

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility

A plan for the Municipality of the County of Victoria

Approved by Council
March 31, 2025

Victoria County
NATURALLY CONNECTED

Table of Contents

Welcome 3

Background 4

Engagement and Evaluation 5

Progress Made / Underway / Ongoing Work 6

Action Items Short Term: 1-12 months 7

Action Items Longer Term: 12-36 months 8

Action Items Longer Term: 12-36 months 9



Photo Credits: The Province of Nova Scotia

Welcome



This work takes place in the unceded and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people, in Unama'ki. We aim to help build community on the basis of respect, continuous learning, and the stewardship of culture and the land we are so grateful to share.

We are a large rural county in Unama'ki, Cape Breton Island, spanning more than 2500 square kilometers, with a population of approximately 7000 people, with seasonal residents and workers drastically increasing the population in summers. Its geographic scope includes the Village of Baddeck and Wagmatcook First Nation, as well as many small rural communities from the centre of the Island along the Bras d'Or lake, up to the northern tip of the island in what is known as the Cape Breton Highlands. It is a region known for its natural beauty. The memorable landscape and cultures of the area bring upwards of 500,000 visitors to this region each year.

The Municipality of the County Victoria recognizes its responsibility for providing equitable access to its services, resources, programs and shared information. We encourage capacity building for community groups and local businesses to do the same.



Photo Credits: The Province of Nova Scotia



Background



The Province of Nova Scotia passed the Accessibility Act (2017) and the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act (2022) and requires all municipalities to create and share their plan for how they will uphold this law. The Municipality of the County Victoria has created the IDEA Plan (inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility) as a working guide for staff and council.

Priority areas of focus include:



- Built Environment



- Information and Communication



- Education



- Goods and Services



- Public Transportation and Infrastructure



- Employment

Engagement and Evaluation



- Engagement is a very important aspect of this IDEA plan. A survey is posted to our website or can be completed by telephone (902) 295-8135. Ongoing feedback is welcomed.
- An IDEA Committee met in March 2025 and held a safe space conversation to gather feedback, help identify barriers, share their lived experience, and ideas. The committee will meet four times per year.
- There is still an opportunity to join the IDEA committee. If you live or work in Victoria County and are interested in serving on this committee, please reach out to accessibility@victoriacounty.ca priority focus is given to those with lived experience.
- Staff will continue to do outreach work to gather input and share learning tools.
- Staff will monitor any action items and goals and record the progress.
- Staff will develop an annual evaluation report.
- A presentation to Council sharing the status of the plan, reviewing any progress completed and issues arising, will take place once per year.



Photo Credit: Province of Nova Scotia

Progress Made / Underway / Ongoing Work



- Municipal staff participate in cross cultural training, accessibility training, and other learning opportunities on the topics of equity and inclusion.



- Staff utilize Accessibility Directorate and Office of Equity and Anti Racism assessment tools, and educational resources.



- Victoria County website is currently undergoing a rebuild, and accessible formats are factored into the plans as they develop. A phased approach is underway.



- Capacity building work continues to assist community groups to learn about funding resources, educational tools and best practices.



- Ensure safe space human resources, provide accessibility accommodations on a case-by-case basis, and non-discriminatory hiring and management practices.



- Snow removal, clearing and salting pathways, and providing clear access to municipal buildings are ongoing in season.



- Plans are underway to host a shared council session with Wagmatcook First Nation council and Municipality of County Victoria Council.



- Council sessions held in the “Old Courthouse” main administration office building will continue to be captured via live-stream video to make the sessions accessible.

Action Items Short Term: 1-12 months

These achievable tasks can be completed within the first 12 months; these actions can help to improve inclusivity.



- Update the Accessible Parking spot at the "Old Courthouse", which is the current main municipal administrative office building, with ground paint and signage.

- Address a low-vision safety concern in the accessible entry hallway by installing an under-stair shelf or ledge, and adding reflective strips to stairs.

- Repair front entry approach and outside railing.

- Share online educational resources with staff, council and the public.

- Address hearing concerns at council chambers by adjusting room speakers and adding acoustic treatment elements and assistive technology.

- Update maps, and online wayfinding information to include Mi'kmaq language. Consult local Mi'kmaq people for accuracy.



Action Items Longer Term: 12-36 months

These tasks may take place over the course of the next three years, in a coordinated approach based on workflow, funding opportunities, partnership opportunities.



- Improve signage on municipal facilities

- Engage in community outreach to share tutorials for website updates and technology tools.

- Seek opportunities for in-person community-based outreach educational seminars on Accessibility, and Cross-Cultural learning.

- Work with Mi'kmaq people to facilitate engagement with the planning process for events, public spaces, and opportunities to share historical or cultural information.

- Seek feedback to identify any gaps in service and any barriers in programs or access to resources.

- Ensure multi-use-trails development includes well planned accessibility features.

- Survey of Transit users and potential users to remain engaged. Ensure transit drivers have access to training resources.

- Hold information sessions for recreation program community champions how to best welcome people and ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

Further Considerations



While recognizing the heritage value of the current administrative building, it is not a fully accessible space and may not meet community needs over time. Accommodations are made where possible to ensure a portion of the building is accessible. But an alternate location for the municipal council in the future may need to be considered. Suggestions presented for consideration are to host council sessions in other accessible spaces in other regions of the county periodically. Future considerations for moving the council and administration to another facility may need to be explored.

Given the municipality covers a large rural area, the public transit system here operates as a door-to-door service, wherein users book their drives in advance. This has its benefits and its challenges. Hours of operation, availability of drivers, and long distances covered are all issues of consideration. Engaging the public with periodic surveys will allow the people to share what is working and what could use improvement. In the same respect, periodic surveys for transit drivers and coordinators should also be deployed so they have an opportunity to share their feedback.



Photo Credit: Province of Nova Scotia



Prepared by the Municipality of the County of Victoria

March 2025