

# **Town of Stephenville Accessibility Plan**

## **Land Acknowledgement**

We respectfully acknowledge the Town of Stephenville as the unceded ancestral homeland of different indigenous populations. We also acknowledge with respect the rich histories and cultures of the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **Commitment to Accessibility**

The Town of Stephenville is committed to an accessible, inclusive, healthy and safe community for everyone. We strive to meet the diverse needs of our community by identifying, preventing and removing barriers so that all people can equitably live, work, play and learn here.

## **Message from the Mayor**

Inclusion and accessibility are core values for our community. Our responsibility as Council is to ensure that everyone can enjoy the amenities our Town has to offer and that no one is left behind. Stephenville has a strategic direction where people feel connected, have a sense of belonging and are actively engaged in community life.

We understand that accessibility is not just a nice thing to do; it is the right thing to do. Our plans to continue improving accessibility and inclusion testify to our dedication to making our Town a welcoming place for all. Our accessibility plan for 2024-2026 is a comprehensive strategy focusing on improving accessibility and inclusion in critical areas. These include our programs and services, buildings and public spaces, information and communication, and workplace.

This new initiative, a product of our collective efforts and careful consultation with stakeholders, including you, our valued community members, shows the way forward for breaking down barriers and improving our community's quality of life, particularly for those with disabilities.

As active community members, I invite you to continue playing a crucial role in improving accessibility.

On behalf of Council, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our community for your unwavering support of our wonderful Town.

## **Message from the Chief Administrative Officer**

We are excited to introduce a vital initiative to enhance accessibility and inclusion in our Town. Our mission as a municipality has always been to ensure that every resident can fully participate in all aspects of civic life. This plan represents a significant step forward in our commitment to making the Town of Stephenville a more inclusive and accessible place for our residents, visitors and region.

The Accessibility Plan is not just a tool but a process for achieving a more inclusive and equitable Town of Stephenville. It's a journey that requires time, resources, and, most importantly, your active participation to achieve our mutual success.

As we work towards reducing and removing barriers and implementing solutions, we will provide regular updates to inform you about our progress and your role in making accessibility a reality in our town.

I am hopeful and optimistic about the positive changes our accessibility plan will bring to our Town. We firmly believe that accessibility and inclusion benefit everyone.

Thank you for your ongoing support in making the Town of Stephenville a better place to live.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are as written in the Provincial Accessibility Act 2021.

#### **Accessibility Plan:**

A document that addresses how to prevent, identify and remove barriers in policy, programs, practices and services.

#### **Accessibility Standard:**

The necessary accessibility requirements established under the Accessibility Act.

#### **Accommodation:**

Any action taken to reduce or remove a barrier preventing or limiting access.

#### **Barrier:**

Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in society, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communication barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, or a barrier established by an Act, regulations, a policy or a practice.

**Built Environment:**

Buildings, parks, trails, playgrounds, streets, sidewalks, and sports fields, built or maintained by the Town of Stephenville.

**Disability:**

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

**Key Focus Areas:**

Areas of operation within an organization that services the public.

**Programs:**

An activity or set of activities offered by the Town that improve the well-being of residents, visitors, businesses and newcomers.

**Public Body:**

An organization that delivers public service, including municipalities.

**Services:**

Work done by the Town that benefits others.

**About the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan**

The Town of Stephenville’s Accessibility Plan (The Plan) is an essential step toward becoming a more accessible and inclusive Town. It shows a commitment to offering equitable access to our programs, services, and public spaces.

The Accessibility Plan will evolve based on the changing needs of our community and the development of Provincial Accessibility Legislation. As accessibility standards develop, the plan will be updated to reflect the responsibilities of municipalities.

The plan creates awareness about current efforts to ensure accessibility to Town of Stephenville-operated programs, services, and spaces. It will focus on actions that support equitable access to:

- Programs and services
- The built environment, including buildings and public spaces
- Information and communication
- Goods and services received through procurement
- Accommodations to access programs and services
- Accessible workplaces and employment

The Town understands the importance of learning from and working with those most impacted by barriers to accessibility. To ensure we understand the challenges and opportunities for improvement, we consulted with the following:

- Persons with disabilities
- Caregivers and families of persons with disabilities
- Advocates for persons with disabilities
- The Accessibility Committee
- Disability agencies and organizations
- Town of Stephenville senior leaders
- Town of Stephenville Council

Focus areas and actions have been identified based on public engagement. The Town will continue working with stakeholders and completing annual reviews to achieve the mutual goal of becoming a more inclusive and equitable place to live, work, learn, and play.

## **Overview of the Accessibility Act**

The Provincial Accessibility Act is Bill 38: An Act Respecting Accessibility in the Province (The Act). This enabling legislation was passed on December 3rd, 2021. It outlines the principles and goals that will improve accessibility in the province and identifies key focus areas where barriers often exist that prevent individuals with disabilities from participating in society. The critical focus areas specific to municipalities are:

- The design and delivery of programs, services and goods that ensure equitable access.
- Built environment that ensures buildings, shared spaces, public transportation and transportation infrastructure are accessible.
- Information and communication that ensure everyone can receive, understand and share the information provided.

- Accommodations that ensure accessible and inclusive options are available for equitable access.
- Procurement processes that ensure equitable access to goods and services that are sourced and purchased.
- Employment that ensures an accessible workplace and support for persons with disabilities to find and maintain meaningful employment.

The Act requires that public bodies create an accessibility plan within two years of the Act coming into force and every three years after that. Accessibility Plans must address prevention, identification, and removal of barriers in public body operations and be publicly available. Public bodies must consult with persons with disabilities or representatives of organizations representing persons with disabilities in preparing a plan.

The Act allows the Provincial Government to develop accessibility standards and provide inspection and enforcement power to ensure accessibility standards are met. The first accessibility standard approved for development is the Accessible Customer Service Standard.

## **Overview of Stephenville's Municipal Services**

The Town of Stephenville provides a comprehensive range of municipal services, including the following:

- Public Works
- Garbage and Recycling
- Community and Economic Development
- Recreation and Wellness
- Planning and Development
- Municipal Enforcement
- Fire Protection
- Taxation and Finance

Further details can be found on the Town's website at [www.stephenville.ca](http://www.stephenville.ca)

## **Demographics**

The 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability shows that in Newfoundland and Labrador, 23.6% of people identify as having a disability. Supporting this significant population of individuals with invisible and visible disabilities is essential in creating an inclusive place.

While visible disabilities can be readily apparent, the challenges faced by those with invisible disabilities can be just as significant, even if they are not immediately visible to others. By recognizing and accommodating our

community's diverse needs, we can ensure that everyone, regardless of their disability, has equitable access to our municipal services and economy.

## **Report an Accessibility Concern or Suggestion**

If you are aware of an accessibility concern or have a suggestion on how something could be done better, let us know. You can contact us 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Report your concern or idea in the way that is most accessible to you.

Phone: 709-643-8360 (leave us a message outside of office hours)

Email: [access@stephenville.ca](mailto:access@stephenville.ca)

Online: go to [www.stephenville.ca](http://www.stephenville.ca) and click "Contact Us" if you have a suggestion or "Report a Problem" if you have a concern.

Town App: go to [www.stephenville.ca](http://www.stephenville.ca) and scroll down to the app download links. The app is available for iPhone and Android, although some operating system version restrictions apply. Once you have downloaded the app, you can use the "Contact Us" and "Report a Problem" features directly from your device.

## **Existing Accessibility Measures**

The Town of Stephenville has worked closely with stakeholders, community partners, and the public to improve accessibility in municipal programs, services, and our built environment.

Key focus areas have been established to help recognize areas of achievement and to organize areas needing improvement.

The Town of Stephenville is pleased to create awareness of our accessibility improvement efforts to date.

## **Design and Delivery of Programs and Services**

Programs and services shall be planned with accessibility in mind. This helps to ensure that all community members can participate equitably.

Public Meetings:

- Accommodations are available on request, where possible
- In-person and virtual meeting formats
- In-person meetings are hosted at accessible locations

Equipment Lending Program – lending of adaptive equipment free of charge:

- Hippocampe Wheelchair - complete with skis and all-terrain wheels
- Electrical Assist Bike
- Sledge

Best Bus – accessible bus:

- 8-passenger, 4-wheelchair bus
- Low-cost fare
- Coverage for the entire Bay St. George region

Programs:

- Registration is available online and in person
- Admission Fees for Personal Care Attendants policy
- Protective Intervention policy

### **The Built Environment and Transportation**

Accessibility in the built environment ensures that people of all abilities can navigate and use public spaces and facilities equitably.

Town Office:

- Dedicated accessible parking and seniors' parking spaces
- Automated entrance
- Customer service rest area with seating
- Accessible washroom in customer service waiting area
- Wheelchair accessible throughout

Stephenville Dome:

- Installation of two insulated vestibule doors with automatic door openers at all entrances
- Accessibility upgrades to main-level washrooms complete with automatic door operators
- Internal Ramp access to view of Ice Surface and installation of guardrails
- Repairs made to enhance elevator functionality and reliability

Regional Aquatic Centre:

- Dedicated accessible and seniors' parking spaces
- Automated entrance
- Accessible changing facilities
- Accessible washrooms
- Swim Chair pool access
- Floatation devices

### Accessible Playground – Blanche Brook Park:

- Prioritized imaginary play, social inclusion, independence and active motion, incorporating generating complexity for an inclusive experience
- Each piece of equipment has been intentionally selected and placed to foster skill development at different levels
- Pour in-place rubber surfacing to ensure wheelchair accessibility and enhance safety
- 3-bay swing set, including a generation swing with inclusive seat and safety harness
- Surface Spinner
- Tire Climbers with calming seating spaces for over-stimulated children
- Ramp-accessible structures with double rails, continuous gripping support, parallel paths of play, wheelchair turn-around areas, and transfer stations

### Streets and Pedestrian Routes:

- New and remediated capital works projects meet accessibility standards, where possible
- Traffic calming strategies in place for designated areas
- Special signage is available on request to warn drivers to take additional care in residential areas where children who require accommodations live

InclusionNL accessibility reports have been completed on the following facilities:

- Stephenville Dome
- Regional Aquatic Centre
- Caribou Curling Club
- Bay St. George YMCA

### **Information and Communication**

Accessible communication ensures that people of all abilities can fully access and understand the information required to participate in the community.

### Town Information:

- Online or in-person reporting of problems
- Town services and information are available through a variety of formats, including app technology, social media, website, and email
- Location map is available on the Town website



- Council meetings are available in person or live-streamed

Website:

- [www.stephenville.ca](http://www.stephenville.ca) meets WCAG 2.1 AA standard
- Plain language is used in Town communications
- Important notices are clearly and prominently identified
- Sans serif fonts are used
- Improved organization and intuitive layout

## **Procurement**

The Town does not currently have general policies or procedures to ensure that accessibility is considered during procurement so that products and services purchased are inclusive and accessible.

## **Accommodations**

Accessibility accommodations provide equitable access to Town programs and services for people with diverse needs and abilities.

Calls for Accommodations:

- Accommodations to assist individuals to access or participate in programs, services, meetings, facilities, and employment opportunities are available upon request

Service Animals:

- Service animals are welcome in Town programs, services, and public spaces

## **Employment**

Equal opportunity employment practices ensure that individuals requiring accommodations have equitable access to the Town's workforce.

- Town of Stephenville career opportunities are posted on the Town website, social media, and online job boards
- Job postings use inclusive language
- Inclusive interviewing methods
- Accommodations to participate in an interview process may be considered upon request
- Respectful Workplace policy
- Duty to Accommodate policy
- Wellness program
- Benefits program

- Variety of employment types

## **Barriers and Actions**

The Town of Stephenville is committed to working with stakeholders to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent access and participation, whether architectural, physical, technological, attitudinal, or related to policy or information communication.

The Provincial Accessibility Act allows the Province to develop accessibility standards and requires public bodies to meet obligations within established timeframes. As standards and regulations are being developed, we will ensure compliance and continue collaborating and consulting with stakeholders to improve municipal programs, services and public spaces.

The Town engaged with stakeholders to learn more about the community's needs. This process identified key barriers and recommendations. Town staff have reviewed the feedback received and determined what actions may be taken over the next three years.

Many factors were considered, including identified needs, safety, current legislative requirements, municipal authority, and operational capacity within existing resources such as staffing, budget, equipment, and time.

As resources permit, other actions to reduce barriers not identified in this plan may also be investigated and implemented. Any actions the Town takes to reduce barriers will be reflected in updates as necessary.

### **Design and Delivery of Programs and Services**

**Barrier:** Lack of general awareness among potential users that the accessible equipment lending program exists.

**Action(s):** The Town's Communication Department will create and distribute promotional material about the equipment lending program.

**Barrier:** Limited staff availability to deliver accessible lending program equipment to potential users outside of the summer period when there are additional seasonal staff.

**Action(s):** The Town shall assess the feasibility of increasing year-round recreational staffing.

**Barrier:** Potential Best Bus service users cannot utilize the service to its fullest potential due to limited operating times, and it is only available to seniors and users under 25.

**Action(s):** The Town will engage with the Best Bust Board of Directors to investigate the feasibility of expanding the **Best Bus service** to include people of all ages who require it outside its current operating schedule.

**Barrier:** Accessibility is not consistently considered when planning Town-operated events and programs.

**Action(s):** Create and utilize an event accessibility checklist based on the template created by InclusionNL.

**Barrier:** Town-operated program times, locations, and types, including sensory-friendly programs, programs for people with autism, youth and adults with disabilities and access to community gardening, are limited.

**Action(s):** The Recreation and Wellness Department will investigate the feasibility of expanding the Town's inclusive and accessible programming.

**Barrier:** Lack of general staff knowledge and understanding about disability awareness and supporting accessibility.

**Action(s):** Source staff training on disability and accessibility awareness.

### **The Built Environment and Transportation**

**Barrier:** Facilities without automated door openers and openers that are not in working order.

**Action(s):** Standards from the CSA-B651 Accessible Design for the Built Environment shall be considered in new and renovated facilities where possible. The Town will create a Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program to identify and remediate non-conformances in the built environment, including absent or non-functioning automated door openers.

**Barrier:** There is not enough lighting at some building entrances and exits.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include lighting requirements.

**Barrier:** Some washroom soap dispensers, grab bars, hand dryers, and paper towel dispensers are installed incorrectly or in a nonfunctional location. Some faucets are also of an incorrect type and lack the required water temperature controls.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include the type, specifications, and placement of washroom fixtures and fittings.

**Barrier:** Stairs without colour contrasting edges and proper handrails.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include stair safety and accessibility requirements.

**Barrier:** No access to older child and adult changing spaces and changing tables.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include access to changing facilities for older children and adults.

**Barrier:** Construction causes loud noise, smells, and unexpected environmental changes.

**Action(s):** Public notices and social media posts informing residents about planned construction will include information on potential loud noise, smells, and unexpected environmental changes.

**Barrier:** Lack of accessible trails.

**Action(s):** The Recreation and Wellness Department will seek ways to improve accessibility of the Town's trail network.

**Barrier:** Sidewalk and curb access is impacted by absent sidewalks, narrow widths, poor conditions, lack of tactile indicators, and objects blocking access, such as signage, poles, hydrants, and drainage grates.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include accessible pedestrian infrastructure.

**Barrier:** Pedestrian signals lack accessibility features.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include accessible pedestrian signals.

**Barrier:** Incorrect service counter heights.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include accessible counter heights.

**Barrier:** Insufficient wheelchair-accessible event viewing spaces and corresponding seating for ambulatory attendants.

**Action(s):** The Town's Built Environment Accessibility Conformance Program will include accessible viewing spaces.

### **Information and Communication**

**Barrier:** Town information is not consistently communicated in plain language or accessible formats.

**Action(s):** Town emails will use accessible fonts. Public-facing documents and social media/website postings will be per the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Accessible Communications Engagement Checklist.

**Barrier:** Limited public knowledge of existing accessible amenities.

**Action(s):** Create an Accessibility page on the Town website with key accessibility information and resources.

**Barrier:** Lack of public knowledge of how to report accessibility concerns.

**Action(s):** A new [access@stephenville.ca](mailto:access@stephenville.ca) email address has been set up, and reporting instructions will be given in the accessibility plan and the Town's website accessibility page.

**Barrier:** Town event accessibility information in promotional material is insufficient.

**Action(s):** The Town's new Event Accessibility Checklist will require promotional material to include accessibility information.

**Barrier:** Information about construction and alternative accessible routes is not communicated well.

**Action(s):** Public notices and social media posts informing residents about planned construction will include information on any barriers to accessibility that the work might create and offer alternate routes as required.

## **Procurement**

**Barrier:** Lack of protocols ensuring accessibility is considered in the procurement process.

**Action(s):** The Town's procurement policy shall be updated to include accessibility protocols.

## **Accommodations**

**Barrier:** Lack of ASL (American Sign Language) support for those attending Town programs and services.

**Action(s):** The Town will investigate the feasibility of providing live ASL interpretation at Town programs and services.

## **Employment**

**Barrier:** Programs to support Town employees with disabilities are not formalized.

**Action(s):** The Town will adopt draft Policy 072 - Duty to Accommodate by council resolution.

## **Evaluation**

Municipalities play a critical role in shaping communities and ensuring that everyone has equitable access to the programs, facilities, and services they have to offer. The Town of Stephenville's 2024-2026 Accessibility Plan will guide our work in accessibility over the next three years.

During annual reviews, Town staff will update council on progress made in completing actions to remove barriers to accessibility. The accessibility plan will be updated every three years. Updates to the plan will include obligations required by provincial accessibility standards as they are developed and introduced.

To evaluate the success of the plan, the Town will ensure its compliance with relevant accessibility laws and regulations in Newfoundland and Labrador and utilize accessibility resources and checklists such as:

- Event Accessibility Checklist
- Microsoft Office accessibility checks
- PDF accessibility checks
- Accessibility Standards Canada
- Web accessibility checkers
- Colour contrast checkers

Additionally, to ensure that the plan is implemented successfully, the Town will:

- Continuously monitor accessibility in new initiatives during the planning phase
- Update the Accessibility webpage as necessary
- Continue to receive, consider, and resolve concerns from stakeholders, including the public, disability organizations, the Accessibility Committee

## **Conclusion**

At the Town of Stephenville, we are proud of the work we have done to build a community that is inclusive, diverse, and accessible for all. However, we also recognize that there is more work to be done. We are committed to ensuring everyone can participate fully in all Town programs, services, and public spaces.

The Town is constantly seeking ways to improve, and we value feedback from the community. Together, we will continue to create a more accessible and inclusive community that benefits everyone.

## **Contact Us**

**Phone:** 709-643-8360 (leave us a message outside of office hours)

**Email:** [access@stephenville.ca](mailto:access@stephenville.ca)

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