



LET YOURSELF IN

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2024 - 2026

Town of Harbour Grace



John Walsh – B.A., B.A. Ed., M.Ed.
Principal Consultant
JW Consulting Associates
11 Wembley Crescent
Mount Pearl, NL, A1N 4T8
(709) 728-8414 (cell)
Email: cet@nl.rogers.com

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1.0 Statement of Commitment

The Town Council of the Town of Harbour Grace are fully committed to fulfilling their obligations relating to ‘accessibility and inclusion’. In fact, they have initiated efforts for improvements many years ago, simply because council saw the need to do so – not because they were mandated to do so. With this ‘Accessibility Plan’ council intends to intensify its efforts to mitigate any barriers to accessibility and inclusion that may prevent full participation in programs and events. Staff will review its programs, operations, and services from an ‘accessibility’ lens to put forth recommendations to council for improvements in the general areas of ‘accessibility and inclusion’. Council is committed to doing more and plan to implement what is identified in the plan – barring any unforeseen circumstances or emergencies. Council is aware that an ‘accessible and inclusive’ Harbour Grace benefits everyone.

2.0 Accessibility Goals

Existing Initiatives (Already Completed)

Many years ago, the Town of Harbour Grace implemented several initiatives to improve ‘accessibility and inclusion’. The Town of Harbour Grace has made great progress in many areas, but they are aware that there is much work still left to do, but council is committed to getting it done. The Town has completed the following:

- Significant improvements have been made to sidewalks in Harbour Grace to make them more accessible. Specifically, Water Street, Noad Street and Kitchen’s Hill, as well as a long area of sidewalks along Harvey Street. These are built to current accessibility standards.
- St. Francis Soccer Clubhouse and the Aero Tennis Clubhouse have both had renovations done in recent years. The doors have been widened to make them more accessible, and the pathways to the washrooms have been made accessible.
- The same renovations have been made to the Moriarity Park complex.
- There are sensory zones dedicated to the town’s Santa Clause Parade (which is monitored by the town’s Fire Brigade) for those with various sensory issues.
- There is a wheel chair ramp installed at the Town Hall for those with mobility issues
- An electronic door opener has been installed at the Town Hall, as well.
- The Town Hall has a fully accessible ‘gender neutral’ washroom for the public to use
- There is also an accessible wheelchair ramp at the Kearney Tourist Chalet in Harbour Grace
- The washrooms at the Kearney Tourist Chalet are also accessible.
- There is already an accessible washroom available at the Fire Brigade Social Club.

Towards improving 'inclusion':

- Everyone is welcome in Harbour Grace.
- PRIDE events are intentionally partnered with the town's Splash Centre Community Youth Network as well as Communities Against Violence, for obvious reasons.
- The Town proudly flies the PRIDE flag during PRIDE week; again, to show support a community of people that are marginalized.
- There is also a bench at the S.W. Moores Memorial Park walkway that is painted in PRIDE colours – this bench stays there all year long.
- During PRIDE week to show its support for the LGBTQ+ community in Harbour Grace
- There are accessible raised beds planned for the community garden at Moriarity Park (to assist seniors and others).

Communications:

Besides the work that has already been done in Harbour Grace, there are many new initiatives council are fully committed to implementing to improve 'accessibility and inclusion' in the town:

- *Instead of simply posting pictures to the town's website or Facebook page, the 'text' is added for those with various 'visual' impairments.*

New Initiatives for 2024-2026:

Some priorities the town of Harbour Grace have identified going forward are the following:

- The Otterbury Schoolhouse is a designated historic site, and 'accessible' washrooms are being installed to make the schoolhouse accessible to everyone.
- The space at the Otterbury Schoolhouse is set to become a 'multi-purpose' space that will house the Earhart 50+ Club (among other groups in the future).
- There are plans to pave the parking lot behind the town's Fire Brigade Social Club to improve accessibility – especially for older adults or those with various mobility issues.
- There are also plans in place to install an automatic door opener at the Fire Brigade Social Club.
- This has been done since our first correspondence.

DISABILITY
isn't contagious – **IGNORANCE** is

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- There is also a handrail with grab bars to be installed at the Fire Brigade Social Club.
 - The Harbour Grace Heitage District Development Plan aims to create an accessible, pedestrian-friendly walkways in the downtown.
 - Plans are already underway to install sidewalks at LeMarchant Street and Southside Road in the town to make the town more accessible.
 - The Regatta Grounds have renovations scheduled, and among the considerations, is to build an accessible washroom on the grounds for the public to access.
 - Upgrades scheduled for the Danny Cleary Community Center include an elevator as well as the installation of an electronic door opener.
 - Future plans for Moriarity Park have improved accessibility in mind – especially the walkway in the park.
 - The Town of Harbour Grace’s strategic plan has identified ‘equity and inclusion’ as priorities going forward; this demonstrates council’s commitment to accessibility and inclusion.
 - A recent poll conducted in the town spoke of the need for the town to be more ‘age friendly’; a model for ‘inclusiveness’; and to be ‘accessible and barrier free’ for everyone to enjoy – whether it’s programs, facilities, services or operations – generally to be more accessible.
 - In funding and supporting the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* (as part of the town’s *Accessibility Plan*) this will allow the committee members to learn and grow in the broad areas of accessibility and inclusion; in large measure, council is fulfilling its mandate by doing this; of course, ‘implementation’ of the recommendations that are brought forth is huge, and council must consider making commitments (financially and otherwise) going forward
 - Making the ‘public’ more aware will be extremely important in the future; the ‘public’ has a huge role to play (especially as it relates to inclusion); to that end, Harbour Grace council intends to elicit the support of the public and help make the public more aware of issues of accessibility (and especially inclusion) by sharing information, building awareness, and indentifying, removing, and preventing barriers to accessibility within the town. Raising public awareness about issues of accessibility in Harbour Grace is extremely important and the public has an important role to play; an ‘inclusive and accessible’ town benefits everyone
 - The Town can make the ‘*Advisory Committee on Accessibility*’ as diverse and representative of the community relating to ‘accessibility and inclusion’ as possible
 - Ensure the ‘terms of reference’ of the committee address fundamental issues of accessibility and inclusion; consider some of the following groups/individuals to serve on the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility*:
 - People with physical disabilities
 - Those with visual impairments
 - Those with hearing impairments
 - Members of the LBGQT+ community

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- Representation from indigenous groups
 - People with emotional or mental health issues
 - Those with intellectual impairments
 - Representatives of special interest groups, professionals, and advocates that have an established focus and agenda (those representing people with physical challenges, John Howard Society, CNIB, Association for New Canadians, Hard of Hearing Association, Pride Community, the autism community etc...) – professionals who work in the field and have specific training, knowledge, and skills to offer
 - Local representatives of Harbour Grace (from the above, where possible)
 - Appointing a very capable staff person (mandatory) to serve on the committee – a capable staff person is critically important in organizing meetings; sending out reminders to committee members; organizing training; taking & distributing minutes etc.,
 - Having a member of council (also mandatory) serve on the committee who is committed to learning more about accessibility and to chair the initial meeting, at least (unless otherwise decided)

Note: All individuals or groups don't need to be represented, but as diverse a group as possible works best.

- Commit to ongoing learning activities for members of council of the Town of Harbour Grace and the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility*, and offer 'opportunities to learn' more about 'accessibility issues' to the public, as well; these ongoing learning opportunities could include:
 - Guest speakers
 - Webinars, courses, and other 'on-line' learning tools (normally provided virtually)
 - An introduction and overview of the province's *Accessibility Act*
 - Review of existing (and new) programs, initiatives, services, and facilities that are examples of accessibility and inclusion within Harbour Grace
 - "Hands On" learning – consultations with professional representatives of those with various disabilities; first-hand experience (lived experience) of barriers to disabilities & accessibility within the town; learning from professionals working in the field – these are all helpful PD opportunities
- Ensure all future recreational facilities built by the Town of Harbour Grace are accessible – make this the first question that gets asked about 'new facilities' owned/operated by the town "Are the facilities accessible?"
- Revise the Town's commercial '*Building and Development*' regulations to ensure all new 'commercial' operations are accessible going forward; obviously "existing" businesses can continue to be "grandfathered" by these regulations (if they do not already meet the new standard); council could consider putting a reasonable 'timeline' to be compliant

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- Review existing recreational facilities and playgrounds, apparatus, & equipment with a view to improving accessibility (where practical) – i.e. by removing and preventing ‘barriers’ to full participation
 - Make the public aware of council’s commitment to accessibility through its approval of the town’s revised commercial ‘*Building and Development*’ regulations and council’s other commitments
 - Identify new initiatives and facilities which are affordable which demonstrate councils’ commitment to ‘accessibility & inclusion’
 - Communication is so important; so, share the town’s ‘Accessibility Plan’ with taxpayers/public, and council should proudly take every opportunity to boast of council’s ‘commitment’ to accessibility when talking to the public or speaking to various community groups and/or at functions
 - Provide an annual award for the “Town of Harbour Grace Accessibility/Inclusion” to help raise awareness and to acknowledge acts that “include others” and improve “accessibility” & inclusion; once again, this helps raise ‘awareness’ among the public. Sometimes, those (or an organization) who help organize a monthly community supper may be recognized. This small ‘act of kindness’ includes others – especially the marginalized and more vulnerable among us. These people (and organizations) need to be publicly recognized.
 - Consider having the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* make a survey available to residents of the town (using SurveyMonkey or some other cost-effective tool – (the committee makes the final decision) to get ideas on how to make Harbour Grace more accessible and inclusive in the future
 - Enable the ‘*Advisory Committee on Accessibility*’ to fundraise annually for a ‘cause specific’ fundraiser to help raise awareness of issues of accessibility & inclusion in Harbour Grace (and to highlight the work they do) – this is more about raising awareness than raising money

Suggestions from the Public Consultation

- One of the members of the ‘Advisory Committee’ asked if the plan that was being developed by us for the Town of Harbour Grace was final; we (JWCA) said that what we were developing was the plan for 2024-2026 (a three-year plan) and it was considered final, but if members of the committee planned to do a couple of important things in addition to what is in the plan – we would happy to have it added. Image4 is very accommodating and the cost would less than \$200. JWCA could provide the contact info.
- It was mentioned that the Town is pretty responsive to the needs of the ‘disabled community’; a lady said when she called the Town they were there within 20 minutes to fill in potholes so her son could get out in his wheelchair.
- There were many things undertaken in the past 2 years by the Town of Harbour Grace that were highlighted
- Next, we turned our attention to what was planned to be done over the next 3 years by the town

– and it was substantial; in fact, some of it has been completed already (we were told by staff). This was shared with those in attendance.

- There was some uncertainty about the state of commercial buildings, this is a real problem for people with mobility issues; but those commercial buildings are ‘grandfathered’ for exemption – it was suggested that a date was needed (even for those being grandfathered) to have a final date to have accessible upgrades completed - even if it is 5 or 10 years away.
- It was noted that in the strategic plan as well as the questionnaire relating to the strategic plan both scored highly in terms of accessibility & inclusion; that was note worthy and something that should be built upon. The strategic plan identifies ‘priorities’ for council.
- It was suggested that online (or other) learning should be offered not only to the advisory committee members and members of council, but opportunities should be offered to the public as well; how many would ‘really’ participate; the cost (to the town) would be negligible.
- With the province’s adoption of the *Accessibility Act* municipalities have specific timelines to address accessibility issues.
- It also means that work on ‘accessibility and inclusion’ MUST be completed.
- The consultants noted that while changes to accessibility may be marginally more expensive, it’s always cheaper ‘to do it right’ the first time; renovations are always costlier.
- Communicate the Accessibility Plan to the public (once it’s received by council), and the consultants suggested the mayor and council use every opportunity to talk about accessibility when addressing residents – whether it’s with youth groups, with seniors, or at the Fire Brigade Ball
- There was a resident in attendance (in a wheelchair) who spoke of his involvement in a program at Easter Seals when he was living in St. John’s. The name of the program was “I Can Too” and perhaps some of it can be adopted for use in Harbour Grace in its recreation programming.
- The ‘Splash Centre Community Youth Network’ in Harbour Grace was mentioned for the potential for accessibility and inclusion
- Perhaps in the revised commercial ‘*Building and Development*’ regulations a timeline for completion of accessibility requirements for those properties ‘grandfathered’ by the regulations could be provided – even if it’s 5 or 10 years.
- It was mentioned that perhaps someone in a Wheel Chair could ‘test drive’ changes to accessibility regulations to ensure a wheelchair can manoeuvre around properly.
- It was mentioned (in a previous consultation session) that even change tables in washrooms need to be sturdier; these are not built for babies (necessarily); they need to be built to handle a grown adult who may also have washroom needs.

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- The fact that the ‘garden beds’ in the community garden are raised is a great idea and helps make them more accessible and inclusive for everyone.
 - There are also limited human resources in a town like Harbour Grace – if staff goes on annual leave - the work just piles up. Only emergency items are addressed, normally.
 - There was talk about plans to use text to explain photos for the visually impaired – that works similar to ‘closed captioning’ where the words are on the bottom of the screen for the hearing impaired.
 - There is no one in the town that organizes recreation on behalf of the town - so there is great reliance on minor hockey, and figure skating etc., to be directly involved.
 - It was mentioned that the Advisory Committee should not be expected to fundraise; but fundraising is a way to ‘raise awareness” about the work of the committee or accessibility, in general, it is not about the ‘money raised’ but about ‘raising awareness’
 - Perhaps when the Accessibility Plan is in place there will be more opportunities for federal and provincial funding

3.0 Barriers to Accessibility

In Harbour Grace there are still barriers to accessibility that have been identified.

Physical Barriers – Despite council’s efforts, there are still many physical barriers to accessibility in Harbour Grace. Physical barriers are more easily identified. There is still work to done within the business community to ‘raise awareness’ and to make the commercial facilities (in Harbour Grace) more accessible. The Town of Harbour Grace is committed to working with the business community in the town to help ensure businesses within the town become more accessible.

Financial Barriers – The economy is tight. Money is hard to come by, and several groups/individuals need to be taken care of. On top of that, apparatus, equipment or renovations to facilities to improve accessibility tend to be expensive.

Everything is relative, but compared with other municipalities across Newfoundland and Labrador, Harbour Grace is doing well financially (and in almost every other way) and most importantly, they seem to be ‘living within their means’. But finding discretionary spending for things like accessibility can be challenging – even for a town like Harbour Grace - especially with so many other needs at the forefront

BUILDING minds
building **FUTURES**

(as mentioned above) vying for the same funding. As important as accessibility and inclusion are (and it is a priority of council), it can sometimes be difficult to divest funds towards these projects. There are so many needs (and demands among taxpayers of the town) in a smaller rural community like Harbour Grace, and there is only a limited amount of money to go around.

While it may be argued that (financially) the town is doing well (and it is), everything is relative. Understandably, Harbour Grace's council are reticent to increase taxes (especially with so many other costs rising) to cover the increased costs of completing projects on accessibility (which tend to be costly). That's where 'raising awareness' about issues of accessibility become so important. While 'accessibility' presents barriers to a small percentage of our population, it says something about the 'inclusive' nature of our society when these barriers 'are' removed. A fully accessible and inclusive Harbour Grace is the goal – and that benefits everyone.

Human Resources – As far as human resources go, Harbour Grace is not unlike many other towns in Newfoundland and Labrador. Harbour Grace have a limited number of staff available at any given time. Even when staff are on annual leave currently, there are usually no replacements for them to complete their work while they're on vacation. Only emergency services (like garbage collection) are continued. The work is usually just left to face employees upon their return or others have to 'pick up the slack' for shorter periods of time. Certain things will be done – but certainly not everything. But it is difficult, because staffing levels are normally at 'bare bones' in most municipalities already. Some communities have special interest groups and municipal departments to undertake certain new initiatives and to give it the attention it deserves. The irony is that quite often smaller municipalities have to do the same things as larger municipalities (in order to be compliant) – but they have to do so with much smaller staffing allocations. So, staffing or human resource restrictions is definitely a barrier to accessibility.

Public Engagement – This is not a problem unique to Harbour Grace. Getting the public to engage in issues of accessibility & inclusion, especially persons who do not want to identify as having a disability, can be challenging. But the public needs to be engaged. The public needs to be more aware of challenges relating to accessibility and inclusion – not just staff, or the advisory committee, or members of council – everyone. As mentioned, this is a problem for all municipalities – not just Harbour Grace. But it is even more challenging in smaller towns where most people know one another – where names and families are more entrenched. This certainly seems to be true with Harbour Grace. An example would be the stigma associated with a person living with a mental health issue or having an intellectual or cognitive challenge. While these conditions are more difficult to recognize, this normally creates its own challenge. Some disabilities are harder to detect and these are challenging for everyone to address, as a result. Even coming forward to serve on the Advisory Committee for Accessibility can be an example of this. While some peoples' participation on the committee may be obvious – others' may be less obvious.

Communication – There are segments of the municipal population with hearing issues or visual impairments. People with visual impairments may not be able to read information on the town website, for example, or even be able to read their tax invoices. Many people have hearing challenges - especially in large crowds or crowded rooms where there is a lot of chatter or peripheral noise (even those with

hearing aids). These are important barriers that need to be considered by council. Because, as things stand right now, there are definite communication barriers, and they even exist with most social media devices and tools and on most social media platforms (which councils do not control), as well. In fact, we normally have little or no control over social media devices (or how they operate). People sometimes can't communicate well for various reasons, and this can present a problem for public bodies (like municipal councils).

4.0 Focus Areas

- 4.1 The primary focus in Harbour Grace (for this plan) has to be raising awareness among the public about issues of 'accessibility and inclusion'. Focus areas change 'year to year'. The primary area of focus for the town's Accessibility Plan for the next several years will be to make council and the general public of Harbour Grace more aware of issues, concerns, and barriers to 'accessibility' (and inclusion) within the town. Simply put – to raise awareness. Raising awareness among the public is always a great place to start. Raising awareness among residents of the town will require a big commitment of time, energy, and resources. It must come at the public from many different directions. The ongoing education of council, the advisory committee, and the general public will be a 'process' rather than an 'event', but with a full commitment from council this can and will be achieved, over time. Educating members of the advisory committee or council is much easier than educating the general public of Harbour Grace. This is an excellent area to focus on at the start.
- 4.2 Perhaps Harbour Grace council can make a proclamation declaring that the town is committed to being an *Accessible Community* dedicated to establishing and implementing principles of accessibility and inclusion in everything they do 'going forward'.
- 4.3 Another 'area of focus' will be to remove the barriers that currently exist (over time) and to prevent barriers to accessibility from being established in the future.
- 4.4 Council will, going forward, consider all aspects of accessibility and inclusion relating to outside (non-elected) committees of council, volunteering with the town, working in the town, as well as hiring new employees (where practical). This will be a huge commitment. Show me what you have done – not just what you intend to do.
- 4.5 Involvement of staff is huge. Involve staff in the development of 'accessibility' and inclusion efforts. Employees can help identify specific budget items required in implementing the plan (in various areas of programs, operations, and services). These budget recommendations can be provided through the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* or they could be provided directly to council (through Committee of the Whole). But they must be presented and considered for implementation by council. Some (larger projects) may take years to implement while others can be implemented immediately. It depends on what the initiative is.
- 4.6 Ensure physical accommodations that are fully accessible are provided and available in the community. These often apply to persons with physical disabilities or other restrictions, but it's important that they are 'prioritized'.

4.7 The Town’s commercial *Building and Development* regulations and permitting processes must ensure healthcare facilities and clinics are accessible and inclusive for all individuals. It’s important the town work towards gathering support from the business community relating to the town’s revised commercial *Building and Development* regulations.

5.0 Advisory Committee on Accessibility

5.1 The *Accessibility Act* requires an advisory committee be put in place. The *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* is a great place to start. One of the first considerations (from council’s perspective) is which member of council is going to be appointed from council to serve on this committee. This can be telling of council’s commitment to accessibility. Obviously, appointing someone from council who is knowledgeable and sympathetic to the needs of the accessible community, and who is open to learning more about the issues and barriers that exist is very important. Depending on whether or not this committee is entirely new or is adopted and expanded from the another committee of council, the councillor may be required to chair the first meeting of the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility*, and definitely will become knowledgeable of issues relating to accessibility on behalf of council and the barriers that may still exist. Having a genuine interest and bringing a ‘commitment’ to the committee are keys to success for any councillor appointed.

5.2 Another consideration is “how” members will become part of the committee. Harbour Grace put out a ‘call to serve’ on the committee. The committee will be an “advisory committee”, meaning that the committee can put forth ‘recommendations’ that may or may not be adopted (or funded) by council. They offer advice and make recommendations (as do all committees of council) to council on issues of accessibility. Any upgrades always have to be subject to the approval of council and likely depend on the availability of money. Members of the committee are considered “experts” in the field of accessibility in Harbour Grace. They often have special knowledge and they have been exposed to ‘training’ in issues relating to ‘accessibility and inclusion’.

How will members be assigned? Will everyone who shows an interest be appointed? Council put forth an ‘Open Call’ for nominations to serve on the committee? How will potential committee members be approached to become part of the committee and by whom? How will this call be prepared and where will it be published? Once again, how will committee members be chosen by council to serve on this committee? What criteria will be used? These are practical considerations that will have to be made by council and/or staff.

Assuming that council’s ‘advisory committee’ will become a separate committee, will all members of the committee be residents of Harbour Grace or will some advisory committee members be representative of professionals or ‘experts’ working elsewhere in the field who may have training and expertise to offer already? That decision must be made relatively quickly. Many committees

on “accessibility” already have “terms of reference” adopted – so there is no need to re-invent the wheel. Borrow *when and where* you can. The ‘terms of reference’ can be revised and adopted by your own committee for use in Harbour Grace.

5.3 Another question to be answered is how should the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* be reflective of inclusion? Consider members of the committee from groups/individuals that are normally marginalized from the following:

- People with physical disabilities or mobility issues (1 or 2)
At least one (1) from some of the others listed below (depending on the size of the committee):
- Those with visual impairments
- Those with hearing impairments
- Members of the LBGQTQ+ community
- Representation of indigenous groups
- People with mental or emotional health issues
- Those with intellectual disabilities
- Representatives of broader special interest groups, professionals, and advocates that have an established focus and agenda
- Local representatives (living in Harbour Grace)
- Staff person (who can assist the councillor and be a ‘lead’ and knowledgeable on issues relating to disability)
- Member of council who is sympathetic and is committed to learning more about accessibility. Someone with a ‘vested’ interest ideally. This person will become council’s liaison on issues of ‘accessibility and inclusion’ – with help from the staff person appointed.

Note; Again, not all individuals or groups need to be represented. But the more diverse the committee is – the better.

Another consideration is how each individual or group has had to overcome ‘barriers’ to accessibility when choosing membership to your committee. You may also need to consider representatives who live in your community. Except for any professional staff (CNIB etc.,) who may live in neighbouring communities, having residents of Harbour Grace should be a priority.

Courage

doesn't mean you don't get afraid,

courage means you **don't let fear STOP you**

NOTE: Some disabilities may not be so easy to detect – like ‘intellectual’ disabilities. Other individuals may not want to be categorized or be seen to have a disability at all. This can make choosing who may or may not be asked to participate in the work of the committee even more challenging.

- 5.4 Should committee meetings be made ‘public’? There are arguments to be made on both sides. Should the media be invited to attend? Having the meetings open to the public may provide an opportunity for others (other than those who serve on the committee) to be aware of (or even participate) in things relating to accessibility. It also advances the arguments for ‘openness and transparency’.

On the other hand, having meetings that are open to the public may prevent some committee members from speaking their minds ‘openly & freely’ and thereby advancing the agenda of accessibility as it needs to be done by the committee. Some members of the advisory committee may not want the public to even know they are on a committee dealing with issues of accessibility & inclusion (or how they became involved). This is a decision that must eventually be made (by council or by the committee itself). Perhaps it is something the committee can eventually decide upon.

6.0 Council Commitment

- 6.1 Having a staff person from the town is ‘mandatory’. A staff person from Harbour Grace must be appointed to become an accessibility team ‘lead’, and to support the work of the councillor appointed to the committee as an advisory committee of council. The staff person can prepare meeting agendas, circulate copies of the agenda to committee members, take and circulate minutes of meetings, arrange for guest speakers or other professional development opportunities, address issues of ‘technology’ for virtual learning sessions, prepare & complete funding applications, schedule professional development opportunities, assist with ‘on-line’ learning, and perform other ‘day to day’ tasks, as required. These are all important, time-consuming, and busy duties.
- 6.2 The committee should (early in the process) be provided with an opportunity to become familiar with the provincial **Accessibility Act** and what is happening on the provincial level to address issues of accessibility and to remove barriers. These learning opportunities are normally free of charge and are an important means of bringing Committee Members “up to speed” and getting them in touch with other professionals in the field of accessibility.
- 6.3 The **Accessible Canada Act 2019** should also become familiar to committee members (eventually) . While familiarity with the Province’s Accessibility Act will be a priority, eventually familiarity with federal legislation will be important. While the various provinces are responsible for the plan, there is much to be learned at the national level, as well. Committee members should be challenged to become familiar with expectations and opportunities to learn more at the national level, and become aware of funding opportunities (both provincially and federally) to access funding to support their local projects and initiatives – which tend to be fairly costly when it comes to accessibility.

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- 6.4 The *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* can eventually “tweak” the Accessibility Plan to better suit their needs. The Accessibility Plan must become a ‘living and breathing’ document in order for it to become truly effective. Revisions and updates should become a normal part of the renewal process. The plan must be updated every 3 years according to current requirements.
- 6.5 Learning and collaboration should become a part of the routine work of the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility*. Learning about issues (and trends) of accessibility should be a major focus of the committee. Council should work to ensure these opportunities are provided. While most of these opportunities are “free”, there may be donations to be made or registration costs to be covered etc... Things like arranging “guest speakers”, or other ‘hands on’ learning opportunities should be provided to committee members of Harbour Grace, as well as conference participation and ‘on-line’ learning opportunities. In other words, a commitment to learning more should be made and provided by council as a priority.
- 6.6 The plan cannot be kept on a shelf. All plans must be ‘shared’ with the public if they are to be successful. Council should create a message about its commitment to improving accessibility and share its plan with the public in Harbour Grace. The plan should become a much-publicized ‘public document’. If the plan and all of the good work of the committee is not widely shared with the public, the town will not likely improve substantially in the broad areas of accessibility. Sharing this information widely allows others to be more active in community events and thereby improves accessibility for everyone in the town.
- 6.7 Council (as much as feasible) needs to be committed to implementation of the plan. Implement the goals and actions identified in the Accessibility Plan. The plan is empty words without proper implementation. Implementation is critical to the plan’s success. If council is truly committed to eliminating and preventing barriers to accessibility – immediate action needs to be taken. It is often said, “talk is cheap” - and there is truth in this statement. There will be costs incurred, but there also will be plenty of opportunities for funding (both federally and provincially) once the plan is adopted.. In any case, implementation is the key.
- 6.8 Making opportunities for members of the public in Harbour Grace (and elsewhere) to learn more about accessibility is critically important. So, these opportunities should be well publicized and shared with the general public. Harbour Grace may eventually become synonymous with accessibility. That would be a tremendous thing to have happen as an “off shoot” to these initiatives.

7.0 Accessibility Standards

Over time, either through a recommendation put forth by the *'Advisory Committee on Accessibility'*, or through other means, council will establish new standards for accessibility within the town. Affordability and practicality will be important in establishing these standards, and while they may apply more to future commercial builds or programs, the standards will help identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility that currently exist. This will raise awareness, at least, to these barriers.

'Officially', a "standard" may apply to individuals, organizations, or public bodies that:

- i. Design and deliver programs and services
- ii. Provide information or communication
- iii. Procure goods, services, and facilities
- iv. Offer accommodations
- v. Provide education or offer opportunities for learning
- vi. Provide healthcare
- vii. Provide opportunities for employment
- viii. Own, operate, maintain or control an aspect of the 'built' environment other than a private residence with 3 or less residential units
- ix. Conduct an activity or undertaking prescribed in the regulation

These 'standards' cannot violate or supersede the 'standards' set by the Province of Newfoundland Labrador through the *Accessibility Standards Advisory Board* in 2022. These are the standards that are to be applied in every situation that may exist in Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to accessibility.

I may be **DIFFERENT**
from you, but **NOT LESS** than you

GLOSSARY

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador defines “disability” as follows:

“A *disability* includes a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation that is permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature that, in interaction with a barrier, prevents a person from fully participating in society.”

“A *barrier* means anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in society, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, or a barrier established or perpetrated by an Act, regulations, a policy or practice.”

Advisory Committee on Accessibility – For the Town of Harbour Grace, the ‘*Advisory Committee on Accessibility*’ (whether a new committee or a revised committee) – this committee looks at the facilities, programs, services, and operations that currently are in place in Harbour Grace and puts forth recommendations on how the town can prevent (or remove) barriers so that the town can be more accessible (where feasible) going forward. The *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* become somewhat of local ‘experts’ in the area(s) of accessibility, but as an ‘advisory’ committee the committee can put forth recommendations and provide advice, but council does not have an obligation to implement the suggestions made.

Accessible – at the local level, it simply means putting forth efforts to remove barriers to participation; whether they be physical barriers or other barriers (such as enlarging the font size of the print on correspondence for aging adults or for the visually impaired), or removing barriers to participation for various individuals or groups who may not otherwise be comfortable participating. At one time the term “accessible” referred only to physical accessibility, but it has been expanded to include much more.

Accessible community refers to a specific community of people which believes in and supports the principles of accessibility (in this case, residents of Harbour Grace).

Not taking action is the

**ULTIMATE
DISABILITY**

Accessibility Act is a provincial law (Province of Newfoundland Labrador) that governs all issues relating to accessibility, in general, which became law in 2021. The Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities oversees the work of his/her officials, and staff within the department can be a huge help and resource to people like those serving on the *'Advisory Committee on Accessibility'* in Harbour Grace, or the members of council, in general.

Accessible Canada Act is a federal law adopted by the Government of Canada in 2019. The law applies primarily to those under federal jurisdiction (such as indigenous groups), but many excellent ideas can be borrowed from this legislation and applied locally in Harbour Grace. The Accessible Canada Act is the national standard that all provinces must comply with.

Accessibility standards are a set of standards that are provided to public bodies whereby they can (as a public body) develop a set of standards through the provincial *Accessibility Act* which governs all aspects of accessibility, in this case, within the Town of Harbour Grace.

Building regulations refer to the official regulations which govern builders which have been adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Harbour Grace to control building and development within the town.

Chair as in "chairing a committee" refers to individuals who are elected or appointed to lead a committee. The additional responsibilities of the chair are to ensure meetings are scheduled; to help prepare the meeting agenda; to note who attends (and who is absent); to lead the discussion and maintain "order" in the meetings following the rules of order that have been adopted; to understand the basic principles of democracy and meeting decorum; and to ensure the "minutes" of the meeting are circulated to others (as decided by the committee).

Goals are defined as a 'desired result' or outcomes – something you are aiming to achieve. In terms of improving accessibility, the goals that are identified by the town are things the town would like to achieve to make Harbour Grace more accessible.

Inclusion is a term broadly used to proactively remove any barriers that may exist that may prevent residents of Harbour Grace from participating – these barriers could be physical, emotional, intellectual, or through discrimination as a result of prejudice, or removal of any type(s) of barriers of any nature.

Intellectual impairments refer to barriers of an intellectual nature (such as autism) which are not so easy to see, but may be a barrier to an individual's full participation in programs or events in the community for various reasons.

Lead on issues of accessibility is normally the staff person appointed by council to serve on the committee and is an individual who can be trusted to be "in the know" and somewhat of a 'local expert' on issues relating to accessibility that council can refer to for advice and to answer questions as they arise etc...

Local representatives are people chosen to represent the town of Grand Falls-Windsor who actually live in the town.

Open Call is a term used in official “Rules of Order” that means that (in this case) council will prepare a document which will be made public “calling” for nominations to serve on the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility*. Depending on the response, not everyone nominated will serve on the committee. Ultimately, that will be council’s decision. Whether the call will only be open to residents of Harbour Grace (or not) or will include other professionals or individuals willing to serve who may live and/or work in other communities will be specified in the call, as well as things like “the terms of office” etc...

Physical handicaps – are barriers of a physical nature that may prevent some individuals from participating (such as not having wheelchair accessible washrooms or entranceways).

Public refers to anyone who would like to attend a meeting, in this case – whether they be residents of Harbour Grace or others living in neighbouring communities who may have an interest in issues of accessibility. When public is used there are usually no ‘restrictions’ on who can attend.

Public Document is any document ordered by council to be prepared for viewing by residents of Harbour Grace or elsewhere. A public document may be shared through social media and posted on the town’s website and thus can be viewed by anyone, and is generally made available for viewing by members of the public (not just residents of Harbour Grace).

CONCLUSION

Development of the initial plan is a huge ‘first step’. But it is only a plan. Without ‘implementation’ of the plan nothing will be achieved other than what has already been done. Council needs to make issues of accessibility and inclusion a topic for its budget discussions every year. This will be the next step towards implementation of the plan.

Consider the recommendations and priorities of the Advisory Committee on Accessibility and council should make an effort to fund them.

So, developing this plan is an important first step and a huge commitment on behalf of the Town Council of the Town of Harbour Grace, but it is just the beginning.

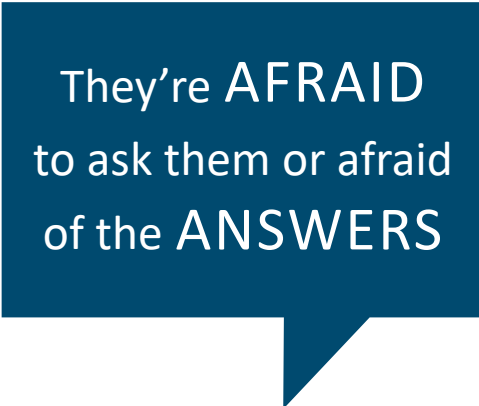
Council’s commitment to ‘approving’ the recommendations is extremely important. Council must be committed (including financially by committing funds each year) to build more accessible facilities and refurbish existing ones (that are currently not accessible). Council must also commit to applying “an accessible lens” to everything it does in the future – whether it’s developing a budget, hiring, accepting or including community volunteers, assigning people to committees, building new facilities or refurbishing old ones – a commitment must be made to being more accessible and inclusive. The town must be seen as ‘leaders’ in this endeavour. Involving people or segments of the population who may be disenfranchised is an excellent place to start. These people often have so much to offer. They just need to be asked or included. Too often they are never asked their opinion and are overlooked.

Council must be committed to accessibility and inclusion. A fully accessible and inclusive Harbour Grace benefits everyone. Whether it's serving on committees of council, volunteering in the community, coaching teams, hiring people (inside or outside), providing places to meet etc., considering issues of accessibility and inclusion send clear messages that the Town Council of the Town of Harbour Grace are committed to issues of accessibility and inclusion. 'Doing' is more important than "saying". Council must be willing to set the example – to stand tall and be a leader on issues of accessibility and inclusion.

If council is committed to doing more and to working "side by side" with the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility*, things will slowly change. Even then patience will be required. The most important thing is to try. Some years not as much money will be available to put into accessibility. The committee must understand that. Committing to 'making the effort' is an essential starting point.

Normally, if there is no financial commitment made on the part of council, accessibility is not a priority – and it 'must' be a priority of council. There must be room in the budget for initiatives pertaining to improving accessibility. This is where council needs to start. If something (like accessibility) is truly a priority – council must commit funds to it.

So, to reiterate, this 'Accessibility Plan' is a great starting point. Once again, we feel obligated to issue a reminder to council that this plan is meant to be a fluid document. It needs to be updated every three (3) years to reflect changes and improvements that have been made. Things change – and so must this plan. Perhaps this can be the work of the *Advisory Committee on Accessibility* to bring forth a series of recommendations or changes to be made to the Accessibility Plan that reflect the current state of affairs in Harbour Grace in the area of accessibility.



They're AFRAID
to ask them or afraid
of the ANSWERS

APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A:

Minutes from Public Consultation

- One of the members of the ‘Advisory Committee’ asked if the plan that was being developed by us for the Town of Harbour Grace was final; we (JWCA) said that what we were developing was the plan for 2024-2026 (a three-year plan) and it was considered final, but if members of the committee planned to do a couple of important things in addition to what is in the plan – we would happy to have it added. Image4 is very accommodating and the cost would less than \$200.
- It was mentioned that the Town is pretty responsive to the needs of the ‘disabled community’ community; a lady said when she called the town they were there within 20 minutes to fill in potholes so her son could get out in his wheelchair.
- There were many things undertaken in the past 2 years that were highlighted
- Next, we turned our attention to what was planned to be done over the next 3 years – and it was substantial; in fact, some of it has been completed already (we were told by staff). This was shared with those in attendance.
- There was some uncertainty about the state of commercial buildings, this is a real problem for people with mobility issues; but those commercial buildings are ‘grandfathered’ for exemption – it was suggested that a date was needed (even for those being grandfathered) to have a final date to have accessible upgrades completed - even if it is 5 or 10 years away.
- It was noted that in the strategic plan as well as the questionnaire relating to the strategic plan both scored highly in terms of accessibility & inclusion; that was note worthy and something that should be built upon. The strategic plan identifies ‘priorities’ for council.
- It was suggested that online (or other) learning should be offered not only to the advisory committee members and members of council, but opportunities should be offered to the public as well; how many would ‘really’ participate; the cost (to the town) would be negligible.
- With the province’s adoption of the *Accessibility Act* municipalities have specific timelines to address accessibility issues.
- It also means that work on ‘accessibility and inclusion’ MUST be completed.
- The consultants noted that while changes to accessibility may be marginally more expensive, it’s always cheaper ‘to do it right’ the first time; renovations are always costlier.
- Communicate the Accessibility Plan to the public (once it’s received by council), and the consultants suggested the mayor and council use every opportunity to talk about accessibility when addressing residents – whether it’s with youth groups, with seniors, or at the Fire Brigade Ball
- There was a resident in attendance (in a wheelchair) who spoke of his involvement in a program at Easter Seals when he was living in St. John’s. The name of the program was “I Can Too” and perhaps some of it can be adopted for use in Harbour Grace in its recreation programming.

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- The 'Splash Centre Community Youth Network' in Harbour Grace was mentioned for the potential for accessibility and inclusion.
 - Perhaps in the revised commercial building and development regulations a timeline for completion of accessibility requirements for those properties 'grandfathered' by the regulations could be provided – even if it's 5 or 10 years.
 - It was mentioned that perhaps someone in a wheel chair could 'test drive' changes to accessibility regulations to ensure a wheelchair can manoeuvre around properly.
 - It was mentioned (in a previous consultation session) that even change tables in washrooms need to be sturdier; these are not built for babies (necessarily); they need to be built to handle a grown adult who may also have washroom needs.
 - The fact that the 'garden beds' in the community garden are raised is a great idea and helps make them more accessible and inclusive for everyone.
 - There are also limited human resources in a town like Harbour Grace – if staff goes on annual leave - the work just piles up. Only emergency items are addressed, normally.
 - There was talk about plans to use text to explain photos for the visually impaired – that works similar to 'closed captioning' where the words are on the bottom of the screen for the hearing impaired.
 - There is no one in the town that organizes recreation on behalf of the town - so there is great reliance on minor hockey, and figure skating etc., to be directly involved.
 - It was mentioned that the Advisory Committee should not be expected to fundraise; but fundraising is a way to 'raise awareness" about the work of the committee or accessibility, in general, it is not about the 'money raised' but about 'raising awareness'
 - Perhaps when the Accessibility Plan is in place there will be more opportunities for federal and provincial funding.

APPENDIX BC:

Call to Serve on Advisory Committee

Seeking Members for Our New Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee

The Town of Harbour Grace has engaged a consultant to assist with the completion of its first Accessibility Plan. The Plan will consider a multitude of factors which can create barriers to inclusive participation, including, but not limited to, inaccessible infrastructure and non-inclusive policies and technologies.

When developed, the Plan will help guide the Town in accessibility standards and inclusive practices. To help advise the Plan and make recommendations regarding its implementation, the Town is creating an Accessibility Advisory Committee (6-8 members), which, ideally, will seek a diverse membership from the following groups:

- Persons with accessibility challenges or lived experience with a disability (ie., those with physical disabilities; visual or hearing impairments; etc.);
- Persons from the community's aging population (ie., seniors 65+);
- Persons from the Indigenous community;
- Persons from the LGBTQ2+ community;
- Persons from a minority ethnic or national community, or a newcomer/immigrant;
- Persons with mental health issues;
- Persons with intellectual impairments (ex., autism);
- Unhoused persons; and
- Representatives from special interest groups engaged with the above communities.

If you are interested in serving on the Accessibility Advisory Committee, please complete the application form. The form can be picked up at the Town Hall, 112 Water Street, Harbour Grace, NL, or downloaded on our website here: <https://townofharbourgrace.ca/site/uploads/2023/12/12-21-2023-harbour-grace-accessibility-advisory-committee-application.pdf>

Completed applications can be delivered to the Town Hall during office hours or emailed to the general email, hello@townofharbourgrace.ca, with the subject line "AAC application."

The deadline for applications is Wednesday, January 3, 2024.

Please consider serving on our Accessibility Advisory Committee and helping us create a more inclusive community!

Attitude

is a small thing
that makes a

Big

difference

