivery of information
- continue to hold all in-person and online meetings in as barrier-free locations as possible, observing the 'Guide to Planning Accessible meetings and Events', Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, Department of Justice.

TRANSPORTATION

The Town of Oxford is committed to ensuring that all residents, regardless of age or ability, have fair access to safe and regulated transportation options. Currently, these options include Cumberland County Transportation Services (CCTS), a non-profit rural transportation service seeking to provide reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation service, and My Cab taxi service, which uses accessible vehicles.

The Town of Oxford is committed to exploring opportunities to enhance accessible local transportation options and working with current providers and local organizations where it is possible to promote essential, accessible, and cost-effective services for residents in Oxford and surrounding areas.

EMPLOYMENT

The Town of Oxford is dedicated to making employment opportunities accessible to people of all ages and abilities by removing barriers to work. Our workforce will reflect the diverse population of our community. We will enhance our hiring processes and workplace environments to ensure they are more inclusive and accessible for both new and existing employees, regardless of age or ability.

The Town of Oxford will continue to offer employment opportunities that are accessible to people of all ages and abilities by identifying and removing barriers to work. We will continue to improve processes regarding employment, job descriptions, hiring processes, and promote an accessible workplace.

The Town of Oxford owns, leases, and operates public facilities such as the Town Hall, Medical Centre, Theatre, Arena, Library, sidewalks, parking areas, and a variety of other buildings, parks, and infrastructure.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Responsibilities

Town Council is responsible for:

- Approving the Accessibility Plan
- Support future projects that improve accessibility

The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for:

- Implementing the Accessibility Plan
- Appointing a staff member/or members as Accessibility Coordinator
- Overseeing the Accessibility Plan with the Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for:

- Developing and updating the Accessibility Plan as needed
- Monitoring and evaluating the Plan
- Feedback and recommendations to Council

The Accessibility Coordinator is responsible for:

- Supporting the work of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and leading it in its responsibilities
- Monitoring progress in implementation of the Plan
- Assuring that Town budgets, planning documents and processes align with the Plan
- Apply for grants and funding opportunities that support accessibility improvements
- Continuing efforts to improve organizational awareness of accessibility
- Supporting staff who may need accessibility accommodation to succeed at their jobs
- Receiving and responding to public concerns, complaints, and suggestions

Monitoring

- The Town of Oxford Accessibility Advisory Committee will prepare an Accessibility Achievement Report for the Council by March 31st of each year. The Accessibility Achievement Report will update the Council on the progress being made in each area of the plan and highlight ongoing accessibility projects.

- The Accessibility Advisory Committee will conduct public surveys as required and include those results in the Accessibility Achievement Report.
- The Plan will be reviewed yearly and updated as required and presented to Council for approval.
- The Town of Oxford Accessibility Achievement Report will be posted to the website yearly as an update to the Town of Oxford’s accessibility progress on the plan.

Feedback and Public Engagement

- When an approved updated Accessibility Plan has been posted, a corresponding news article will be posted to encourage everyone to read the plan and respond to the plan by contacting the Town of Oxford by phone, email to the Accessibility Coordinator and/or via the “How do I Report a Complaint” form under “Departments” on the Town of Oxford website (www.oxfordns.ca).
- The Accessibility Coordinator will respond within a reasonable time regarding the feedback, questions and/or complaints. Responses to the feedback, questions and/or complaints may involve reviewing the matter with the Accessibility Advisory Committee and/or Council as needed.
- Anyone can appeal directly in writing to the Council. The Council may refer to any appeal to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for additional review and recommendations before issuing a final response to the inquiry.
- The Accessibility Coordinators will keep a record of all inquiries, questions, and concerns and will review any inquiries with the Accessibility Advisory Committee at future scheduled meetings. These updates will become part of the Committee’s continual review of the Accessibility Plan and may inform future changes to the plan.

REFERENCE LIST

The Town of Oxford Accessibility Committee would like to acknowledge the following sources of reference in the development of this Accessibility Plan:

- Nova Scotia Accessibility Act
- The Accessibility Planning Toolkit for Municipalities
- Wolfville: Access by Design - an Accessibility Plan for 2019 – 2022
- Wolfville: Access by Design – an Accessibility Plan for 2022 - 2025
- Accessible Cumberland Joint Accessibility Plan
- Rick Hansen Foundation (Information from Accessibility Expo)
- Town of Oxford Accessibility Study Survey 2022
- Town of Oxford Accessibility Committee Terms of Reference
- Town of Oxford Website (www.oxfordns.ca)
- Cumberland County Transportation Services, (<https://cctscumberland.ruralrides.ca>)
- Google Maps (<https://maps.google.ca>)