

# Accessibility Plan

## Town of Oxford

### 2023-2026





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Welcome Message.....</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Glossary of Terms.....</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
<b>What We Believe.....</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>Community Consultation.....</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>Areas of Focus.....</b>	<b>Page 13</b>
<b>Goods and Services.....</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>Goods and Services: Recreation.....</b>	<b>Page 18</b>
<b>Information &amp; Communication.....</b>	<b>Page 20</b>
<b>Transportation.....</b>	<b>Page 23</b>
<b>Employment.....</b>	<b>Page 26</b>
<b>Built Environment.....</b>	<b>Page 29</b>
<b>Implementing the Plan.....</b>	<b>Page 33</b>
<b>Reference List.....</b>	<b>Page 36</b>

## **WELCOME MESSAGE**

The Town of Oxford strives to become a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting community, for all its members. This includes being accessible for persons with disabilities in all areas of its operations. Since October 28, 2021, the Town of Oxford has been taking steps in developing an Accessibility Plan with a goal of implementing universal accessibility standards through a long – term and fiscally responsible phased approach. In accordance with section 44(2) of the Accessibility Act, the Town of Oxford’s Accessibility Committee is comprised of a variety of members, half of which are persons with disabilities, or are representatives from organizations representing persons with disabilities.

Our plan is the result of the collaboration of the Town of Oxford, the Accessibility Committee, and members of the community. The Accessibility Committee hosted an Accessibility Expo which allowed members of the community to visit the booths of community organizations, ask questions, and provide feedback regarding their areas of concern about accessibility within the Town of Oxford.

In addition to our Accessibility Expo, the committee also created, and distributed a survey. This survey gave community members the opportunity to anonymously identify barriers within the Town.

The Accessibility Committee wishes to thank all the community members with lived experience of disability who offered their time and expertise, and their stories with us, both through the survey and at our Expo.

The Town of Oxford’s Accessibility Committee is committed to meeting the needs of people who face barriers with accessibility. We will do this by identifying, removing, and preventing these barriers and by meeting requirements of Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act. We encourage you to consider our Accessibility Plan a living document and to provide us with feedback, and to suggest changes, that will continually improve it.

# Town of Oxford's Accessibility Advisory Committee



Top row (in the zoom picture): Kiersten Hiltz

Bottom row (left to right): Stan McDougall (Staff), Jo MacDonald (Chair), Meagan Marchant (Committee Member), Tracy Briggs (Committee Member), Linda Cloney (Staff), and Danielle Laurie (Committee Member)

Missing members from Committee photo:

Arnold MacDonald (Committee Member and Deputy Mayor), Mandy Blake (Committee Member), and Brenda MacDonald (Committee Member)

# 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.

([nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf](https://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 Nova Scotia's 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 persons with disabilities used by policy developers and analysts to access and address the impact of all initiatives (policies, programs, or decisions) on persons with disabilities. It is also a resource in creating policies and programs reflective of the rights and needs of persons 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](https://novascotia.ca/accessibility/plan))

## **Infrastructure**

The “underlying structure” that makes a place liveable 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/](http://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.](http://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.](http://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag))

# INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Accessibility Plan was developed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee and staff of the Town of Oxford who jointly provided advice to the Oxford Town Council on identifying, preventing, and eliminating barriers experienced by people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, initiatives, and facilities.

Nova Scotia has the highest rate of disability in Canada with nearly one person in three living with some form of disability. There are many different types of disabilities including physical, visual, hearing, mental health, intellectual and learning disabilities and quite often people live with multiple disabilities and some live with undiagnosed disabilities.

The Town of Oxford, like many other municipalities in Nova Scotia, is committed to ensuring equitable access to community life and participation in society for all people, regardless of their abilities and is committed to helping all people maintain their dignity and independence.

We believe in inclusion which involves equitable and equal access. Equality means everyone is treated the same; Equitable means everyone is treated fairly based on their needs and abilities. Therefore, we need to meet the needs of people who face barriers to accessibility but include everyone in that design. How do we do this? The answer comes from identifying, removing, and preventing these barriers while meeting the requirements of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

The committee and staff have worked diligently on the development and oversight of this plan. This plan serves to outline the goals for improving accessibility in the Town of Oxford.

## WHAT WE BELIEVE

The Town of Oxford, through municipal Council members, staff and most importantly, through the inclusion of the members of the public, commit to a culture of accessibility which strives to encourage the prevention and removal of barriers to participation for all ages, income, and ability levels. We will achieve this by identifying, removing, and preventing these barriers and by meeting the requirements of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act. All of us, including Council, staff, and members of the public need to work together toward this living goal through guiding principles in this process that should continue to be priorities as we move forward to implement this plan:

- Work toward equitable access for all members of our community so that every individual has an equal opportunity, and everyone is treated fairly. Equitable access acknowledges individual circumstances to remove barriers.
- It is essential to include lived experience of people with disabilities in the creation of this plan, actions, and decision-making processes.
- As new standards are introduced and new technology becomes available, this plan shall be reviewed and updated to ensure its relevance. This document, therefore, has been created to be a living document.
- We must continue to collaborate with other municipal units, the Accessibility Advisory Committee, the Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, and community partners to advance this plan and work towards improved accessibility in our communities.



## COMMUNITY CONSULTATION OXFORD ACCESSIBILITY EXPO

The Accessibility Committee undertook public consultation efforts by hosting its first Accessibility Expo on June 2, 2022, at the Oxford Legion and through an Accessibility Study Survey advertised on the Town of Oxford Website and on Facebook from June 2, 2022, to September 30, 2022. The Committee heard from several residents of the Town of Oxford and had 30 responses to the Accessibility Survey. Some key take aways from the Accessibility Survey and the Accessibility Expo:

- 96.7 % of respondents indicated that they were residents of the Town of Oxford
- Many respondents indicated that they have difficulties with mobility, mental, hearing, and visual impairments.
- 20% of respondents indicated that they have accessibility needs and difficulty in participating in town programs or activities because of barriers faced in a building on a property.
- As indicated through the survey and through the Accessibility Expo, the areas of greatest accessibility concern include Town sidewalks, the Medical Centre, Parks, Arena, and Town Hall (in that relative order).
- Some areas of concern related to accessibility in the Town of Oxford included:
  - wheelchair accessible parking spaces and wheelchair access into the Oxford Arena and uneven ground which is a detriment to visually disabled persons.
  - Large holes and cracks in sidewalks and sunken/missing sections which flood and or are not cleared off during winter snowfall and become very icy and impassable.

- Most people in the Town of Oxford indicated that they travel around town by their own vehicle. Secondary mode of travel is by walking with bicycling being a close third.
- Uneven pavement, cracked sidewalks, no sidewalks, bad weather and street lighting were identified as the top 5 items that make it difficult to travel around the Town of Oxford.

## AREAS OF FOCUS

We will work towards equitable access in these priority areas which will help to identify, prevent, and eliminate barriers for people with disabilities to participate fully in our communities. This Accessibility Plan is a united plan based on universal standards. Each municipality has been provided with a template to develop individual Accessibility Action Plans for each commitment. The Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan 2018-2021 highlights commitments to improving accessibility within 6 areas of focus. These priority areas, which are the six areas of focus for this plan include:



### **GOODS & SERVICES**

equitable access to goods & services delivered by the Town



### **GOODS & SERVICES RECREATION**

equitable access to Municipal Physical Activity delivered by the Town



### **INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION**

Clear & Accessible information and communication from the Town



### **TRANSPORTATION**

Equitable access to transportation service for everyone



### **EMPLOYMENT**

Equitable access to jobs with the Town, and fair employment practices



### **BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

Accessible Buildings & Public Spaces



## GOODS AND SERVICES



### **Our Vision**

We will work towards the goal of people of all ages and abilities having equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Town of Oxford.

### **Our Starting Point**

#### **Overview**

The Town of Oxford provide many services such as:

- Town Council and Committee meetings
- Provide Customer Service Counter
- Providing information and communication to the public (see Information and Communication section)

- Maintaining streets and sidewalks, including snow and ice removal (see Built Environment section)
- Tax and water bill inquiries
- Maintaining other services such as water, sewer, and streetlights.
- Providing emergency services, such as fire & policing services.
- Maintaining parks and open spaces (see Built Environment section)

## **Achievements**

- Council meetings are now live streamed and recorded with closed captioning, making them more accessible.

## **Barriers**

- Staff are not adequately trained in providing accessible services or events.
- No resources or funds are designated to offer alternative communication to people that need them (for example, a sign language interpreter, speech interpreter)
- Buildings in which goods and services are offered may not be fully accessible.
- The Town Hall is accessible except for an automatic door opener.
- Although the Arena is built at ground level it is not fully accessible. For example, there are no automatic door openers, common room is one level up and not accessible to some.

## **Policy**

The Town of Oxford will deliver all goods and services without bias. No resident shall be denied a service because of a disability.

## **Actions**

### **Top Priority (2023 – 2027)**

- CAO to appoint an Accessibility Coordinator or delegation of similar responsibilities to staff to:
- Receive and respond to concerns, complaints, and suggestions about accessibility and the Accessibility Plan
- Continue improving organizational awareness of accessibility.
- Monitor progress in implementing the Accessibility Plan and ensure the Plan’s priorities and actions are reflected in the budget cycle and other planning documents.
- Assist in budget planning through discussion and research items that may be required as part of the plan.
- Ongoing staff training in providing services and programs to all people including those with disabilities.

### **Other Priorities Identified**

- Create internal and public communications that are accessible to all.
- Accessible digital content, technologies, and platforms (e.g., Easter Seals Website )
- Accessible buildings and spaces conducive to positive customer experiences, including sitting areas, well-lit and sensory sensitive spaces, and accessible washroom.
- Clear and accessible way finding signage to municipal services and events.
- Assistive devices at service counter and other civic spaces to aid in communication with citizens who are hard of hearing or deaf.
- Applying an accessibility lens to procurement.
- Applying an accessibility lens to all policy, procedures, and practices.
- Consider accessibility barriers and vulnerable populations in emergency management planning and prioritization of critical infrastructure.

- Where applicable, include an “Accessibility Lens”/Impact Analysis in report to council and in consultant reports delivered to staff and council.
- Register municipal building(s) for a RHFAC rating to better understand the physical accessibility of the site(s). We will learn how to improve and identify barriers and work toward receiving certification.



## GOODS AND SERVICES RECREATION



### Our Vision

Municipal physical activity services delivered by the Town of Oxford will be accessible for people of all ages and abilities. We will take steps to break down the barriers to ensure everyone can play.

### Recreation Building & Spaces: identifying access barriers, actions, and priorities

Recreation locations	Access Barriers	Actions/Priorities
<b>Baseball Field</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Parking (limited)</li> <li>• Uneven sidewalks (to get there)</li> <li>• Loose Gravel, not walkways entering the area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Sidewalks + walkways</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• Washrooms / Accessible Outhouses</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slope and uneven ground going into the area.</li> <li>• Seating (bleacher style)</li> <li>• Washrooms (limited and not accessible)</li> </ul>	
<b>Arena (Community Room)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Parking (limited), parking area lighting is dim</li> <li>• Uneven sidewalks to get there.</li> <li>• Uneven ground, breaking pavement in parking area</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• Access to Community Room / Heated area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Sidewalks + walkways</li> <li>• Access to Community Room</li> <li>• Automatic or Open-Assisted Doors</li> </ul>
<b>Tennis Court</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Parking area: uneven ground, break up of pavement</li> <li>• Uneven sidewalks to get there</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Sidewalks</li> <li>• Washrooms / Accessible Outhouses</li> </ul>
<b>Soccer Field</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Parking (limited)</li> <li>• Uneven sidewalks to get there.</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• Washrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Parking</li> <li>• Seating</li> <li>• Washrooms / Accessible Outhouses</li> </ul>
<b>Black River Park</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible trail leading from the parking lot and going across the small bridge to driveway</li> <li>• Directional Signage</li> <li>• Uneven sidewalks to get there</li> <li>• Washroom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking</li> <li>• Sidewalks</li> <li>• Directional Signage</li> </ul>

**Note: Bicycle racks around town to encourage biking and a safe spot to lock up their bike.**



## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION



### Our Vision

Information and communication delivered by the Town of Oxford will be clear and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. We will take steps to help people understand accessibility and barriers and will increase awareness about the accessibility rights of people of all ages and abilities.

### Our Starting Point

#### Overview

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

- Our website, social media, newspaper, mail, and email.
- Meetings of Town Council which are open to the public and streamed live on social media.
- Meeting of Committees of Council are open to the public
- Open houses and other public meetings

- Displays and bulletin boards to promote events (Theatre, Post Office, Library)

## **Achievements**

- People can listen to or watch Town Council meetings, with closed captioning, live on social media.
- Agendas and minutes of all Town Council meetings are posted on the Town website.
- The Emergency Management office (EMO) Coordinator has worked with the Town of Oxford and the public to develop a contact list for use in the event of an emergency.

## **Barriers and Achievements**

- Many people do not know that others face barriers to accessibility.
- There is currently no process for hearing-impaired individuals to attend or participate in public meetings, including meetings of Town Council and Advisory Committees.
- The Town of Oxford website (<https://www.oxfordns.ca>) has been redeveloped to be more accessible to people.
- Training on digital accessibility including assistive technology and the benefits of digital accessibility. Accessibility using audio video, creating accessible documents using MS Word and creating accessible PDFs.
- The Municipal Governments Act sets guidelines for public notices to be published in newspapers, which may not be accessible to people with visual impairments.

## **Policies**

The Town of Oxford will help to:

- On request, provide information in an accessible format, or with communication supports that consider a person's specific needs.
- Build a campaign to promote the accessible service to the public.

- Continually review that the Town’s digital presence (e.g., website and social media) and Information Technology systems are designed for people of all abilities.
- 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.

## **Top Priorities (2023 – 2027)**

- Develop and implement a public awareness program (for Town staff and public) to build awareness around barriers to accessibility and what an accessible community means.
- Provide modified editions of key municipal resources – in large print and/or in plain language – on request. Examples include recreation guides, emergency management information and bylaw services.
- Ensure digital communications, including alerts, are screen readable.
- Encourage partner agencies to achieve the same standard of communication.

## **Other Priorities Identified**

- Continually review that the Town’s Web presence meets the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- Work with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) to advocate to accessibility to be included in the public notice requirements of the Municipal Government Act.
- Consult with the public to allow for feedback and participation in discussions through public Council meetings and other means before Town Council decides where required.

# TRANSPORTATION



## Our Vision

The Town of Oxford will ensure that people of all ages and abilities have equitable access to regulated transportation services (the Town of Oxford does not have any publicly funded transportation services). Regulated transportation service in the Town of Oxford currently include Cumberland County Transportation Services (CCTS) and taxi service.

## Our Starting Point

### Overview

Cumberland County Transportation Services (CCTS) is a non-profit rural transportation service seeking to provide reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation to residents of The Town of Oxford to where they need to go, and when they need to get there. The service is incredibly valuable to those without transportation, especially those with disabilities. One of the challenges faced as a community include book appointments far ahead, and although subsidized, cost remains an issue still for many. Taxi service makes up the balance of local public transportation, with some accessible options.

## **Achievements**

CCTS served 6,662 clients during the April 2021 to March 2022 year and drove 305,468 kilometres:

- 28% were in wheelchairs, or using walkers or canes, 72% were not in wheelchairs, 46% were travelling for medical reasons, 36% were attending sheltered workshops, 4% for access to food, 4% for education, 4% for social programs (VON Adult Day programs), 2% for Covid-19 vaccines, 1.5 % for shopping and the remaining 2.5% for training, work or other (interview, funeral)
- 30% were seniors (65+) 2% youth (under 18) and 68% adults aged 19 to 64.
- CCTS has five accessible vehicles and one non-accessible vehicle in its fleet.
- CCTS offers a pre-booked door-to-door service, that is first-come-first-served.

## **Barriers**

- CCTS vehicles must be booked at a minimum 24 hours in advance (due to the requirements of its Motor Carrier License) and at least a week or more in advance, especially if going beyond Cumberland County to other parts of Nova Scotia or into New Brunswick.
- Cost of transportation is a barrier to many, even though fares are subsidized.
- Some residents may be unaware of CCTS.
- Some have a misconception that CCTS transit service hours match office hours. Vehicles are on the road from 5 am to 7pm Monday to Fridays (and often longer hours), on Saturday mornings and on Sundays as required.
- Attendants travel for free and there are no charges for wait times (for example at Halifax hospitals).
- Other than taxi, there are no other transportation services for getting around the local area.

## **Policies**

It is recommended that the Town of Oxford review its policies to consider the following:

- Continue to promote Cumberland County Transportation Services (CCTS) and local taxi services.

## **Action**

### Top Priority (2023 – 2027)

- Town staff will work with CCTS staff to review accessibility at frequent stops, including snow removal.

## **Other Priorities Identified**

- Explore subsidized transit and taxi fares, especially to municipal services and events.

# EMPLOYMENT



## Our Vision

We will remove barriers to employment for people of all ages and abilities who seek a career with the Town of Oxford. Our workforce will reflect the Town’s diverse population. We will make our employment practices and workplaces more accessible for new and existing employees of all ages and ability.

## Our Starting Point

### Overview

The Town of Oxford employs 10 employees. There are 7 elected representatives on Town Council, including the mayor. Elected representative must be a Canadian citizen, at least 18 years of age, and live in the community. The Council may appoint other members of the public to serve on committees.

## Achievements

Town of Oxford Accessibility Plan 2023-2026

- Members of Council receive tablets for reading agendas and Town documents. This makes reading more accessible because users can zoom in on text and change the font size.
- The Council Chambers is somewhat barrier free.
- Town Hall is somewhat barrier free.

## **Barriers**

- Jobs are posted in tradition ways, including web pages, which may not be accessible to some individuals.

## **Policies**

It is recommended that the Town of Oxford review its policies to consider the following:

- Be an equitable employer that values diversity and supports its employees to succeed.
- Offer accommodations during recruitment.
- Offer accommodation to employees of all ages and abilities. This includes providing assistive devices and a workplace environment so that employees can succeed at those jobs.
- Work with the employees to build an understanding of the value of accessibility an inclusion.

## **Actions**

### **Top Priorities (2023 – 2027)**

- Clearly state in job postings that they are open to people with disabilities and that accommodations are available in the workplace.
- Plan accessible meetings and events for staff and council by referring to ‘Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings and Events’ and Guide to Planning

Accessible Online Meetings and Events, Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate, Department of Justice.

- Share opportunities for accessibility training with residents and local businesses – online or in person with Town of Oxford Staff training.
- Assign a designated staff person to help individuals who may need assistance to succeed at their jobs.

# BUILT ENVIRONMENT



## Our Vision

The goal is to have our public buildings and public spaces accessible to people of all ages and abilities, whether we own, lease, or operate the space. We will also encourage citizens and the business community to make other public and private spaces accessible.

## Our Starting Point

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

## Achievements

- Establishment of the Oxford Accessibility Committee.
- Stabilization of the Town Hall deck and addition of pedestrian traffic aids.
- Ramp into Oxford Theatre.
- Arena entrance has been upgraded.

- Winter Maintenance upgrades, for example clear snowbanks where crosswalks are designated and adopted Snow Removal Policy that reflect priorities of safe snow removal for public safety and accessibility.

## **Barriers**

- Various sidewalks and walkways are uneven, cracked, and crumbling.
- The curbs at crosswalks need to be reviewed for accessibility, for example tactile and proper slope.
- Some crosswalks are not clearly marked and do not have light, sound, or tactile indicators.
- Some public washrooms are not fully accessible.
- Accessible parking is limited.
- Some of the signage is not up to code regarding standard signage for various places as in the Library, Bank, and Parking... etc.
- Stairs indoors and outdoors at public buildings are often lacking contrast strips and tactile indicators.
- The municipal building entries are currently not accessible regarding automatic door openers.
- Service counters may not be an accessible height.
- Lighting may be poor around some sidewalks, parking areas, and building entrances.
- It can be very expensive to update (retrofit) existing buildings to make them more accessible.
- Accessibility projects compete with other budget demands, including essential services such as water, sewer, fire rescue, policing, school, library, emergency response measures and more.

## **Policies**

It is recommended that the Town of Oxford review its policies to consider the following:

- Provide basic access for people of all ages and abilities to public buildings, public washrooms, and at public parks with a natural slope of less than 5 percent.
- Improve and maintain the sidewalks, crosswalks, and curb cuts with the accessibility standards.

## **Actions**

### **Top Priorities (2023 – 2027)**

- New municipal buildings (including retrofits) and outdoor spaces including sidewalks will comply with the Accessibility Act’s Built Environment Standard (when implemented).
- New or rehabilitated sidewalks, roads, and parks to comply with the Accessibility Act’s Build Environment Standard as closely as possible (when implemented).
- The Accessibility Committee to conduct annual accessibility audits of municipal buildings, sidewalks, and other outdoor spaces to identify deficiencies and needs. When auditing consider:
  1. Whole Journey Approach
  2. Universal Design
  3. Seasonal Maintenance
- Ensure emergency management and building evacuation plans are reviewed with accessibility and vulnerable populations in mind.
- Consider a portion of the annual budget to install, maintain, or improve accessibility in public buildings and spaces.
- Put auditory, visual, and tactile markers at busy intersections where people cross the road – for example, within the downtown core area and near schools.
- Widen doorways and install automatic doors at the entrance of municipal buildings and public washrooms.
- Awareness needs to be raised regarding motor vehicle operators and pedestrian traffic competing for street priority, for example a pedestrian

could be hearing impaired, and the motor vehicle operator may not realize and assumes the right of way.

### **Other Priorities Identified**

- Improve and maintain the accessibility of municipal buildings and outdoor spaces including sidewalks to comply as closely and feasible with the Accessibility Act's Built Environment Standard (when implemented).
- Conduct a "gap analysis" of where sidewalks, crosswalks, and lighting are not present currently.
- Council to implement the CSA Accessibility requirements to the Council Chambers in Town Hall by March 31, 2026.
- When closing sidewalks for constructions, ensure an accessible detour is offered.
- Strive to ensure that all new and retrofit buildings meet the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) Gold Standard.
- The curbs at crosswalks need to apply tactile, proper slope, and any other accessible requirements.

# IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

## Responsibilities

Town Council is responsible for:

- Adopting the Accessibility Plan.

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 Coordinators 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.
- 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.

## **Schedule**

As previously stated, this is a living document and therefore will be ongoing and evolving with a goal of full implementation by March 31, 2030.

## **Monitoring**

- The Town of Oxford Accessibility Advisory Committee will prepare a Town of Oxford Accessible Report Card for Council by March 31st of each year beginning in 2024 (referencing the Wolfville: Access By Design, an Accessibility Plan for 2023-2026). This report card will measure the performance of the policies and actions in this Plan. The Committee may also make recommendations to improve the Plan.
- The Accessibility Advisory Committee will conduct public surveys as required and include those results in the report card.
- The Plan will be updated every 3 years and more frequently as new provincial standards are implemented.
- The Town of Oxford Accessible Report Card will be a public document and will be posted on the Town's website.

## **Evaluation**

The Town will lead a public review and evaluation of the Town of Oxford's Accessibility Plan before fiscal year 2024/25.

## **Responding to Questions and Complaints**

- Anyone can lodge a complaint, pose a question, or express a concern about accessibility within the Town of Oxford. They should be directed to the Accessibility Coordinators and/or the Town of Oxford webpage.

- The Accessibility Coordinator will respond within a reasonable time regarding the questions and/or complaints. Before responding, the Accessibility Coordinator's response will contain the reasons for the decision.
- Anyone can appeal to Council if they are not satisfied with the response from the Accessibility Coordinator. Council may refer any appeal to the Accessibility Advisory Committee for additional review and recommendations before issuing a final response to the complaint.
- The Accessibility Coordinators will keep a record of all complaints, questions, and concerns and will provide summary updates to the Accessibility Advisory Committee on a regular basis. These updates will become part of the Committee's continual review of the Accessibility Plan and may inform future changes to the plan.
- Currently, the "How do I Report a Complaint" webform is the best vehicle to pose a question and/or address a complaint located on the Town of Oxford website, under the heading Departments.

## 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
- Town of Oxford Accessibility Study Survey 2022
- Town of Oxford Accessibility Committee Terms of Reference
- Cumberland County Transportation Services,  
(<https://cctscumberland.ruralrides.ca>)
- Google Maps (<https://maps.google.ca>)