Town of Amherst

Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Strategy

Uniting as One

Stronger Together

TOWN OF Amherst
NOVA SCOTIA

Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgement

It is important to acknowledge that the Town of Amherst is located on the unceded ancestral territory of Mi'kma'ki. These territories are covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq people first signed with the British Crown in 1726. We are all Treaty people and these treaties are still applicable today.

The Treaties did not deal with surrender of land and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq title and established the rules for what was to be the ongoing relationship between nations.

The Town of Amherst recognizes and celebrates the Black African Nova Scotia Community, who have had a vibrant presence in the community. We honor these historical communities across Nova Scotia who have been here well over 400 years.

Message from the Chair

The Town of Amherst is a vibrant and dynamic region in the province of Nova Scotia developed over the span of centuries on the traditional unceded territory of Mi'kma'ki. The land is also home to an historic African Nova Scotia community whose heritage and contributions have shaped the current landscape of our region dating back over 400+ years.

Amherst is continually becoming a more diverse town with unique stories and cultures enriching the community. In August 2021 the Amherst Town Council developed a Terms of Reference to identify keys steps in making our community more welcoming and inclusive. The Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee was formed to make recommendations to Council through the development of a strategic plan to assist in addressing the inequities of our community and builds a clear path forward. The committee was comprised of individuals from the African Nova Scotian and Indigenous community that were charged with engaging the community, encouraging feedback and researching best practices in the development of this plan.

This strategic plan is a living document, further to more community engagement, consultation and discussion. In the meantime, it addresses immediate actions that we as a municipal government can take now, including but not limited to, becoming a leader in the community for equality, equity and accessibility, respecting and promoting human rights and cultural inclusivity.

Moving forward we will continue to work collaboratively with our entire community to encourage more first voice experience and strive to create a safe space where everyone feels welcome.

Our Combined Vision

The Town of Amherst's vision is to be a healthy, prosperous, inclusive and environmentally sustainable community in which people of all ages, abilities, genders and cultures are engaged and proud to live, work and play. We are committed to ensuring that all citizens have the equitable opportunity to contribute and be valued.

We believe in supporting diversity, inclusion and dignity for all citizens of our community.

We further seek to understand how we can be more responsive to the needs of the underrepresented groups of our community. We recognize that we need to create a space that is safe for their voices to be heard thus creating a community that is balanced, equitable and committed to ongoing review of our vision's objectives.

With the guidance of the Town of Amherst Inclusion, Diversity and Equity committee we will commit to doing the necessary work, by fostering strong relationships with underrepresented groups, gathering feedback, researching and revising relevant policies, creating actionable, achievable goals and adequately resourcing the work.

Role of the Diversity Committee

To assist, research, promote and recommend to Council on all matters that relate to equity, diversity and inclusion.

The committee will, in the first two years, develop a working strategy by which these actions can be reviewed, discussed and implemented.

The committee will be comprised of a diverse cross section of our community and will strive to create a safe space where all voices can be heard. The committee will encourage all of our citizens to participate fully in the development of the action plan of this strategy.

5

Our Approach

• Development of terms of reference August 2021
• Recruitment of Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee August 2021-May 2022
• Develop working document based on the shared objectives May 2022- October 2022
• Community Consultation – meetings with organizations or programs that support the youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, women, immigrants, and newcomers, Mi'kmaq and the Indigenous community, Black and Historic African Nova Scotian communities, 2SLGBTQ+. October 2022-March 2023
• Development of strategy and metrics based on feedback from the community and IDE committee May 2023

Our Lense

The committee will actively seek input and include all voices and identities, actively seeking out those who are typically excluded.

Always being cognizant of the need for reconciliation and acknowledgement of the centuries long displacement and systemic radicalization impacting persons of indigenous and African NS descent.

Understanding the discrimination and bias towards individuals who belong to the 2SLGBTQ+ community, we will aim to create policy, procedures, employment opportunities and programs that ensure equitable access for everyone.

Community Consultation

The Inclusion Diversity and Equity Committee engaged community members during the months of February to April 2023 through consultation meetings and a questionnaire that was made accessible on the Town of Amherst's website, Facebook page and via e-mail. The Committee received 32 responses from individuals and diverse community groups which helped capture some of the successes and challenges the Town of Amherst has as a growing and diverse community.

Qualitative Data: Comments from the Survey

> Something that I think would be helpful, is to offer the chance for everyone to experience others cultures. For example, when you have events such as Canada Day, reach out to the many different restaurants in the area and ask them to set up a booth, ask people of different backgrounds to host events around celebrations that are important to them so that we have the chance to learn

"The "inclusivity" piece is much more important in a day-to-day context here in this town - broadening Amherstonians mindset when it comes to welcoming Newcomers into our community, and including them as equals, which they are! I don't feel that it's up to the Town per se to somehow address this, as it's a cultural mindset people in this town have (i.e. "us" and "them"). "Forced inclusivity" and trying so hard to be diverse is corny and patronizing. In a perfect world, "inclusivity" would occur and unfold naturally... but, the people need to want that. So, the question therefore is, are Amherstonians able/willing/ready to welcome minority groups/peoples in a real and genuine sense".

"I can say that when I look at the council members I see 1 female, 1 person of colour, 1 male possibly under age 45 and 5 white males over the age of 50. I get a very strong bias opinion that the town is run by the "boys club" which does not encourage many to approach the town with new ideas".

Qualitative Data: Comments from the Survey

"There are no designated positions, how leaders speak within community demonstrates that there is a lot of learnings and attitudinal changes are required to have an organization that is a leader in inclusion. My recommendation is that leadership - manager and above participate in immersive and intentional learnings to understand their own white privilege, understand white supremacy as a structure that is maintained by the very structure of the operations of the Town. They need to learn about the history of Indigenous peoples, Black Nova Scotians and the 2SLGBTQ+ community".

"More focus on the Acadian heritage of a significant percentage of our population".

"Multi-generational celebrations of traditional and non-traditional/non-Christian holidays. Festivals that bring community members together to social and connect".

"I recently was in conversation with a high-level rep from the Town and their language around marginalized communities was poor. very "1970's" was one comment maybe there should be more education around cultural inclusion, racism, privilege- especially for those who think they are in the know".

> There has been an INCREASING improvement over the years in particular actions such as BOB's Barber Shop mirror at the CCM and Archives is a huge plus given Black men WERE NOT permitted to get their hair cut there years ago or look at the finished cut in the ornate mirror - SUBTLE CHANGES - the mirror is now on public display for all to enjoy.

Qualitative Data: Comments from the Survey

"Hire staff that can advocate for newcomer group and support them to settle in the area. Information Hub, Welcome Network (Volunteers to greet new people), Community Night or fair kinds stuff to connect to others".

> **TREAT THEM AS EQUALS. As someone who has lived abroad for more than 1/4 of my life, someone who knows what it feels like to be an "outsider," I can say that it's mildly insulting and patronizing to refer to non-Amherstonians as "diverse populations." This kind of mindset perpetuates the divide and does not help in what I think it is that you're trying to achieve.**

"There is nothing in the Town Hall office that makes me think they welcome all members of town. The ongoing disputes with the Town and the downtown businesses are also another indictor. It has long been said that the Town is not open to ideas and if you have one that is new or different, to go outside of Amherst to pitch your idea and the neighboring areas will love to have you".
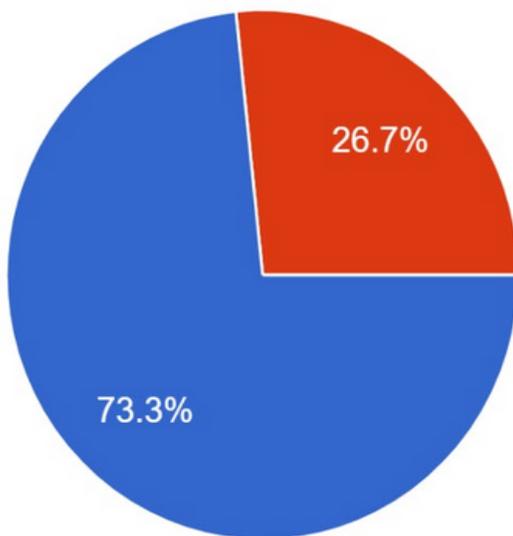
● Yes
● No

The graph reflects the responses from the community when we asked if they would be willing to assist the Town of Amherst Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Committee to increase awareness and create opportunities for future inclusive priorities.

Shared Goals in line with DCCM and UNESCO

- The Municipality acts as a guardian for public interest

- The Municipality as an organization in the fulfillment of human rights

- The Municipality as a community sharing responsibility for respecting and promoting human rights and diversity

OUR PLAN

Moving Ahead Together

ACTION STEPS

- Evaluate and make recommendations help to create a diverse municipal workforce

- Engage the citizens of the community through public consultation on a regular basis to create awareness and gain feedback on an ongoing basis

- Recommend opportunities for training to staff in the creation of a culturally competent, safe workplace for all

- Ensure compliance with the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act

- Include marginalized groups in the recruitment of committee memberships, subcommittee participation and community engagement

- Ensure that Municipal services are equitable and accessible to all

- Commit to the ongoing promotion and celebration of cultural diversity in our community

12
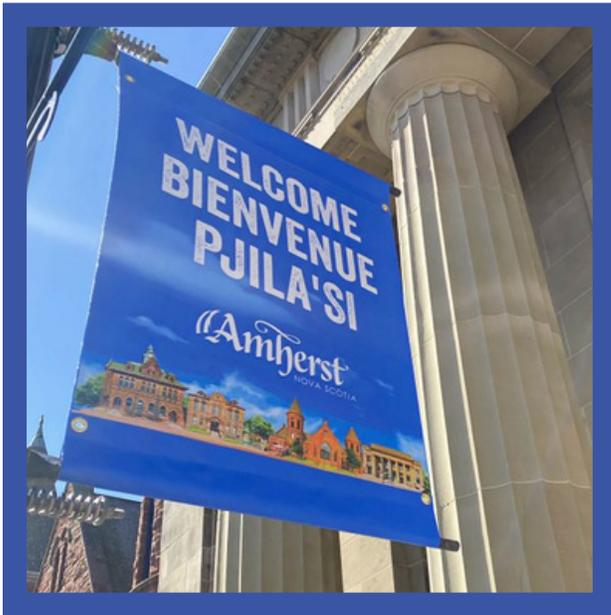
GOAL 2

Become a Municipality that works to the fulfillment of human rights

ACTION STEPS

- Develop, implement, promote anti-racism strategies, policies and procedures, including complaints and dispute resolution mechanisms, within the municipal organization.

- Ensure ongoing equity in all aspects of the municipality's operations, including corporate planning, policy and program development, and procedures and practices with respect to employment, service delivery and contracting, as well as organizational culture; take steps to eliminate barriers; and finally, measure progress.

- Educate and sensitize elected officials and municipal employees on mutual respect, citizenship and the obligation to protect and promote human rights.

- Facilitate monitoring and removal of systemic barriers that impede fair and equitable access for full participation of Indigenous and racialized communities in the economic life of the municipality, as well as access to professions and trades for foreign trained professionals.

GOAL 3

Become a Municipality who leads the community sharing responsibility for respecting and promoting human rights and diversity.

ACTION STEPS

- Organize regular community forums in collaboration with existing organizations to offer citizens an opportunity to discuss and be heard on issues of racism and discrimination in the municipality, including effectiveness of local policies and programs.

- Empower other non government organizations to share information and take action against racism and discrimination.

- Partner with educational institutions such as the Nova Scotia Community College to encourage the development of programs specific to identifying and responding to acts of racism, establishing a curriculum to bring awareness to the systemic causes of racism and engage students to be part of the movement to end racism in the community.

14
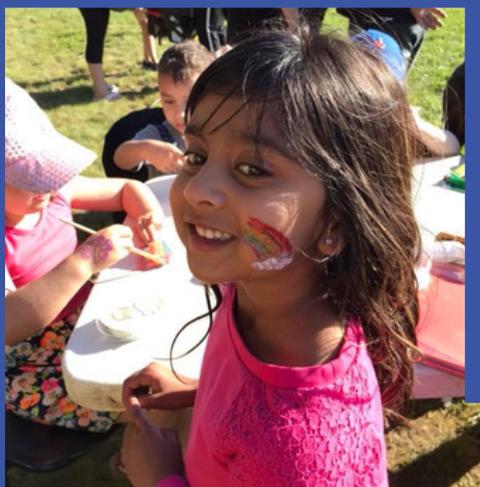
GOAL 4

Embrace the promotion, respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and inclusion.

ACTION STEPS

- Provide equitable support to diverse cultural projects, programs, events and infrastructure so that the cultural diversity and heritage of the community can be preserved and enhanced.

- Support initiatives that enable more diverse members to participate fully in society.

- Promote awareness of the fact that integration of a community's cultural fabric, together with its economic, educational, social and security interests, strengthens and benefits the whole community.


15

Evaluation and Monitoring

Develop a communications pathway that includes a mailing list of allies who are interested in the ongoing work the committee is doing to promote the work that is being done and solicit feedback.

Host regular bi-annual information sharing sessions on the work of the committee and ensure underrepresented and/or diverse communities are invited.

Establish a process of inquiry/complaint that is reviewed by the Chief Administrative Officer and senior staff as well as the IDE Advisory committee. Ensure a process is in place to review and respond to these inquiries.
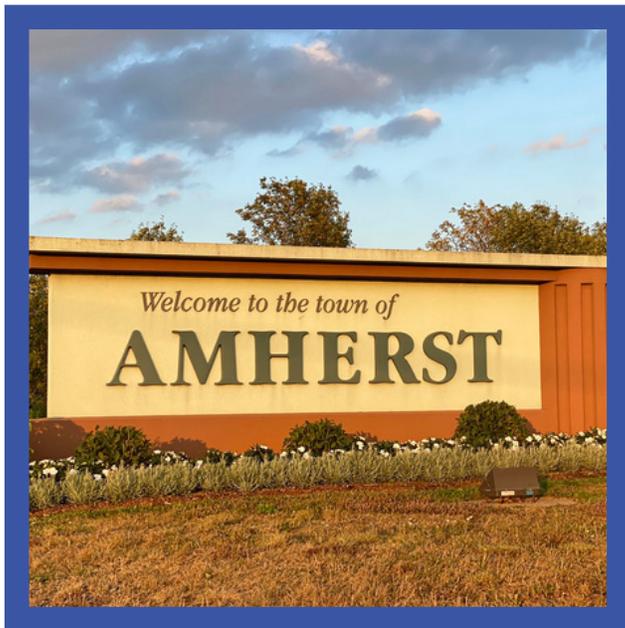
Glossary of Terms

A Glossary of terms has been developed in an effort to promote understanding and clarify the terms that are contained in the strategy. It is recognized and understood that these definitions may change over time but will form a foundation for understanding in the current document.

Accessibility: Accessibility involves removing the barriers faced by individuals with a variety of disabilities (which can include but not limited to physical, sensory, cognitive, learning, mental health) and the various barriers (including attitudinal and systemic) that impede an individual's ability to participate in social, cultural, political and economic life. Disabilities can be temporary or permanent. As we age our abilities change and therefore an accessible society is one designed to include everyone and be fluid over time.
African Canadians: People of African descent in Canada, who are citizens or permanent residents (used as an umbrella term for all peoples of African descent in Canada)

African Nova Scotians: Honoring specifically African Nova Scotia Communities across the Province who have been here well over 400 years. *Distinct from African Canadians or other people of Africa who now reside in Noa Scotia. Many of these communities self-identify as Indigenous African Nova Scotian.

Ally: A person who supports an individual or group to be treated equitably and fairly. This often grows out of the self-awareness of inequities or privileges experienced. Action is taken individually or collectively to create conditions that enable everyone to have equal access to resources and benefit (city for all women initiative 2015)

Belonging: A sense of belonging is the feeling of being connected and accepted by one's family and community. It is a critical component of human and community development and lends itself to feeling like one can participate and relate to the group or community.

Glossary of Terms

Colonialism (Colonization): The practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another. Settler colonialism-such as the case in Canada- is the unique process where the colonizing population does not leave the territory, assets ongoing sovereignty to the land, actively seeks to assimilate the indigenous populations and extinguish their cultures, traditions and ties to the land (Government of Canada 2019). In Canada this means that Western European derived ways of being believing, knowing and doing are implicitly and explicitly presented as the standard or norm and other ways of being, knowing, believing and doing are implicitly or explicitly presented as "other" alternative, or less worthy.

Cultural Humility: A practice of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience (Canadian Institute of Planners 2019)

Cultural Competency: A comprehensive collection of behavior, attitudes, practices and policies that creates an inclusive environment for people of diverse backgrounds. Culturally competent organizations have the awareness, knowledge base and learned skills to effectively and sensitively work and provide services to people of diverse backgrounds (Portland Metropolitan Region 206)

Cultural Safety: An outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address powerful differentials that can be present in planning systems, e.g., between decision- makers or experts and marginalized people. It means all people feel respected and safe when they participate in planning processes (Canadian Institute of Planners 2019)

Glossary of Terms

Decolonization: In Canada, decolonization is usually discussed in terms of the relationship between Indigenous and Non indigenous peoples. It is related to indigenous resurgence (Indigenous people reclaiming and restoring their culture, land, language, relationships, health etc. both independent of and with the support of non- indigenous people). Decolonization is also associated with other relationships between groups of people within Canada and in other countries and contexts around the world, and for some, is linked to broader principles of inclusion and equity. Decolonization is a process, not a product, and it involves undoing or removing of colonial elements of society.

Diversity: Vancouver's A Healthy City for All (2014) describes diversity as a term that is often confused for race or culture when in fact it should be used to consider the number of interlocking ways that people are disadvantage and mistreated, and thus how people from various and marginalized groups or communities feel comfortable, safe and able to access their community spaces and institutions (City of Vancouver, 2014)

Equity: Fairness, impartiality, even-handedness. A distinct process of recognizing differences within groups of individuals and using this understanding to achieve substantive equity in all aspects of a person's life (Government of Canada, 2019)

Inclusion: Acknowledging and valuing people's differences so as to enrich social planning, decision making and quality of life for everyone. In an inclusive Municipality, we each have a sense of belonging, acceptance, and are recognized as valued, contributing members of society. Real inclusion takes places when those already included in the mainstreams learn from those who are excluded and initiate change (City for All Women Institute, 2015)

Glossary of Terms

Indigenous peoples (to be developed with consultation) Indigenous peoples' is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. These are three distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. (Marie-Céline Charron 2019)

Institutional Racism: Polices, practices and procedures that work better for white people than people of color, often intentionally or inadvertently (National League of Cities, 2017)

Intersectionality: The intersection, or crossover, of our many identities affect how each of us experiences the Municipality. The intersections occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments, other political and economic unions, religious institutions and media (City for all Women, 2015)

LGBTQ+ or 2SLGBTQQIAA: Acronyms used to encompass most or all members of a sexually-gender-diverse communities. LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, +) or 2SLGBTQQIAA (Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally) are typically used interchangeably. Members of these community's experience overt and systemic discrimination.

Mi'kmaq: Mi'kmaq (Mi'kmaw, or L'nu, "the people" in Mi'kmaq) are indigenous peoples are among the original inhabitants of Atlantic Canada.

Glossary of Terms

Marginalization: Refers to a long-term, structural process of systemic discrimination that creates a class of disadvantaged minorities. These groups become permanently confined to the margins of society; their status is continually reproduced because of various dimensions of exclusion, particularly in the labor market, but also from full and meaningful participation in society (Province of Ontario, 2017)

Peace and Friendship treaties: On the East Coast, Peace and Friendship Treaties were signed with the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy prior to 1779. Treaties were solemn agreements that set out long term promises, mutual obligations and benefits to both parties. The British crown first began entering into treaties to end the hostility and encourage cooperation between British and First Nations. As the British and French competed for control of North America, treaties were also strategic alliances which could make the difference between success and failure for European powers (Government of Canada, 2021)

Privilege: The experience of freedoms, rights, benefits, advantages, access and or opportunities afforded to members of a dominant group in a society or in a given context (City of All Women Institute, 2015)

Race: A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, ethnic classification, and the social, economic and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups (Portland Metropolitan Region, 2017)

Racialization: A process of delineation of group boundaries and of allocation of persons within these boundaries by primary reference to (supposedly) inherent and/or biological (usually phenotypical) characteristics (Province of Ontario, 2017)

Glossary of Terms

Racial Equity: Closing the gap so that race does not predict one's success, while also improving outcomes for all (National League of Cities, 2017)

Reparations: Governments have a duty to acknowledge and address widespread or systemic human rights violations, in cases where the government caused the violations or did not seriously try to prevent them. Reparations initiatives seek to address the harms caused by these violations. They can take the form of compensating for the losses suffered, which helps overcome some of the consequences of abuse. They can also be future oriented-providing rehabilitation and a better life to victims-and to help change the underlying causes of abuse. Reparations publicly affirm that victims are rights-holders entitled to redress. (https://www.racialequitytool.org/glossary)

Social participation: Involvement in meaningful activities that increase one's sense of belonging and well-being.

Structural, Institutional or systemic racism: When institutions or systems create or maintain racial inequity, often as a result of hidden institutional biases in policies, practices and procedures that privilege some groups and disadvantage others (Province of Ontario, 2017)

Systemic Barriers: Obstacles that exclude groups or communities of people from participation in and the benefits of social, economic, and political life. They may be hidden or unintentional but are built into the way society works. Existing policies, practices and procedures, as well as assumptions and stereotypes reinforce them (City for All Women Initiative, 2015)

Glossary of Terms

Truth and Reconciliation: The concept of reconciliation is about speaking the truths of the past and acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted on Indigenous Communities in Canada, including residential schools. It is about, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviors that continue to marginalize indigenous people. Reconciliations about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples in this country (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)