



Inclusion Advisory Committee Minutes

September 29, 2020

11:30 a.m.

Virtual

Present:

Taylor Stocks, Chair - LGBTQ2S
Councillor Deanne Stapleton, Council Representative
Debbie Ryan, CNIB
Donna Power, Metrobus/GoBus, Accessible Transit
Kim Pratt Baker, Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Megan McGie, NL Association for the Deaf
Sarah White, Autism Society
Joby Fleming, Empower NL
Nancy Reid, Coalition of Persons with Disabilities
Trevor Freeborn, Coalition of Persons with Disabilities
Duane Morgan, CNIB
Natalie Godden, Manager of Family & Leisure Services
Vanessa Bambrick, Acting Inclusive Services Coordinator
Shanna Fitzgerald, Legislative Assistant

Regrets:

Heidi Dixon, First Light NL
Margaret Tibbo, Public Representative
Grant Genova, NL Association of Architects, Universal Design
Kimberly Yetman-Dawson, Empower NL
Brittany Hiscock, CHHA NL
Tess Hemeon, Autism Society
Hope Colbourne, NL Association for Community Living
Renata Lang, Association for New Canadians
Trisha Rose, Fieldworker III, Inclusion Services

Others: Meaghan Philpott, Manager of Diversity & Public Education - ANC
Tonya Knopp, Manager Facility Engineering
Patrick McDonald, Supervisor - Capital Works
Victoria Etchegary, Manager of Organizational Performance and Strategy
Garrett Donaher, Manager of Transportation Engineering
Christa Norman, Special Events Coordinator

1. **CALL TO ORDER**
2. **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Moved By Debbie Ryan
Seconded By Joby Fleming

That the agenda be adopted with the addition of a statement from Councillor Stapleton.

MOTION CARRIED

3. **ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES**
 - 3.1 **Adoption of Minutes - June 3, 2020**

Moved By Kim Pratt Baker
Seconded By Debbie Ryan

That the minutes of June 3, 2020 be adopted as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

4. **DELEGATION**
5. **BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**
6. **OTHER BUSINESS**
 - 6.1 **Statement from Councillor Stapleton**

Councillor Stapleton addressed the Committee and read the following statement that was presented at the Regular Council meeting on September 28, 2020:

Over the past week, the Inclusion Advisory Committee has taken some criticism publicly for not advocating on behalf of the inclusion community on this issue. This could not be farther from the truth. In fact, the committee was involved in the public engagement process and did submit a number of recommendations that are included in the final report – the “What We Heard” document.

We conducted a focus group with 25 users of services from Empower and they told us that lack of safe sidewalks in winter significantly impacts quality of life. They talked about the challenges of not being able to use Metrobus accessible routes due to sidewalk snow clearing issues. They told us about the importance of having clear crosswalk push button areas and safe cross walks.

We do value the role of our Inclusion Advisory Committee is assisting us to make decisions that consider their unique concerns and challenges, and this group has been instrumental in influencing a number of decisions of Council.

The Key2Access pilot - a new technology that does not require a pedestrian reach for a button on a pole at a crosswalk – would not have been possible without them; we consulted with the IAC on the size of garbage containers for the automated garbage program and developed an exemption process with their suggestions; they have offered invaluable guidance on blue zone parking areas; accessibility enhancements in city parks; an improved intake process and new reception desk at the Access Centre; and much more.

The Inclusion Advisory Committee are strong advocates for change at City Hall; and they are making a significant difference in the way we do things.

Council has advisory committees in place, like this one and the Seniors Advisory Committee (who also made recommendations in this particular engagement process) to gives us their perspective on the difficult decisions before Council. They certainly did that, and the advice we received is part of what makes this decision so difficult for me, and I'm sure for all of us on Council.

6.2 Vacant IAC Positions – Verbal Update

The Manager of Family & Leisure Services gave a brief update on the vacant positions on the Inclusion Advisory Committee. The selection committee has been reviewing all applications and there are two candidates shortlisted for the anti-racism position. A recommendation will be formulated for Council to appoint the new members in the coming weeks.

6.3 Paratransit Update for September 29, 2020

Donna Power of GoBus gave an update to the Committee:

Service Levels

Customers have been slowly getting back to their travel with GoBus. Ridership at approximately 50-55% of regular service levels. Bus capacity was reinstated to 100% when masks were made mandatory, though MVT is still making effort to promote physical distancing where possible. Enhanced cleaning/disinfecting protocols are still in place.

Eligibility Assessments

Assessments resumed in June after a period of closure due to COVID-19. GoBus are now exploring options to increase the volume of assessments being done each month so that they can get through ridership without too much extra delay. The goal of completing assessments for all existing customers within one year will not be met.

To date 178 assessments have been completed (121 existing customers; 57 new applicants). There were 143 unconditional and 25 conditional approvals. 8 individuals were denied eligibility (5 existing; 3 new). 29 people requested to close their accounts. And one formal appeal has been completed.

GoBus Contract

The current contract for GoBus service will expire December 2021. Preliminary work on developing a new RFP has begun and input from stakeholders will be sought in the near future. A draft RFP is expected.

6.4 Pedestrian Mall Presentation & Discussion

Victoria Etchegary, Manager of Organizational Performance and Strategy; Christa Norman, Special Events Coordinator; and Garrett Donaher, Manager of Transportation Engineering joined the Committee to discuss

the downtown pedestrian mall and request feedback from the group. The members were provided the following background:

- The pedestrian mall was developed in response to, and as a means of, stimulating the downtown economy and to create space for residents to enjoy the outdoors in a safe, public health guided way.
- Timelines were tight; there was feedback from the business community prior to and throughout the process facilitated by the City and Downtown St. John's.
- A section of Water Street was closed to traffic to create the Pedestrian Mall and included four blocks from Adelaide to Prescott St.
- Deliveries and essential traffic were allowed at key times.
- Some downtown businesses were not supportive/depending on sector/location.
- Accessibility concerns were raised early on in relation to access to sidewalks and patios.
- Businesses within the Mall were able to extend their footprint to increase capacity.
- Businesses outside the Mall were able to avail of parkettes.
- Pedestrian Mall was one of few actual "events" happening in and around St. John's in summer 2020, there was little competition.

Questions put forward to the Committee included:

Planning for the mall

Thinking about the process to establish the Pedestrian mall, this year:

- What feedback would you provide to the city to be included in the planning process?

While the mall was in operation/future malls

Thinking about the period of time the mall was in operation this year:

- What worked well for you/your client group?
- What was challenging for you/your client group?
- What needs to change for future malls to ensure better inclusion?

Discussion took place with the following points from members summarized:

- Concern was raised about the process in general regarding the way the City consults with the Committee. There was a lack of appropriate opportunity to be a part of and provide feedback in the initial planning stages.
- The Committee were not adequately consulted in the planning process for the Downtown Pedestrian Mall. Input was limited to the change in the accessible parking via email.
- A trial run of the map showed that the accessible parking was barricaded. When IAC members visited the mall they noted that it was not easy to get in past the barricades, there was not adequate signage and there was no one to direct traffic upon entering or to facilitate parking. This was not clear on the map presented to the Committee.
- There was not an adequate amount of consultation or conversation about the impacts within the Inclusion Committee and what the event was like once it was up and running.
- Service NL was involved in the planning of the mall within the Special Events Regulatory Committee, but IAC members felt that did not provide enough insight into the diverse inclusion needs.
- There should be collaboration/training with downtown businesses so they can understand inclusion more broadly which in turn could improve inclusion downtown.
- The Ramps Up working group comprised of City Staff, Downtown St. John's, Service NL, and designated IAC members will explore the possible solutions to the unique accessibility concerns in the downtown neighborhood.
- Putting down a ramp brings immense responsibility as there needs to be consideration beyond just the outside of a building. There are major issues downtown with the curb cuts and limited accessibility inside the venues.
- With the placement of the ramps there was a false sense created that things were more accessible than they were (i.e. ramps may have allowed access to the outside decks but no access to washrooms was

provided making the decks inaccessible for some persons with disabilities.)

- Creating the pedestrian mall so quickly with limited consultation made some citizens with disabilities feel that their needs were not considered and resulted in feelings of exclusion.
- There was concern of safety and significant barriers for those with vision loss during the pedestrian mall event. Serious barriers already exist on Water Street which were more evident during the event.
- City staff noted that there is a review from a regulatory and permitting perspective as part of the evaluation process for the downtown pedestrian mall.

The Panel concluded that more detailed feedback will be provided at follow up meeting to be scheduled for next week. A working group will be formed to discuss and produce specific issues to bring back to the next meeting for discussion.

6.5 New Mews Centre Presentation & Discussion

Tonya Knopp, Manager Facility Engineering and Patrick McDonald, Supervisor of Capital Works, were in attendance for this portion of the meeting to present the new concept design of the H.G.R. Mews Community Centre replacement facility which will be constructed at Mundy Pond Park starting in 2021.

The City has been planning for the replacement of the H. G. R. Mews Community Centre for the past two years. To date, site reviews have been completed and public engagement has taken place on both the location of the new facility and the needs of the community in relation to amenities and programming. On Monday, August 19, 2019, City Council voted to locate the new facility in Mundy Pond Park adjacent to other recreation facilities in the area which will also include the new Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities Accessible playground. Members reviewed visuals including an aerial view showing the placement of both the building and the playground in Mundy Pond Park and the floor plans. A Mews Centre Walkthrough video was shared with the group which was emailed out to the members for their personal review.

Discussion took place with the following points noted:

- It was recommended that the City use the National Standard of Canada, B651-18, which can be found online on www.csagroup.org.

The standard can provide information that will aid in ensuring the building is fully accessible.

- Cultural inclusion is important as user groups at the Mews Centre come from different cultural backgrounds and privacy is important. Viewing areas in design need to meet privacy accommodations. Public engagement provided feedback and the new building will have dedicated male and female washrooms as well as an all-inclusive family washroom with private changing areas. The aquatic viewing area will be reviewed and outfitted with a possible blind or curtain system. There are no direct lines of sight onto the second floor where the pool is located, and the glazing used on the exterior windows will limit view of the inside.
- As the design goes forward the elements incorporated will be provided to the IAC for their feedback.
- Reception area should include barrier free counter space with knee space to accommodate persons who use wheelchairs. It was noted that it has been included in the design.
- With the use of so much glass in the design, wayfinding may be of concern for people with vision loss. Staff advised that the rendering does show glass, but the material has not yet been decided.
- The importance of contrast between walls and floors and colored nosing on stairs was noted by the committee.
- There will be space for buses to stop directly in front of the main entrance in a layby area.

This project will come back to the Committee as there is more progress made on the design.

6.6 Sidewalk Snow Clearing - Concerns from Citizen

Background "What We Heard Document" is attached. Please refer to page 28-31 in WWH Sidewalk Snow Clearing 2020 for specific reference to Inclusion.

The Committee reviewed a letter submitted via email to members of Council and the Inclusion Advisory Committee from Anne Malone, Disability Rights Activist. A letter was also received from Lisa Walters of AccessYYT. The Chair read both letters to the Committee.

Clarity was requested from Councillor Stapleton regarding Council's decision not to further invest in the sidewalk snow clearing services at this time. The public engagement showed immense concern for the conditions of sidewalks in the winter and the ability to navigate them in the winter months. Councillor Stapleton expressed that sidewalk snow clearing engagement will be used for the long-term goal of improving snow clearing and given the serious financial situation the City finds itself in at the end of the 2020 fiscal year there were other considerations at present. In the spring, 1.5 million dollars of new sidewalk snow clearing equipment was purchased to improve the sidewalks for the coming year. The financial crisis of snowmageddon and the pandemic have caused considerable issues for the City which may result in tax increases, service reductions or a combination of both. It was expressed that raising taxes may cause hardship for those already in financial distress due to the pandemic. Given anticipated budget challenges going into 2021, sidewalk snow clearing was referred to the 2021 budget process for consideration.

Considerable discussion took place with the following points from members summarized:

- Concern was raised that the City has developed to the degree that they can no longer provide essential services like snow clearing to the people who live in it. Development of the City should be slowed down until those that live within the City can be cared for.
- Essential services like snow clearing should be provided to the people who live within the City regardless if it results in increased taxes.
- Empower held consultations and the message was clear that snow clearing needed significant improvement for accessibility.
- People with disabilities will not have the same support they had last year as home support, income support and community supports and health will face cuts under the new Provincial budget.
- The long-term impact of COVID and snowmageddon has caused a considerable increase to medical care. During the pandemic people were encouraged to get out and move. If there is a snow event and people are unable to do that there will be increased need for mental health support and healthcare. The effect that COVID had on people and being confined for a long period of time is what people with disabilities are faced with in the winter months when they do not have the access to go outside.

- Individuals need to be able to access their community and lives on a daily basis.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that persons with disabilities are to have full and effective participation and inclusion in society. Barriers created by the inability of the City to enable access to the streets are against the Human Rights Act.
- It was recommended that the City try a one-year pilot project and review the economic impact of raising taxes by \$25-50 to explore sidewalk snow clearing under an increased budget.
- It was proposed that the Committee meet once a month to have frequent discussions surrounding inclusion.

The Chair requested guidance on the best way to speak on behalf of the Committee. A public statement will be drafted by the Chair and sent out to the Committee for feedback over the next 48 hours. This item will be discussed further at the next meeting of the Inclusion Committee next week.

7. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

A meeting is scheduled for October 7, 2020 11:30 am - 1:00 pm to further discuss the matters of the Pedestrian Mall and Sidewalk Snow Clearing.

8. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:47 pm.

CHAIRPERSON, TAYLOR STOCKS