THE MUNICIPALITY OF THE COUNTY OF RICHMOND
LA MUNICIPALITÉ DU COMTÉ DE RICHMOND

Richmond Accessibility Plan

SPRING 2022

The Municipality of the County of Richmond Accessibility Plan
Spring 2022

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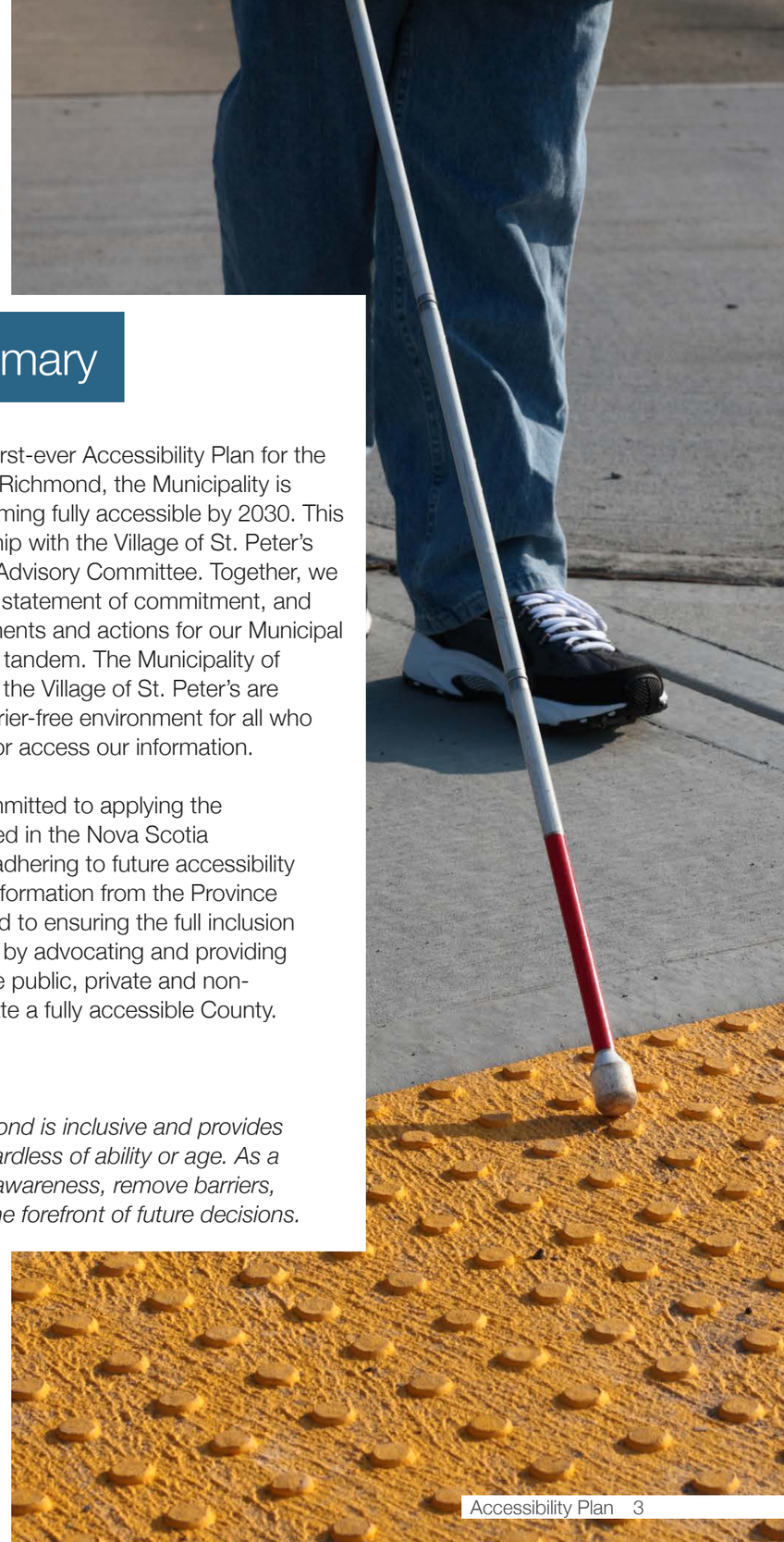

Executive Summary

With the introduction of this first-ever Accessibility Plan for the Municipality of the County of Richmond, the Municipality is beginning its journey to becoming fully accessible by 2030. This plan was created in partnership with the Village of St. Peter's and our shared Accessibility Advisory Committee. Together, we have drafted a shared vision, statement of commitment, and series of focus area commitments and actions for our Municipal units to pursue together or in tandem. The Municipality of the County of Richmond and the Village of St. Peter's are committed to providing a barrier-free environment for all who use our facilities, contact us or access our information.

As a Municipality, we are committed to applying the accessibility standards outlined in the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, 2017, and adhering to future accessibility recommendations as more information from the Province is released. We are committed to ensuring the full inclusion of all persons with disabilities by advocating and providing support for accessibility in the public, private and non-governmental sectors to create a fully accessible County.

Vision

Vision: *The County of Richmond is inclusive and provides meaningful access for all regardless of ability or age. As a community, we will promote awareness, remove barriers, and put lived experience at the forefront of future decisions.*

Focus Areas

The Accessibility Plan is intended to be a flexible and evolving document that builds on the current priorities of the Municipality and the Villages. It will also be responsive to changing conditions. The plan includes five key focus areas to help guide action towards the vision:

- Employment
- Goods and Services
- Information and Communication
- Transportation
- Built Environment

Each of the five focus areas includes a goal, a summary of current state achievements and barriers, and supporting indicators. They also include several guiding policy statements to assist in accessibility decision-making. These focus areas are actioned using 14 short-term actions for the Municipality of the County of Richmond.

Initial Actions

1. Review maintenance procedures for gravel and snow removal for all sidewalks in commercial areas, residential areas and at key facilities.

2. Modify hiring, funding evaluation, and procurement policies and procedures to prioritize persons with disabilities, both upon hiring, through onboarding and beyond.

3. Advocate for accessibility improvements to widen the paving of shoulders and create an improved winter maintenance procedure.

4. Partner with the Village to create a business survey to understand and create a record of which businesses are accessible.

5. Update Committee and Council communications policies and procedures to provide accessible resources for meetings and engagements, removing accessibility and technology barriers.

6. Partner with the Village to review current accessibility standards at key facilities and conduct Rick Hansen Certifications (or alternative certification) for Municipal Buildings, particularly for entrances.

7. Update the municipal website to an accessible standard.

8. Update and standardize all County signage with Braille, tactile and other design elements.

9. Review current recreational programming to identify and propose accessible recreational programming options.

10. Review the pedestrian road crossing locations and advocate for well-painted locations with visual/ audible cues.

11. Partner with the Village to offer training and professional development for staff, Commission and local businesses for accessibility, including accessible customer service, information and communications, and accessible design standards.

12. Attract more people with lived experience to the AAC.

13. Advocate for and support accessible trail development to ensure the network is safe and accessible for all users.

14. Review and revise emergency management planning to include accessibility.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Statement of Commitment

The Municipality of the County of Richmond and the Village of St. Peter's are committed to promoting awareness, removing barriers and creating equitable and accessible spaces for all. We commit to ensuring that opportunities in our society are open for everyone in Richmond County to participate in a dignified and barrier-free manner.

The Municipality and the Village commit to ensuring all goods, services, information, communication, infrastructure, transportation, buildings, and employment practices align with the following values:

- **Inclusivity** - Ensuring that the county is inclusive and welcoming to everyone regardless of ability, age, race, class, gender identity or access to technology.
- **Meaningful Access** - Continuously removing accessibility barriers and providing equitable opportunities so that everyone can fully participate in our community.
- **Representation** - Putting the voices of people with lived experience among those at the centre of the decision-making process.

By coming together as a community, we will continue to find new ways to reduce barriers, improve accessibility, and ensure that we meet or exceed the 2030 Nova Scotia Accessibility Act requirements.

1.2 About the Accessibility Plan

About the Municipality of the County of Richmond and the Village of St. Peter's

Located in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, Richmond County is ideally situated on the East Coast of North America. The Municipality of the County of Richmond is the smallest of Nova Scotia's 18 counties. Lying on the Cape Breton side of the Strait of Canso, adjacent to international shipping lanes, the county is bordered on the south by the Atlantic Ocean and the north by the Bras d'Or Lakes.

The Village of St. Peter's is situated within Richmond County on the Fleur-de-Lis trail and the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive trail. It is a commercial centre in the County and it is incorporated as a Village under the Municipal Government Act, making it a separate municipal unit. The Municipality and the Village are working together to improve accessibility in the County. The St. Peter's Canal bisects Richmond County by joining the Atlantic Ocean with the World Renowned Sailing Destination of the Bras d'Or Lakes.

Mi'kmaw, Acadian, Scottish, and Irish cultures create a kaleidoscope of rich cultural activities for all to enjoy. Whether you are enjoying Richmond's many Acadian festivals, singing along at a local Milling Frolic or participating in ceremonies with the Mi'kmaw community of Potlotek; Richmond County has something for every taste.

With approximately 8,900 people, the county is largely rural and boasts 230,000 acres of forested land and miles of pristine coastline. About one-third of Richmond's residents speak both French and English, and the county is home to several vibrant Mi'kmaw, Celtic, Acadian, and a variety of other cultures that contribute to our rich history, which is celebrated during numerous festivals and events held around the county throughout the year.

The Accessibility Advisory Committee

This plan was created with the involvement of the Accessibility Advisory Committee [AAC]. This citizen, staff, and Council committee was created on July 14, 2021. Its members include:

- Two elected Councilors designated by the municipal council
- One elected Commissioner, designated by St. Peter's Village Commission
- Four members of the public, with at least half of the members being someone with a disability or representing an organization that works with people with disabilities
- Municipal and Village staff

The AAC's purpose is to provide advice to the Municipal Council and Village Commission. They also help to identify, prevent, and eliminate barriers to access in Municipal and Village programs, services, initiatives, and facilities for people living with disabilities. This committee plays an important role in helping Richmond County become more accessible.

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act [Act] was adopted by the province in 2017 to make the province more equitable and accessible. The Act's goal is to make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030, by "prevent[ing] and remov[ing] barriers that restrict people with disabilities from fully participating in society." This Act outlines the roles of public sector bodies in helping the province achieve this goal.

This plan was created in accordance with the provincial guidance to start improving accessibility in the Municipality of the County of Richmond.

1.3 Plan Methodology

This Accessibility Plan was developed in conjunction with the Village of St. Peters and an Accessibility Advisory Committee shared between the two municipal bodies. As a result, much of the content and guiding statements are identical as they have been developed to ensure a shared vision across the County of Richmond. The community feedback, goal areas, and action lists have been tailored to the specific realities of the two different bodies.

Many different inputs have informed and shaped this plan, including research, community engagement, committee discussions, and a series of site assessments. The main inputs that have shaped this plan are as follows:

Site Assessments: The project's Accessibility Consultant, Level Playing Field, conducted a sample of site assessments at crucial locations across Richmond County. Sites that were assessed included: accessible parking spaces and curb cuts to entrances, sidewalks, trails, parks, libraries, health centers, recreation and community centers, and some Municipal and Village buildings. Assessments utilized virtual methods and on-location photography to inspect the accessibility of these locations for those walking or using a wheeled mobility device. Findings from this assessment can be found in Appendix B: Site Assessment Report.

Public Engagement: Between January 17, 2022, to January 30, 2022, a series of public engagement activities were undertaken to understand what currently works well, what barriers exist and what opportunities there are surrounding accessibility in the County of Richmond. Throughout those two weeks, a total of 147 community members were engaged. To share insights and ask questions, the community was encouraged to complete an online or paper survey, phone our call-in accessibility line, or attend one of two virtual workshops. An invitation to participate in the planning and on the committee was mailed to every household in the County. More information about the engagement findings can be found in Appendix C: Internal Research and Engagement Report.

Policy Direction: A series of provincial and local policies were investigated to understand the existing direction that this plan should both adhere to and take recommendations from. More information about the findings and recommendations can be found in this plan's policy sections, as well as in Appendix C: Internal Research and Engagement Report.

Case Study Research: Five case studies of municipalities across Canada that have undertaken similar initiatives were explored in this plan to guide current best practices. These case studies are documented in Appendix C: Internal Research and Engagement Report.

Accessibility Advisory Committee: Many of the plan components were either directly informed by or revised by the AAC. Their feedback has ensured that the plan reflects the committee's objectives. The AAC helped shape the plan's vision, statement of commitment, focus area commitments, and short-term action list.

Staff Input: Municipal staff were consulted throughout this plan's development and helped inform the scope and actions proposed in this plan directly. Staff workshops and surveys helped refine commitments, the vision, and the actions developed through various methods described above.

1.4 Glossary of Terms

The following definitions and their meanings are provided for clarification. These definitions were created based on standards and definitions found in the *Accessible Canada Act*, or the *Canadian Standards Association CSA B651HB-18.*

Accessibility Plan - A plan to address the identification, removal and prevention of barriers in the policies, programs, practices and services of a public sector body.

Accessible – When used to describe a building, facility, or other site, means the location possesses the necessary characteristics for it to be easily entered, exited, utilized, and navigated by people with diverse physical, sensory and cognitive abilities.

Accessible route – Is a pedestrian path of travel (either interior or exterior) that is free of barriers and obstructions. It is usable by all people, including those with physical or cognitive impairments and those requiring mobility aids and devices.

Barrier - The Accessible Canada Act defines a barrier as - "anything—including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice—that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation."

Blended transition – Canadian Standards Association CSA B651HB-18 defines a blended transition as - "a connection with a slope of 1:20 (5%) or less between the level of a pedestrian walkway and vehicular path of travel."

Braille – A tactile system of raised dots used to represent letters and words. In Canada, Unified English Braille (UEB) is the standard used for Braille.

Cane-detectable – Any object or change in surface texture that is within the detectable range of a white cane generally used by people with vision impairment.

Colour-contrast – A significant contrast in light and dark colours between the foreground and background of an element.

Curb ramp – A sloped surface built into a curb.

Depressed curb – Also known as drop curbs; a continuous length of curb along

a pedestrian route that is lowered to the level of an adjacent roadway. Such curbs may be located at vehicle loading/ unloading areas or at intersections.

Disability – A physical, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that hinders an individual's full and effective participation in society.

Glare – Canadian Standards Association CSA B651HB-18 defines glare as "excessive reflection of light from a surface."

Goods and services – All tangible and intangible items or amenities that consumers purchase independently or receive through the government. For the purpose of this document, goods and services will refer to government-owned services, including snow removal, or waste management.

Illumination – The intensity of light on a surface or in a space, measured in lux (lx). 1 lux = 1 Lumen / m2

Luminance – The amount of light emitted or reflected from a surface in the direction of the observer. Luminance is commonly referred to as the brightness of a surface.

Municipality – A governmental body established under the Municipal Government Act that provides local government for rural areas outside incorporated towns. Municipality in this document refers to the Municipality of the County of Richmond administration and government.

Ramp – Canadian Standards Association CSA B651HB-18 defines a ramp as a "sloping walkway leading from one level to another, which has a running slope with a ratio steeper than or equal to 1:20 (5%)."

Recreation – The experience that results from freely-chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing (National Framework for recreation).

Signage – Information that is provided in the form of visual and tactile communication. Includes one or more of the following elements: alphanumeric symbols, pictograms, illustrations, Braille.

Slope – The ratio of rise on an inclined surface.

Tactile walking surface indicator (TWSI) – An internationally recognized standardized surface detectable underfoot by a white cane to guide persons with low vision or blindness.

Tactile attention indicator (TAI) – A type of TWSI made of truncated domes that signals a need for caution at a change in level or other potential hazard as entry into a vehicular route or train track.

Tactile direction indicator (TDI) – A type of TWSI with flat-topped elongated bars to facilitate wayfinding in open areas.

Village – A type of community that has a commission established under the Municipal Government Act for the purpose of providing municipal services to a defined area within a larger county or district municipality.

Wheeled mobility device – A collective term to describe a range of wheeled personal transportation devices (includes manual wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs and scooters).

2.0 Accessibility Overview

2.1 The Vision

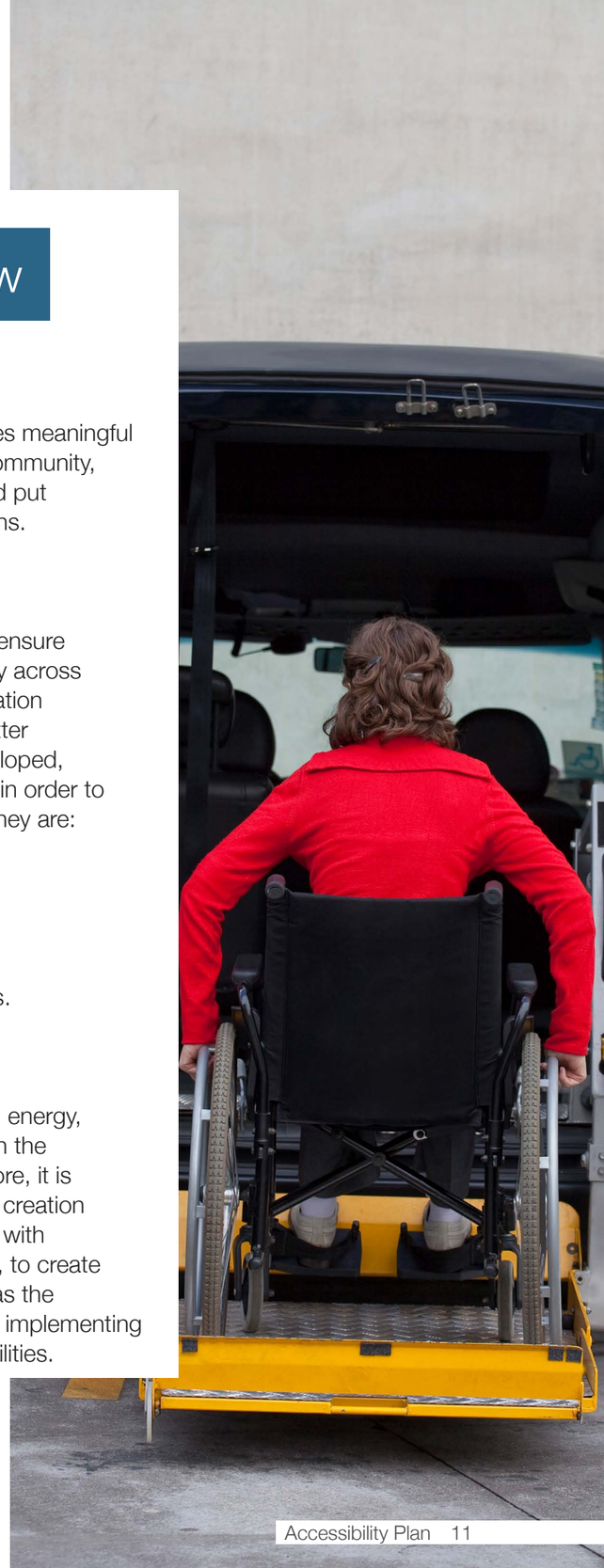
The County of Richmond is inclusive and provides meaningful access for all regardless of ability or age. As a community, we will promote awareness, remove barriers, and put lived experience at the forefront of future decisions.

2.2 Governance Structure

The Municipality of the County of Richmond will ensure that they are taking steps to improve accessibility across the County of Richmond through the implementation of this plan. As actions are completed, and a better understanding of accessibility challenges is developed, there are steps that the Municipality should take in order to continue improving accessibility in the County. They are:

- Developing future action plans and updating plan priorities every three years.
- The AAC will continue to work with Council to ensure the progression of the actions and to provide advice on future accessibility initiatives.
- This plan and the resulting actions will be updated as provincial legislation changes.

The forthcoming plan will require significant time, energy, and resources to make the necessary changes in the Municipality to become more accessible. Therefore, it is recommended that the Municipality explores the creation of either an internal position or a shared position with neighbouring Municipalities, including St. Peter's, to create an Accessibility Coordinator Position. Their role as the Accessibility Coordinator would be to assist with implementing this plan and assist the AAC with their responsibilities.



2.3 Forces For and Against Accessibility

The Accessibility Advisory Committee [AAC] identified some of the forces working for and against accessibility. These forces are aspects of the community that will influence the development and uptake of this plan as the Municipality continues to improve accessibility.

Forces working for accessibility

- Richmond County has an engaged, tight knit community
- There are many opportunities to collaborate with local organizations to move forward on accessibility goals
- Information sharing through social media such as Facebook
- Telile service which provides vital information to people without an internet connection
- Great potential for improving the trail system to be more accessible
- Richmond Literacy Network and other programs are helping to close the skills gap
- General positive attitudes about moving towards a more accessible community
- Municipal facilities are leading by example by ensuring accessibility wherever possible
- Strait Area Transit provides an option for accessible transportation

Forces working against accessibility

- Poorly maintained and poorly designed roads and sidewalks
- Aging infrastructure that prevents accessibility upgrades
- Limited awareness of accessibility needs
- Limited accessible work opportunities
- Language barriers for French speaking residents trying to access municipal information
- Complicated funding applications for accessibility grants
- Internet accessibility and the digital divide
- Public transportation is difficult to access and navigating it can be intimidating for many people with disabilities
- Accessible parking spots are very limited
- Transportation options are very limited
- Many outdoor public spaces are inaccessible for people with mobility issues

2.4 Our Community's Priorities

During the engagement phase of the Municipality and Village's Accessibility Plan, we asked residents via an online and print survey how they would rate the accessibility of key components of their community. The following chart shows the overall accessibility ratings from residents of those who were from the County of Richmond.

It should be noted that this chart is organized from the highest number of "very accessible" and "somewhat accessible" responses to the lowest number. It should also be noted that respondents were able to answer "not applicable" for elements that they do not interact with.

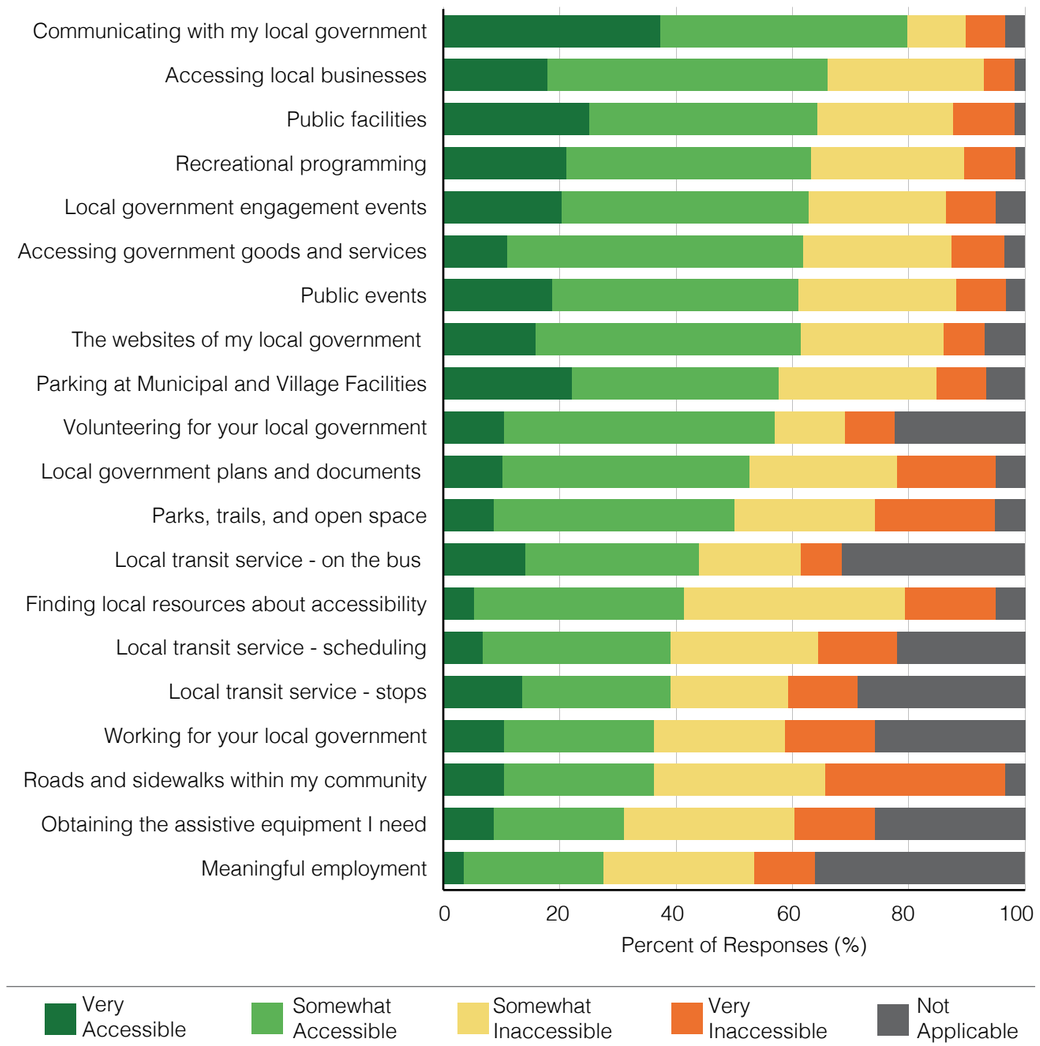
The three most accessible elements reported as either very accessible or somewhat accessible for the Municipality include:

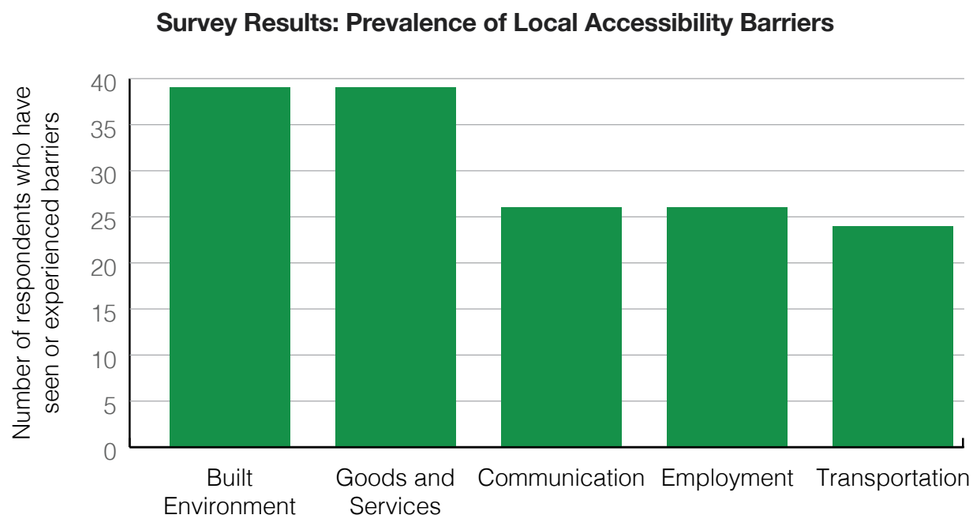
- Communicating with the local government
- Accessing local businesses
- Public facilities

The three least accessible elements, reported as very inaccessible, or somewhat inaccessible (not including "not applicable" options) included:

- Moving along roads and sidewalks within my community
- Finding local resources about accessibility
- Obtaining the assistive equipment I need

Survey Results: Accessibility Ratings





The bar chart above shows all of the responses to the statement, "Select the accessibility barriers you've seen or experienced in the Municipality of the County of Richmond and the Village of St. Peter's."

2.5 Education and Awareness

During engagement, it was found that generally, there was a lack of awareness about accessibility needs across focus areas in the Village and the Municipality. Many of the actions highlighted in Section 4 of this report will help ensure progress towards each focus area and general education and awareness. In particular, Action 11: Partner with the Municipality to offer training and professional development for staff, Commission and local businesses for accessibility, acts to support the education and development of resources for staff, and businesses in The Village and Municipality.

Additionally, residents highlighted the "can do" attitude and dedication of many existing non-profit and community groups in the Municipality and the Village. Throughout the development of this plan's actions, these groups should be sought out for potential partnerships and collaboration to further the impact of any accessibility actions made by the Village and Municipality.

Lastly, residents highlighted the potential for growing the positive working relationship between Potlotek First Nation and the Municipality. Throughout the pursuance of this plan, partnerships with Potlotek should continue to evolve and grow to ensure that all communities are involved in creating an accessible community for all.

3.0 Areas of Focus

The Accessibility Plan is supported by five key focus areas, which are:

- Employment
- Goods and Services
- Information and Communication
- Transportation
- Built Environment

Stakeholder input, site assessments, and supporting research have informed these five focus areas. Each of these areas has been organized to include a commitment, an overview of the starting point, and a set of policies to inform the Municipality. Each of the focus areas is comprised of the following sections:

The Commitment: an ideal state to achieve by 2030 for each focus area. Each commitment provides the high-level goal and intent for the focus area to meet over the coming years.

The Starting Point: A summary of the current state for each focus area in the Municipality. The starting point contains three sub-components:

- Overview: A discussion of the current assets, systems and services that are provided by the Municipality
- Achievements: Positive moves that are being made towards greater accessibility right now
- Barriers: Resident and site assessment-identified limitations for accessibility in the community

Policy Statements: These policy statements will be used to inform accessibility decision-making in the Municipality. These are informed from provincial standards for accessibility and will ensure that the Municipality takes the necessary steps to improve accessibility.

FOCUS AREA

Employment

3.1.1. The Commitment

The Municipality of the County of Richmond and its partners provide, create awareness, and advocate for employment opportunities that are accessible to people of all abilities, including those with disabilities.

Supporting elements:

- Public workspaces
- Public hiring practices
- Workplace culture
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training, policies and practices
- Community employment partnerships
- Flexibility for modified workforce participation

3.1.2. The Starting Point

Overview

Employment opportunities in the Municipality vary by industry. The top 6 industries in the Municipality are: 1) agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, 2) mining and oil and gas extraction, 3) manufacturing, 4) utilities, 5) construction, and 6) wholesale trade.

According to the 2016 County Profile, the local labour participation rate is 53.52% in the County, with an employment rate of 43.1% and an unemployment rate of 19.48%. According to the same report, the largest employers in the County include Port Hawkesbury Paper, NuStar Energy, Premium Seafoods Group, Lobsters R Us, Clearwater Seafoods Acadia Drywall/Cabot Gypsum, NSPower, Samson Enterprises Ltd. & Samson Industrial Ltd., and Strait Supplies.

The Municipality of the County of Richmond employs 26 staff, including full-time and seasonal workers.

Achievements

- Municipally owned buildings have some accessible features, such as ramps, accessible washrooms and automatic doors, which improve access to employment at the Municipality for those with a disability
- There is a willingness from the County to be more inclusive with their hiring practices
- Richmond County Literacy Network has programs for older adults which help to prepare people for employment
- The YMCA Cape Breton employment office (Nova Scotia Works) is a great resource for residents who need employment support
- The Richmond County TimeBank (stopped services) was a great resource to connect skilled workers with opportunities

Barriers

- There is chronic underemployment in Richmond County for those with a disability
- Limited information sharing about accessible work sites/ accessible jobs available in Richmond
- There is a lack of mentors or resources for individuals to try different initiatives
- Few work opportunities for people with disabilities, youth and older adults in the County
- Limited internet services create difficulties for people to connect with work opportunities in Richmond and for work from home opportunities
- Many businesses are located in older buildings that are not accessible for employees or customers with mobility restrictions

3.1.3. Policies

The Municipality will:

- Guarantee that training and hiring materials incorporate guidance about recruitment and hiring best practices for people with disabilities
- Consider what accommodations could be offered during their recruitment and employment retention endeavours that build upon current accommodations offered

FOCUS AREA

Goods and Services

3.2.1. The Commitment

All staff and service providers supply and advocate for accessible goods and services in the Municipality of the County of Richmond and continue to identify and improve barriers to the use of local services.

Supporting elements:

- Council and Committee meetings
- Relationship building and advocacy
- Affordability of services
- Building code and bylaw enforcement
- Location of services
- Maintenance and snow removal
- Online and offline delivery options

3.2.2. The Starting Point

Overview

The Municipality of the County of Richmond offers a range of services to the local population. The Municipality provides services including but not limited to administering building permits, dog licensing, emergency management, public works, recreation services, and tax services. Some services included on the eServices portion of the County website allow residents to apply for permits, register a heritage building, and change their address using the virtual format. The Municipality is also responsible for maintaining 1.7 kilometers of their roads, with the remaining nearly 30 kilometers of J-class roads being maintained by the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works.

The local area also hosts a robust accommodation sector to service the growing tourism base. The community health centre in L'Ardoise is a good example of a centre with a range of health services provided to the community. Richmond County is also home to community halls such as; The Lions Community Hall, the Rocky Bay Irish Club, and the Little Anse Social Action Centre that host local events. The Richmond County Winter Festival is an example of a local event hosted in the area each year.

The Municipality of the County of Richmond is governed by a County Council, which has a variety of committees of Council, including the shared Accessibility Advisory Committee with the Village of St. Peter's.

Achievements

- The Municipal office is well equipped and can accommodate hybrid meeting styles (virtual and in-person)
- Partnerships in place with local organizations to work with residents, such as the: Dr. Kingston Community Health Centre, which does outreach to residents, Autism NS, which created a Sensory Friendly skate at Richmond Arena and the Pan Cape Breton Food Hub, which helps with food security
- The Richmond County Literacy Network (RCLN) has general literacy and computer literacy programs to help people with basic skills
- Improvements are being made through partnerships with local ATV groups to make accessible multi-use trails
- There is a good suite of accessible recreation leisure activities offered by the municipality
- Events and services are located in various locations, many of which are accessible, which allows for improved access

Barriers

- Some buildings are not accessible, which limits the access to certain goods and services offered by the Municipality
- Lack of awareness and clarity on accessibility among service providers, including staff and council, when providing accessible services and programming
- Inconsistent access to high-speed internet throughout the community prevents people from connecting to services, sharing of information and opportunities
- Snow removal of local roads can leave those unable to clear their roads stranded or unable to access local businesses and services
- Some offerings from the Municipality and other local organizations are only offered in-person, but travel is not always an option for some people or those living in rural communities
- A lack of transportation options to access services, programming and volunteer opportunities
- Limited access to affordable and accessible service options throughout the county, including affordable housing

3.2.3. Policies

The Municipality will:

Build policies and procedures for snow clearing and snow storage into the Land Use By-law and Subdivision By-law

Provide all municipal goods and services with an inclusionary approach, prioritizing issues related to ability-based biases

FOCUS AREA

Information and Communications

3.3.1. The Commitment

Everyone can meaningfully access, receive, understand, and use information provided by the Municipality of the County of Richmond, and their partners, regardless of ability, or technology availability.

Supporting elements:

- Communication using a variety of platforms/mediums
- Distribution of materials online and offline
- Availability of interpretation services
- Communicating in plain language

3.3.2. The Starting Point

Overview

Richmond county spans across a vast area of Cape Breton, meaning there are many unique communities within the county. The communities boast many outdoor activities that residents enjoy and indoor spaces to gather and hold events. The events and activities highlighted are promoted through many internal groups and networks. Information about events is posted on the festivals and events calendar for Richmond County Facebook page. Tourism has been established in the region as Cape Breton has invested in promoting the island. The County website has limited information about accessibility within the county and the events it hosts.

The Municipality of the County of Richmond currently has a website, www.richmondcounty.ca, where this Accessibility Plan's information is located.

The Municipality predominantly relies on Facebook, Telile Community TV, and the municipal website to digitally share County information. Along with other digital efforts, the Municipality uses in-person information-sharing methods, such as community mail-outs, the quarterly Richmond Reflections magazine, phone-in lines, and informal word of mouth.

Achievements

- A range of communication methods are currently used, including Telile, social media and the Municipal website
- The Municipality offers hybrid meetings to facilitate remote attendance, and Council sessions are live-streamed with a call-in line available
- The County Facebook pages have over 2300 followers
- The Reflections of Richmond online and print newsletter is circulated throughout the County and provides information about upcoming events
- RCLN (Richmond County Literacy Network) programs are a dependable resource
- County attempts to communicate through a wide range of informal media sources
- There is a strong collaborative spirit within the County through various groups, agencies and the Accessibility Advisory Committee

Barriers

- Most public information is only available online through social media and the Municipal website, which is exclusionary for those with limited broadband or tech access
- The County is bilingual, but there is minimal availability of information and communications in both official languages
- There is limited broadband internet service available in parts of the County; many seniors are not connected to the internet
- There is a lack of in-person wayfinding signage
- The County website needs improvement to address accessibility concerns
- Access to information regarding accessibility is hard to find, and there are limited opportunities for residents to provide feedback
- Telile and SP Cable can be used more effectively
- ASL and literacy supports are not always available at local events
- There is a need to improve access to Council information; policies and Bylaws should use plain language

3.3.3. Policies

The Municipality will:

- Supply information in an accessible, customized format or with communication assistance (ASL interpreters, oral translators and real-time captioning)
- Ensure all electronic materials are made accessible for all age ranges and abilities, including those with disabilities
- Host all in-person public meetings in barrier-free locations

FOCUS AREA

Transportation

3.4.1. The Commitment

Everyone in the Municipality of the County of Richmond is able to get to where they need to go through equitable transportation access.

Supporting elements:

- Transit providers
- Public transportation network and scheduling
- Alternative modes of transportation (Active transportation)
- Parking spaces
- Infrastructure repairs and development (sidewalks and roads)
- Advocacy

3.4.2. The Starting Point

Overview

External agencies and the Provincial Government primarily handle transportation in the Municipality. The Municipality owns approximately 1.7 kilometres of municipal roads, with the majority maintained by the Municipality. There are also 29.88 kilometres of local roads (J-class) that are technically owned by the Municipality, which the Province maintains. Lastly, The Municipality owns and maintains approximately 2.6 Kms of sidewalks (1.3 Kms in Louisdale, 0.8 Kms in Arichat and 0.5 Kms in Petit De Grat). The Province owns and/or maintains many roadways in the County of Richmond. Look to the built environment to learn more about built transportation infrastructure.

The Municipality of the County of Richmond is serviced by Strait Area Transit, a non-profit transit service. Strait Area Transit is a community-based transit system that delivers door-door accessible transportation within Cape Breton Island and beyond. This service relies on a pre-booked rider system, where riders are required to request a ride directly from their home to their destination the day before their trip. Service extends between Port Hawkesbury to Inverness. Richmond County is a partner funder in this transit initiative.

There are no taxi services available directly in Richmond County, but two taxi companies in the neighbouring Villages of Port Hawkesbury and Port Hastings. Similarly, there are no VIA rail train lines in Richmond County or rideshare platforms.

Achievements

- Some communities have well developed active transportation infrastructure, including paved sidewalks in Louisdale
- Strait Area Transit are equipped with appropriate accessibility features to accommodate all users, including kneeling entrance to vehicles
- The Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) has an appointment program that provides transportation to and from medical appointments.
- Most public buildings have an adequate provision of accessible parking stalls

Barriers

- Many roadways and sidewalks are unpaved or do not have shoulders, and have large drop-offs bordering them, creating dangerous travel conditions
- Limited public transit service creates a dependency on personal vehicles
- VON has been unsuccessful in trying to get a volunteer driver program running
- There is no local taxi service
- Strait Area Transit website is challenging to navigate and understand what services are offered
- Need to call in advance to book transit service and scheduling can become a barrier
- Transit is not required in municipal budgets and could be subject to potential cuts.
- ATV riders not abiding by regulations in public spaces such as walking trails and beaches can cause conflict. More education and signage is needed.
- Biking on the road is unsafe due to lack of shoulders, cycling infrastructure in the County needs improvement
- Snowplows often block driveways - which can pose a challenge for people with mobility issues
- People experience isolation due to lack of transit and how intimidating it can be to use the transit systems available
- There is a need for more crosswalks in the County
- Hospital access is an issue as the road/street network makes it difficult to find a direct route to the hospital

3.4.3. Policies

The Municipality will:

- Support transit services in the County and ensure that all transit services have the ability to accommodate people with disabilities
- Guarantee that no person will be charged any additional fees for transit services as a result of their disability
- Whenever feasible, ensure that any functions hosted by the Municipality or Village will be held during times that enable people with disabilities to make alternative transportation arrangements, if needed

FOCUS AREA

Built Environment

3.5.1. The Commitment

All infrastructure, buildings, streets, sidewalks, and shared spaces in the Municipality of the County of Richmond are safe, maintained, and provide meaningful access to all.

Supporting Elements:

- Public infrastructure and buildings
- Parking spaces
- Access and safety
- Bylaws and development standards
- Building code and Municipal Planning Strategy

3.5.2. The Starting Point

Overview
The built environment in the Municipality of the County of Richmond is composed of sidewalks, roadways, buildings, placemaking furniture, and their components.

In terms of transportation built environment, the Municipality owns approximately 1.7 kilometres of municipal roads, with the majority maintained by the Municipality. There are also 29.88 kilometres of local roads (J-class) that are technically owned by the Municipality, which the Province maintains. Lastly, The Municipality owns and maintains approximately 2.6 Kms of sidewalks (1.3 Kms in Louisdale, 0.8 Kms in Arichat and 0.5 Kms in Petit De Grat). The Province owns and/or maintains many of the roadways in the County of Richmond.

The Municipality owns four buildings where the public has access: Richmond County Administration Building, Richmond County Solid Waste Management Facility Scale House, Richmond Arena, and Petit de Grat Library. In addition, the Municipality does not own or operate parks.

Achievements

- New and well-maintained sidewalks with appropriate curb cuts, particularly in Arichat and Louisdale
- Rest areas, with adjacent clear ground space for wheeled-mobility users, are provided at intervals along pedestrian pathways
- Most public buildings and private businesses have well maintained accessible parking stalls available
- Many buildings have accessible bathroom stalls with widened doorways
- The recreation department has worked on creating an accessible viewing platform at the Richmond arena
- Improvements to the multi-use trail system, with more shared trails with ATV users being developed
- There are a series of accessible community halls across Richmond County
- Many buildings in Richmond County have accessible features, such as automatic doors, ramps, and accessible washrooms
- Municipal buildings offer services in locations that are accessible
- There are many partnerships with other organizations such as the Seniors Safety & Social Inclusion Coordinator
- Resources throughout the community are available to support accessible goals, including; The Age-Friendly Plan, and many special interest groups to collaborate with

Barriers

- Aging infrastructure prevents some older buildings from being able to incorporate accessible design features
- The abandoned rail corridor along St. Peter's Bay is not accessible to people with mobility challenges, not managed/maintained, and coastal erosion is threatening to lose the trail.
- Lack of safe sidewalks or shoulders coupled with steep drop-offs along busy streets making it unsafe for travel
- Some of the sidewalks are unmaintained and require maintenance or further development/ expanding where their coverage
- Parks, trails and beaches are not designed or maintained to accommodate wheelchairs or other mobility devices
- Crosswalks lack accessibility features, including tactile coverings, audio cues and ample street crossing time for those with mobility issues
- There is a scarcity of affordable housing that is wheelchair accessible
- A general sense of awareness is lacking in business owners about what accessible features are needed
- Certain County-sponsored events are held in locations that are not accessible or dangerous for those with disabilities
- There is a lack of awareness and measures in place for those with non-physical disabilities

- Road maintenance (snow and gravel clearing) restricts mobility and poses safety concerns
- Lack of paved roads in the County; there is a need for more provincial advocacy for the paving of roads
- Expensive and challenging process to receive grant funding to improve the accessibility of local businesses, parks or halls
- Some businesses and service areas are lacking accessible parking, features and washrooms

3.5.3. Policies

The Municipality will:

- Guarantee the allocation of accessible parking spaces, signage and associated curb cuts at all Municipal owned or leased spaces
- Establish the supply of crosswalks and curb cuts in areas with consistent pedestrian activity, such as areas near schools, paths and parks
- Engage private developers and business owners regarding the importance and benefits of having facilities that adhere to the Accessibility requirements of the Nova Scotia Building Code Regulations even if they are not currently legally required to

An example of a widened road shoulder in Petit de Grat for improved transportation access.

4.0 Implementing the Plan

4.1 About The Actions

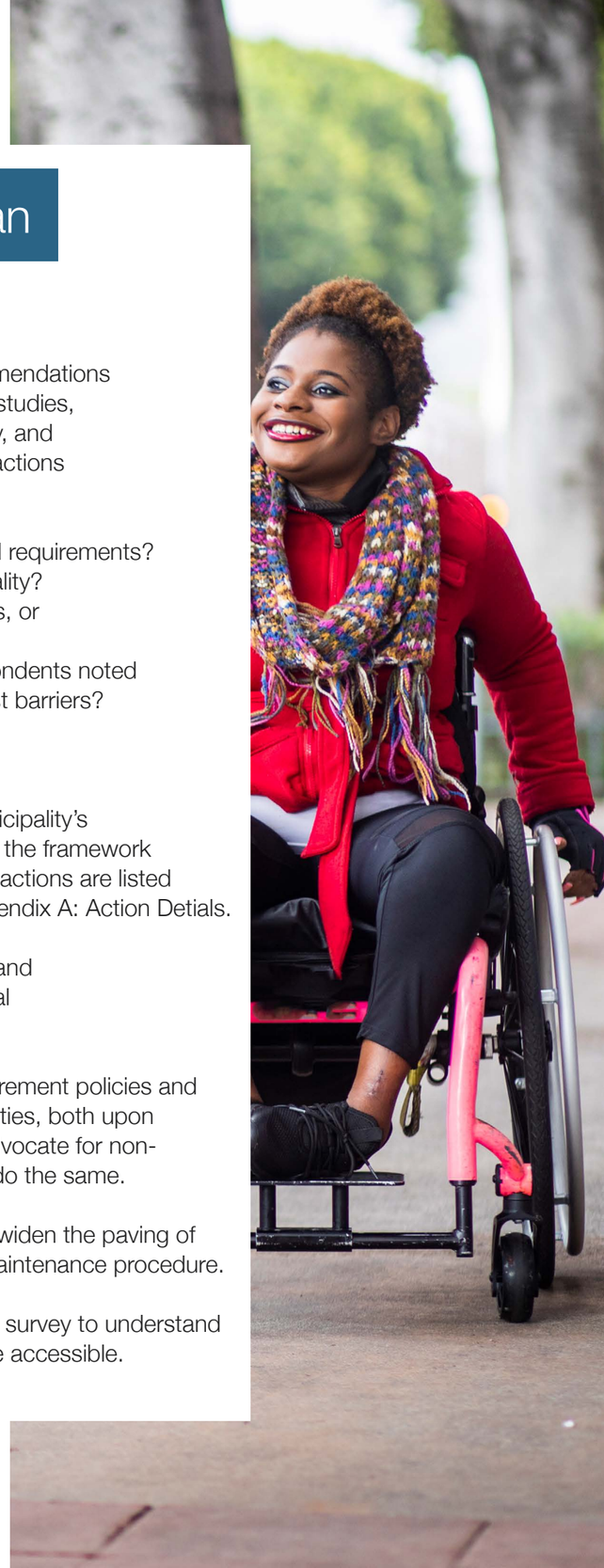
Actions for this plan were selected using recommendations gathered from policy review, best practice case studies, accessibility audits conducted across the county, and findings from the community engagement. The actions have been based on the following framework:

- Is the action in line with provincial policies and requirements?
- Is the action within the control of the Municipality?
- Is the action achievable in the next three years, or will it make a sizable difference in the future?
- Will the action improve one of the areas respondents noted as being least accessible or one of the biggest barriers?

4.2 Actions

Fourteen key actions were identified for the municipality's implementation during the first three years using the framework described in the aforementioned section. These actions are listed below and are described in greater detail in Appendix A: Action Detials.

1. Review maintenance procedures for gravel and snow removal for all sidewalks in commercial areas, residential areas and at key facilities.
2. Modify hiring, funding evaluation, and procurement policies and procedures to prioritize persons with disabilities, both upon hiring, through onboarding and beyond—advocate for non-municipal organizations and businesses to do the same.
3. Advocate for accessibility improvements to widen the paving of shoulders and create an improved winter maintenance procedure.
4. Partner with the Village to create a business survey to understand and create a record of which businesses are accessible.



5. Update Committee and Council communications policies and procedures to provide accessible resources for meetings and engagements, removing accessibility and technology barriers.

6. Partner with the Village to review current accessibility standards at key facilities and conduct Rick Hansen Certifications (or alternative certification) for Municipal Buildings, particularly for entrances.

7. Update the municipal website to an accessible standard.

8. Update and standardize all County signage with Braille, tactile and other design elements.

9. Review current recreational programming to identify and propose accessible recreational programming options.

10. Review the pedestrian road crossing locations and advocate for well-painted locations with visual/ audible cues.

11. Partner with the Village to offer training and professional development for staff, Commission and local businesses for accessibility, including accessible customer service, information and communications, and accessible design standards.

12. Attract more people with lived experience to the AAC.

13. Advocate for and support accessible trail development to ensure the network is safe and accessible for all users.

14. Review and revise emergency response planning to include accessibility.

4.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) will prepare an Accessibility Plan Report Card, which will report on the status of the actions outlined in this plan. This report card will be presented to Council by the end of each fiscal year (March 31). It will measure the performance of the policies and the progress of the actions. This report card will ensure that progress is reported clearly and consistently while also maintaining momentum in completing the actions.

Schedule and Evaluation

The actions outlined in section 4.2 are to be completed within the first three years of this plan, between 2022 and 2025. Future actions to improve accessibility and achieve the commitments noted in each of the focus areas will include a process to revisit community priorities and understand where progress has or has not been made. During this next evaluation period, additional community considerations and any potential legislative changes should be considered.

In 2025 (three years from now), the Municipality will conduct a comprehensive review and update to this plan in accordance with the 2017 Nova Scotia Accessibility Act (S.42. A public sector body shall update its accessibility plan every three years and make it publicly available). This review will identify the next set of short-term actions to be completed between 2025 and 2027, which will continue to improve accessibility in Richmond County. These actions will be chosen based on the framework described in section 4.1.

4.4 Responding to Questions and Complaints

The needs, barriers and opportunities for improving accessibility in the Municipality of the County of Richmond are ever-changing and evolving. To ensure the Municipality continues to address and improve accessibility barriers through to 2030 and beyond, the Municipality, in partnership with the Accessibility Advisory Committee, will respond to any public questions or complaints around accessibility. Suggestions for how to respond to these questions and complaints are as follows.

All accessibility questions or complaints will be forwarded to the AAC and the appropriate staff member(s) responsible for the Municipal service in question. The AAC will respond to the question or complaint in a timely and respectful manner. Depending on the nature of the question or complaint, it will be answered in one of the following ways:

- If a member of staff cannot answer the question or complaint, the question will be added to the subsequent AAC meeting agenda for review.
- The AAC and other responsible departments will assess complaints or questions about physical infrastructure.
- Complaints or questions that can be addressed operationally will be forwarded to the responsible department.
- Complaints or questions that require new capital spending will be added to the subsequent AAC meeting agenda for deliberation.

If a complaint or question about Municipal staff, goods and services, information, communication or any other category unrelated to the built environment is received, the AAC will evaluate if actions are already being addressed in an ongoing action. Questions or complaints not addressed in an ongoing action will be brought forward to the AAC for discussion and potential resolution. Solutions may be proposed immediately or suggested as a priority action for the updated action plan in 2025.

Members of the public who bring forward a question or complaint will be encouraged to join the AAC to help develop a solution to the problem and help complete *Action #12 - Attract more people with lived experience to the AAC.*

Appendices

Appendix A: Action Details

Detailed information about actions to be undertaken between 2022 and 2025.

Appendix B: Site Assessment Report

A report documenting the accessibility status as documented in the site assessment.

Appendix C: Internal Research and Engagement Report

An overview of what was done for public engagement and research.