



STELLARTON: ACCESS FOR ALL

An Accessibility Plan for 2021-2030



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WELCOME/INTRO MESSAGE

On behalf of the Town of Stellarton's Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), Town Council, and staff, I welcome you to read Stellarton's first Accessibility Plan!

In 2017, Nova Scotia established an Accessibility Act with the purpose of ensuring that our province is barrier-free and fully accessible by 2030. The province worked with the Town of Wolfville to create *Wolfville: Access by Design*, the province's first accessibility plan that was developed to shape the plans from other communities across the province. This provided us with the base to develop what we have today.

This document highlights Stellarton's priorities as we move towards a fully accessible town for all. As we progress forward through our plan, these original priorities will evolve. This is essential to fully transform our community to be fully accessible. Our plan is a *living document* and will continue to grow and change with time.

This plan reflects the goal of the Town to be proactive to the needs of people with varying abilities. Stellarton strives to be a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting community to all. With this goal in mind, we encourage all members of the public to voice concerns, questions, and suggestions at any time. You are all welcome to attend our AAC meetings, as well as to contact the Town's Accessibility Coordinators at your leisure and in any capacity that you feel comfortable with.

To our committee members, serving on this AAC has been an opportunity for engagement, education, and growth. We are grateful to have passionate and dedicated individuals in our community to help guide us to a more accessible future.

The Town is incredibly proud of Stellarton: Access for All and look forward to seeing it take shape!

Danny MacGillivray

Chair, Accessibility Committee

Town of Stellarton

BELIEF

The Town of Stellarton is committed to ensuring equitable access to community life and participation in society for all people, regardless of their abilities. We are committed to helping all people maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in *inclusion*.

Equitable access is different from *equal access*. Equality means that everyone gets the same thing; equity means that everyone is treated fairly, based on their needs and abilities (Figure 1).

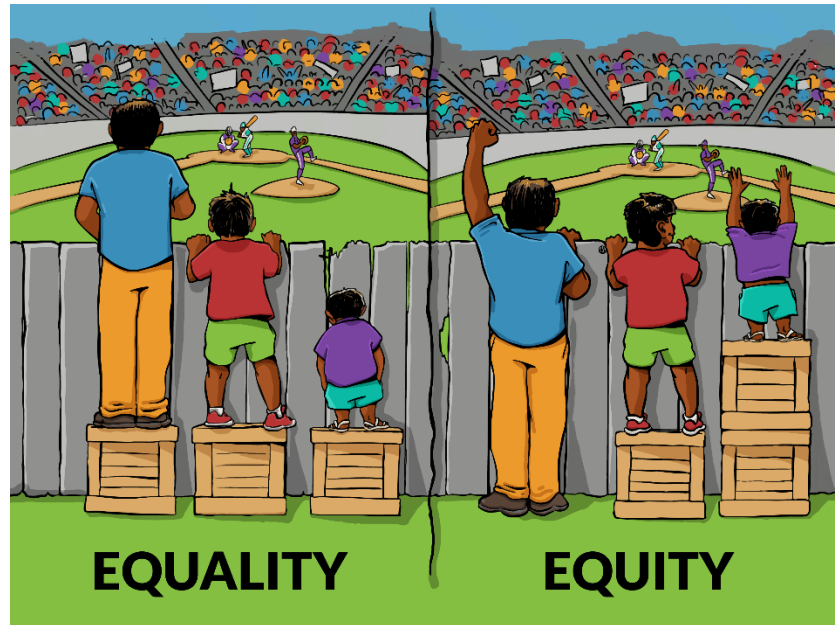


Figure 1

(Sample from Interaction Institute for Social Change)

Stellarton is committed to meeting the needs of people who face barriers to accessibility. We will do this by identifying, removing, and preventing these barriers and by meeting the requirements of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Act.

AREAS OF FOCUS

Our plan includes five areas of focus (Figure 2).

Our Commitments

Built Environment – Accessible buildings and public spaces.

Information & Communication – Clear and accessible information and communication from the Town.

Employment – Equitable access to jobs with the Town and fair employment practices.

Goods & Services – Equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Town

Transportation – Equitable access to transportation service for everyone

Figure 2.



Built Environment:
Accessible buildings and public spaces.



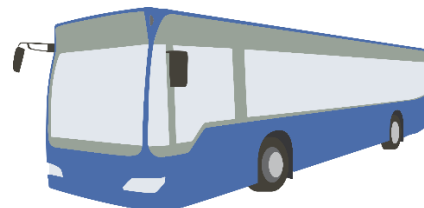
Information & Communication:
Clear and accessible information and communication from the Town.



Employment:
Equitable access to jobs with the Town and fair Employment practices.



Goods & Services:
Equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Town.



Transportation:
Equitable access to transportation service for everyone.

GLOSSARY

Accessible: Easily used or accessed by people with disabilities; adapted for use by persons with disabilities.

Accessibility Lens: A tool for identifying and clarifying issues affecting persons with disabilities to access and address the impact of all initiatives on persons with disabilities.

Braille: A system of writing for the blind that uses characters made up of raised dots.

Equal Access: Individuals have access to the exact same services – every person is equal; every person gets the same things.

Equitable Access: Individuals have access to the same services, but individuals have access to supports needed in order to succeed, based on their needs and abilities.

Infrastructure: The basic equipment and structures (such as roads and bridges) that are needed for a country, region, or organization to function properly.

Living Document: A document that can be changed and modified, as needed.

Municipal Government Act: A provincially mandated set of rules that all Nova Scotian municipalities are required to follow.

Retrofit: To adapt or modify something for a new purpose or identified need that may not have been available or considered necessary at the time of manufacture.

Tactile Markers: Indicators designed to provide walking surfaces with a series of raised bars, which are designed to guide visually impaired walkers down the safest possible route.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Our Commitment

Stellarton’s public buildings and public spaces will be accessible to people of all ages and abilities – whether the space is owned, leased, or operated by the Town. The Town will also encourage citizens, the business community, and NSCC to make other public and private spaces accessible.

Our Starting Point

Overview

The Town of Stellarton owns, leases, and operates public facilities such as Town Hall, Allan Park, many sidewalks, parking areas, and a wide variety of other buildings, parks, and *infrastructure* (basic structures and systems to help the Town run smoothly).

Achievements

- Customer service counter in the Town Hall is divided in two – one side being at a height accessible to individuals that use wheelchairs.
- Traffic lights are equipped with sound cues for hearing impairments.
- Tactile walking plate indicators on sidewalks. The Town has been installing these on any new or replacement sidewalks.
- Large sidewalks in higher pedestrian-traffic areas.

General Barriers

- Town Hall first floor lacks most accessibility features; the “Barrier Free” entrance is not accessible to those who use a wheelchair.
- Town Hall upstairs is inaccessible
- Additional sidewalks needed in high pedestrian-traffic areas of town.
- Open spaces (parks and trails) are not all accessible – especially for those with mobility issues. *
- Not all public washrooms are fully accessible.
- Accessible parking is limited.
- Additional ramps are needed.
- Limited signage for those who have visual/hearing impairments.
- Cars and pedestrians compete for street priority.
- Very expensive to retrofit existing buildings to make them more accessible.
- Accessibility projects compete with other budget demands, including essential services such as water and sewer services.

*Not all greenspaces need to be accessible, but there should be a minimum of one.

Policies

Public Spaces

The Town of Stellarton will:

- By 2025, ensure that all or most existing municipal facilities meet the Accessibility requirements in the latest version of the Nova Scotia Building Code Regulation. For facilities not completed by the end of that fiscal year, have a plan in place to complete work by 2030.
- Provide basic access for people of all ages and abilities to public buildings, public washrooms, and at public parks identified as being accessible.
- Ensure sidewalks and curb cuts within the core area are improved and maintained to the standard outlined in Canadian Standards Association (CSA) B651-18, Accessible Design for the Built Environment.
- Provide accessible parking locations, and associated curb cuts, spread throughout the core area.
- Provide crosswalks and curb cuts in areas where there are many pedestrians, such as near schools and parks.
- Ensure all new municipal buildings will meet new policy regulations on accessibility.

Community Partnerships

The Town of Stellarton will:

- Work with the Stellarton business community to promote Stellarton as an accessible community and encourage businesses to increase accessibility.
- Encourage private developers to have their existing buildings and new developments to match new policy regulations on accessibility.
- Encourage small groups (local committees, volunteer groups, non-profits, etc.) to use an accessibility lens and make accessible considerations on all future projects within the community.

Actions

Top Priorities (2022-2023)

- Commit a portion of the annual budget to install, maintain, or improve accessibility in public buildings and spaces.
- Ensure municipally owned buildings and local businesses place street furniture, sandwich boards, and sidewalk planters away from the path of travel and set back from curb cuts and sidewalks for people to move freely.
- Ensure *auditory*, visual, and tactile markers are installed at identified intersections that are considerably busy where people cross the road – for example, within the core area, near schools, and parks.

Other Priorities

- Ensure the Council Chambers meet CSA Accessibility requirements by March 31, 2024. This includes providing a ramp and elevator to improve access at Town Hall.
- Ensure main entrance and service desk to the Police Station is accessible. The Town is intending to relocate the Police Station to its own building within Stellarton – this building will have the necessary accessibility requirements.
- Work with the Stellarton Public Library to ensure that library collections are more accessible.
- Promote the province’s Small Business ACCESS-Ability Grant program to the Stellarton business community.
- Working with the Pictou County Housing Coalition on a plan for affordable housing.
- Consider changing Land Use By-Laws to make it easier for homeowners and landowners to:
 - Add a secondary suite (e.g., An apartment unit) or a backyard suite.
 - Create co-housing (a community that includes private living space and shared space).

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Our Commitment

Information and communications delivered by the Town of Stellarton will be clear and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. The Town will take steps so staff understand accessibility and barriers to participation and will increase awareness about the accessibility rights of people of all ages and abilities.

Our Starting Point

Overview

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

- Meetings of Town Council and Advisory Committees, which are open to the public. Council meetings are livestreamed.
- Email, the Town’s website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram.
- Public awareness campaigns.
- Display structures (bulletin boards in Town Hall) to promote events and special town meetings.

Achievements

- Meetings can be held in several locations throughout Stellarton if accessible accommodations are needed and Town Hall is unavailable.
- Agendas and minutes of meetings are posted on the Town website and hard copies are available at the Town Hall upon request.
- Town Council meetings are livestreamed during meetings (via YouTube). After a meeting, these videos remain on the Town’s YouTube channel for viewing.

Barriers

- Lack of public education surrounding digital/communication 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.
- Staff are generally not trained to promote inclusion in communications.
- “Plain language” is not consistently used in municipal documents.
- The Municipal Government Act sets limitations for certain public notices – for example, advertisements must be published in newspapers, which may not be accessible to people with visual impairments.
- Streaming video and related technologies do not always work as intended.
- Staff require training on accessibility standards. Currently, staff are not trained in all aspects of impairment, whether it be physical, mental, etc.

Policies

The Town of Stellarton will:

- On request, provide information in an accessible format, or with communication supports that consider a person’s specific needs. (Build a campaign to promote this service to the public).
- Ensure the Town’s digital presence (e.g., website, social media) and IT systems are designed for people of all ages and abilities.
- Hold all in-person public meetings in barrier-free locations.
- Provide annual training to frontline staff in better ways to communicate with people of all ages and abilities, as well as to provide information in an accessible format.
- Provide accessible accommodations/transportation to Town functions, upon request.

Actions

Top Priorities (2022-2023)

- Train relevant staff in plain language and inclusive communications.
- 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 emergency alerts, are screen readable. Encourage partner agencies to achieve the same standard of communication.

Other Priorities

- By 2025, ensure the Town’s web presence meets the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Remove any inaccessible CAPTCHA settings and/or other identified barriers.
- Provide American Sign Language (ASL) and/or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services at Town Council and other Town-hosted public meetings, on request.

- Provide *braille* accommodations upon request.
- Work with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) to advocate for accessibility to be included in the public notice requirements of the Municipal Government Act.
- Issue meeting agendas with enough lead time to review and book communication accommodations, if needed.
- Ensure the public have enough notice to give feedback and participate in discussions before Town Council makes decisions.
- Identify closed captioning options for YouTube livestream. This is already available for published livestream videos and can be added to uploaded videos.

EMPLOYMENT

Our Commitment

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

Our Starting Point

Overview

The Town employs 40 permanent employees. There are five elected representatives on Town Council, including the mayor. Elected representatives must be Canadian citizens, at least 18 years old, and live in the community. The Council may appoint other members of the public to serve on committees or task forces.

Achievements

- Members of Council receive iPads for onboarding to be connected with Town Hall and the community. Users can individualize their settings to allow for visual/hearing impairments. iPads also have additional accessibility settings to make them and their content more accessible to individual users.

Barriers

- Not all Town-owned buildings are wheelchair accessible; Potential employees with mobility issues face challenges.
- Staff, including senior management, are generally not trained to recognize barriers that may limit job opportunities for qualified individuals.
- Jobs are posted in traditional ways, including web pages, which may not be accessible to some individuals.

Policies

The Town of Stellarton will:

- Offer accommodation during recruitment, if needed.
- Offer accommodation to employees of all ages and abilities. This includes providing assistive devices so that employees can succeed at their jobs.
- Work with the Town employees to build an understanding of the value of accessibility and inclusion.

Actions

Top Priorities (2022-2023)

- Update the employee training manual to include a section on respecting diversity. This will include training in working with people of all ages and abilities.
- All Town employees will take the Working with Abilities online training provided free by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission (workwithabilitiesns.ca).
- Establish a centralized accommodation fund to pay for assistive devices or accommodations employees need to succeed at their jobs. Promote this fund on job postings.

Other Priorities

- Share opportunities for accessibility training with residents and local businesses – online or in person with Town of Stellarton staff training.
- Investigate strategies to reach a wider and more diverse audience with job postings. Include statements in the job postings to ensure applicants are aware that accommodations can be provided.
- Assign a designated staff person to help individuals who may need assistance to succeed at their jobs.

GOODS AND SERVICES

Our Commitment

The Town of Stellarton will ensure that people of all ages and abilities have equitable access to goods and services delivered by the Town of Stellarton. This includes ensuring that there are policies, procedures, and tools to promote the accessible delivery of goods and services.

Our Starting Point

Overview

The following are some of the many services the Town of Stellarton delivers to the public:

- Managing meetings of Town Council and Advisory Committees
- Overseeing communication to the public (See Information & Communication section)
- Providing Customer Service counters
- Maintaining streets, including sidewalk snow removal (See Built Environment section)
- Maintaining parks, trails, and open spaces; Including playgrounds (See Built Environment section)
- Maintaining water and sewer services
- Providing emergency services, like police and fire

Achievements

- The customer service counter in Town Hall has a side that is at a height considered wheelchair accessible.
- The Recreation Centre at Allan Park has a ramp, automatic door opener, and accessible washroom.

Barriers

- Town Hall is not accessible.
- No staff members are trained in alternative communication methods, such as ASL.
- No resources or funds are designated to offer alternative communications to people who need them (For example: A sign language interpreter).

Policies

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

Actions

Top Priorities (2022-2023)

- Identify a space and create an accessible playground.
- Ensure that snow removal is completed at Town Hall to be accessible during regular operational hours.
- Provide an adapted listing of recreation programs and services for people of all ages and abilities and update it annually.
- Train the staff who are responsible for delivering accessible services to people with diverse abilities.

Other Priorities

- Waive the entrance fees at leisure activities for support persons for people with a disability.
- Establish an accommodation fund to provide services for residents who need accommodation, such as CART and ASL.
- Provide sign language interpreters, on request, to enable people to participate in recreation and library programs.
- Provide accessible exercise equipment at municipal recreational facilities.
- Provide accessibility training to the Town's Building Inspector, through the office of the Fire Marshal/NSBOA.
- Where applicable, include an "Accessibility Lens"/Impact Analysis in reports to council and in consultant reports delivered to staff and council.

TRANSPORTATION: CHAD TRANSIT & PICTOU COUNTY TRANSIT

Our Commitment

The Town of Stellarton will ensure that people of all ages and abilities have equitable access to publicly funded and/or regulated transportation services. These currently include taxi services, CHAD Transit and Pictou County Transit (started May 17, 2021).

Our Starting Point

Overview

Pictou County Transit does a one-hour loop between Stellarton and New Glasgow. Operating hours: Monday to Saturday 7:00am to 9:00pm.

CHAD Transit is available for door to door on demand service.

Achievements

- Pictou County Transit bus is equipped with the following:
 - Free Wi-fi hotspot
 - One door for all with a quick operating ramp
 - Pull stop request cords
 - Ability to use a child safety seat
- CHAD Transit also has a subsidy program for riders i.e., if client is unable to pay CHAD Transit will cover the cost.
- Pictou County Transit bus is fully accessible.

Barriers

- CHAD Transit has a fleet of eight accessible vehicles, availability may be limited.
- Transit does not operate all days per week.

Policies

The Town of Stellarton will:

- Ensure that no resident is denied transit or taxi service because of a disability.
- Ensure that no resident is charged an additional fee for transit or taxi service because of a disability.

Actions

Top Priorities (2022-2023)

- Town Staff to work with Transit Staff to review snow removal for flagging Pictou County Transit bus and steps (including costs) required to improve snow removal timelines.
- Ensure there are flagging locations in Town designed to meet or exceed Canadian Standards Association (CSAA) Standard B651-18, Accessible Design for the Built Environment.

Other Priorities

- Explore subsidized transit fares and/or passes for people with disabilities and/or low income.
- Ensure training is available for operators and drivers of public transportation.
- Ensure public knows CHAD Transit's door to door on demand service is for all populations, mission is Community Transportation for All.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Responsibilities

- Town Council is responsible for adopting and overseeing *Stellarton: Access for All*.
- The CAO is responsible for implementing the plan and assigning an Accessibility Coordinator.
- The Accessibility Coordinator is responsible for receiving and responding to public concerns, complaints, and suggestions.
- The Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for giving feedback and recommendations to the Town Council.

Schedule

All Top Priorities in this plan will be implemented by March 31, 2024 (the end of the fiscal year). Other priorities will be implemented by 2030.

Monitoring

- The Stellarton Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) will prepare an Access by Design Report Card for council by March 31 of each year (the end of the fiscal year). This report will measure the performance of the policies and actions in this plan. The committee may also make recommendations to improve the plan.
- The Report Card will be a public document. It will be posted on the Town's website.

Evaluating

The Town will lead a public review and evaluation of *Stellarton: Access by Design* before fiscal year 2022/23.

Responding to Questions and Complaints

- Anyone can lodge a complaint, pose a question, or express a concern about accessibility in the Town of Stellarton. These should be directed to the Accessibility Coordinator.
- The Accessibility Coordinator will respond within a reasonable time. Before responding, the Coordinator will consult with the staff person responsible for the area of inquiry. The 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 complainant.
- The Accessibility Coordinator will keep a record of all complaints, questions, and concerns submitted to them, and will provide summary updates to the AAC on a regular basis. These updates will become part of the AAC's continual review of the Accessibility Plan and may inform future changes.