

Annual A.I.D.E Report

Town of Amherst

2025-2026

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Executive Summary

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, *Access by Design 2030*, and the *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act* require municipalities to proactively work towards creating inclusive, accessible, and equitable communities. These frameworks mandate accessibility and anti-hate plans that identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities and marginalized groups, ensuring full participation and equal opportunity for all. Municipalities were required to have such plans in place by April 1, 2025.

To meet these obligations, the Town of Amherst consolidated its Accessibility Committee and Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Committee into a single, comprehensive Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (AIDE) Committee and Strategy. This integrated approach addresses all four pillars—accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity—through coordinated planning, community consultation, and public accountability.

Since adopting the AIDE Strategy, the Town, Council, and staff have made significant progress in improving accessibility and inclusion across municipal services. Achievements include enhanced event coordination and communication, accessible digital platforms, and substantial investments in walkways, recreational areas, and year-round equipment to ensure usability for all residents.

The Town of Amherst Annual AIDE Report highlights the municipality's continued leadership and commitment to building a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible Nova Scotia by 2030.

Introduction and Overview

The Nova Scotia Accessibility Act, *Access by Design 2030*, and the *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act* mandate that communities across the province take proactive steps to build inclusive, equitable, and accessible environments for all. These legislative frameworks require municipalities to develop and implement accessibility and anti-hate plans that identify, remove, and prevent barriers—ensuring full participation and equal opportunity for people of all abilities and backgrounds. Under the *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act*, all municipalities are required to have a plan in place by April 1, 2025.

In response, the Town of Amherst established a unified Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (AIDE) Committee, combining its Accessibility Strategy and Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Strategy into a single, comprehensive plan. This integrated approach reflects the Town’s commitment to addressing systemic inequities and promoting fairness through community collaboration, transparency, and continuous improvement.

Since the launch of the AIDE Strategy, Amherst Town Council, and staff, have made significant progress in improving accessibility, inclusion, and equity throughout municipal operations. Efforts have focused on making public events, facilities, services, and communications more inclusive and user-friendly, while investing in infrastructure and programs that enhance community participation for everyone.

The Town’s AIDE Strategy is guided by five key focus areas:

1. **Delivery of Goods and Services** – Ensuring equitable access to all municipal goods and services for residents and visitors.
2. **Information and Communication** – Providing accessible and inclusive information and communication channels for people with accessibility needs.
3. **Transportation** – Supporting the ability of residents and visitors with accessibility needs to move freely and access reliable transportation options.
4. **Employment** – Promoting the Town of Amherst as an equitable employer that supports the careers of employees with accessibility needs and seeks to attract and retain a diverse, skilled workforce.
5. **Built Environment** – Creating and maintaining buildings and outdoor spaces that provide meaningful, equitable access for all users.

Our 2025-2026 Accessibility Accomplishments

Accessible Standard: Goods and Services		
Accessible Objective	Equity and Anti-Racism Goals/Objectives	Accomplishment
Increase inclusive and accessible community resources and services	Work to build an equitable and inclusive community	The Seminar Room inside the Library has been renovated. It has two doors into the room and both sides had steps down to a flat area in the middle. Staff put framing into the sunken area as well as the steps, insulated it, then covered it with plywood to create a one level surface. It was then covered with new flooring, room was painted and electrical plugs were replaced with Tamper-Resistant plugs.
Improve service delivery for residents	Provide educational opportunities for elected officials and employees on respect, cultural awareness and the promotion and protection of human rights.	Development of an Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity training plan has been completed. Will put resources on our website for community. HR and CL Director to work together to implement with staff and council. Staff completed the Foundations of Belonging in the Workplace training created by Placemaking 4G.
Improve program delivery	Be the leader in the community known for equity, inclusion and diversity	Staff submission to the Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Program was denied.

		<p>Accessible Sledge Equipment borrowed from the County to promote sport.</p>
<p>Ensure events are accessible for everyone</p>	<p>Ensure municipal services are equitable and accessible to all.</p>	<p>Considerations for 55+ Games: Washrooms and Walkways at Robb's Complex and Rotary Park are being upgraded.</p> <p>Live Stream Events: Christmas Parade, Light Up, Remembrance Day, Jane's Walk</p>

Accessible Standard: Information and Communication

Accessible Objective	Equity and Anti-Racism Goals/Objectives	Accomplishments
<p>Ensure that all new public documents, website content, social media posts, publications, policies and procedures will be developed through an accessible and equitable lens</p>	<p>Shared Objective</p>	<p>Continued focus on using plain, concise language</p> <p>Ensuring appropriate colour contrast in design materials</p> <p>Repeating information contained within graphics as typed text</p> <p>Providing text-based links for document downloads alongside clickable graphics</p> <p>Ongoing review and update of website content for clarity and easy navigating.</p>
<p>Existing documents will undergo a review to ensure we are updating documents to reflect our vision</p>	<p>Shared Objective</p>	<p>Monthly review of policies and bylaws.</p> <p>18 Policies and bylaws have been reviewed to date.</p> <p>Inventory and review of all marketing, communications and branding documents in progress.</p>
<p>Improve Signage to meet provincial standards</p>	<p>Work to build an equitable and inclusive community</p>	<p>Accessible trail signage/wayfinding materials are ready to be installed.</p>
<p>Evaluate how we communicate to our external partners</p>	<p>Increase opportunities for engagement by launching an outreach campaign to gather public information with diverse groups (to</p>	<p>Development of comprehensive communications plan that identifies strategies on how to communicate to and</p>

	understand how to improve our engagement strategies).	engage with the public is completed. Input from equity deserving groups, persons with disabilities and newcomers was considered.
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Accessible Standard: Built Environment

Accessible Objective	Equity and Anti-Racism Goals/Objectives	Accomplishment
Review emergency management and building evacuation plan with a lens of accessibility	Existing documents will undergo a review to ensure we are updating documents to reflect our vision.	Review being done of Stadium Evacuation Procedure Regional Emergency Management ByLaw postponed to later date pending consultation.
Conduct built environment assessments	Ensure compliance with the NS Human Rights Act.	Nova Scotia Building Code Regulation Checklists are used in all new construction. Staff have undergone trainings on the Built Environment Standard and also have taken Rick Hansen Courses. Staff and Community Built Environment Assessments completed of the Community Credit Union: Business Innovation Centre Appendix Item 1. A and 1. B “From Green to Great: Building for a Growing and Diverse Community” Presentation given by Town staff. Presentation included a

		<p>review of our park system and a plan to align Amherst’s parks with community growth and recreation demand, emphasize inclusion, accessibility and adaptability and how to guide high- level decisions and future park investments. Appendix Item 1. D</p>
<p>Improve ability to provide barrier free participation in events</p>	<p>Ensure municipal services are equitable and accessible to all.</p>	<p>Conducting facility audits for the 55+ Games.</p> <p>Built Environment Assessments includes recommendations that can be brought forward to Council.</p>
<p>Improve access to safe, affordable and accessible housing</p>	<p>Ensure compliance with the NS Human Rights Act.</p>	<p>United Way Maritimes, The River Philip Foundation, and The Shaw Group have partnered on a new housing community called The Groves at Hillsdale. Located on Church Street in Amherst, Nova Scotia, this development is a clustered residential community of compact, well-built homes for rent and sale. The Groves at Hillsdale is designed to fill growing gaps in the missing middle of housing options, where homeownership opportunities for working families with modest, stable incomes are in extremely short supply.</p>

		<p>There are 47 residential units in total. 28 units are available for sale through a <u>modified shared-equity homeownership model</u>, with 19 units available at <u>affordable monthly rents</u>.</p> <p>The Town of Amherst paid for all the infrastructure on Vista Drive totalling about \$625,000. This supported the development of water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer infrastructure as well as a curbed, built road.</p>
Investigate and make recommendation on the establishment of an accessible playground	Ensure compliance with the NS Human Rights Act.	<p>Council approved \$1,300,000 for an accessible playground.</p> <p>Accessible Playground Build Design RFP was open until May 12th 2026.</p> <p>Staff have submitted an Expression of Interest to gauge funding possibility for various design options.</p>

Accessible Standard: Transportation		
Accessible Objective	Equity and Anti-Racism Goals/Objectives	Accomplishment
Improve pedestrian infrastructure	Ensure compliance with the NS Human Rights Act.	NS Walks/ Hike NS is coordinating a Community Walk Audit. Date to be determined.

		<p>The Town is investing approximately \$2,500,000 to install street, water, sewer and active transportation infrastructure in the first phase of our new business park. Possible we will see new street construction commence this fall.</p> <p>The Town of Amherst maintains approximately 75.5 km of paved roadways. The Town uses a standardized process to assess road surface conditions to determine maintenance and rehabilitation needs. Considerations to replace sidewalks to coincide with a street reconstruction project if such a larger project is scheduled. To be fiscally responsible not all projects are recommended. Appendix Item 1. C.</p>
<p>Continue to improve active transportation opportunities by reviewing accessibility of trails and sidewalks</p>	<p>Ensure compliance with the NS Human Rights Act.</p>	<p>In order to ensure fiscal capacity for other initiatives Council decided not to pursue a public transit system at this time.</p>

Accessible Standard: Education		
Accessible Objective	Equity and Anti-Racism Goals/Objectives	Accomplishment
Continue to grow partnerships with schools and education centres at all levels to offer supports where needed	Increase Community Engagement	Partnered with Amherst Regional High School to host an Opportunities Fair on February 23 2026. Multiple partner organizations gathered to discuss volunteer and employment opportunities within Amherst.
Provide training and opportunities for accessibility, equity and anti-racism	Continue to increase our promotion, respect, understanding and appreciation of our community's diversity by organizing workshops, offering educational resources on equity and anti-racism.	Development of an Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity training plan has been completed. Will put resources on our website for community. HR and CL Director to work together to implement with staff and council. Staff completed the Foundations of Belonging in the Workplace training created by Placemaking 4G. Amherst Police Department partnered with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation to take part in immersive Hate Crime Training. This training is designed to increase our police service's capacity to investigate allegations of hate crime and support

		<p>victims. Part of this training included a Community Engagement piece on Monday March 30th from 6-8PM at 21 Havelock St. Discussions included: how to recognize and report hate crimes and incidents, learning about community resources and supports as well as strategies to build a safer, more inclusive town.</p>
<p>Work to ensure Community Safety</p>	<p>Work to build an Equitable and Inclusive Community</p>	<p>Staff is beginning to investigate best practices into a Strategy for Community Well Being, Safety and Belonging</p> <p>Town Staff and Community Partners are attending a Downtown Safety and Harm Reduction Community of Practice on May 27th 2026.</p> <p>Amherst Police Department partnered with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation to take part in immersive Hate Crime Training.</p>

Accessible Standard: Employment		
Accessible Objective	Equity and Anti-Racism Goals/Objectives	Accomplishment
Diversify recruitment methods	Work to create a diverse municipal workforce.	People Strategy, implemented in early 2026. This strategy will strengthen our accommodation processes and help remove barriers to employee participation and success.
Promote Amherst as an inclusive and diverse workforce	Provide educational opportunities for elected officials and employees on respect, cultural awareness and the promotion and protection of human rights.	<p>Conducted a comprehensive wellness survey to better understand the diverse needs of our employees (Dec 2024/Jan 2025)</p> <p>Launched a virtual health platform to improve access to care and supports (Feb 2025)</p> <p>Introduced more inclusive onboarding practices, including a tailored orientation for our summer students (Spring 2025)</p> <p>Established an official employee wellness committee, offering activities that reflect a diverse range of interests, abilities and perspectives (Sept 2025)</p>
Review of policies and procedures	Existing documents will undergo a review to ensure we are updating documents to reflect our vision.	We continued our HR policy review through an accessibility and equity lens and updated the Smokefree Workplace Policy (June 2025)

		and the Workplace Violence & Harassment Prevention Policy (Sept 2025) to support a safer, healthier, and more respectful work environment.
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Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations for the Amherst Town Council to review.

1. Sidewalks and crosswalks continue to be a top priority.

As the sidewalks are being revitalized, the demographics of the pedestrian population as well as the mix of road users at different time periods should be considered, and crossing facilities and control devices should be designed accordingly.

2. Accessibility Standard Audits

Friday April 17th 2026 Staff conducted a thorough Built Environment assessment using the Accessibility Audit Toolkit of the Community Credit Union: Business Innovation Centre.

Thursday April 23rd 2026 A.I.D.E committee members and staff conducted a Built Environment Walk Through of the Community Credit Union: Business Innovation Centre.

Immediate Improvements to consider are:

- Signage for main entrance (at the front of the building and at accessible parking space in the back)
- Interior signage: Reception, multi-lingual welcome signs, Universal Washroom availability.
- Signage should include braille where appropriate
- A bench/resting area from back accessible parking space towards front entrance
- Increase number of accessible parking spaces
- Install handrails on both sides of staircase
- Install proper stage ramp and handrails

Long Term Improvements to consider are:

- Investigate feasibility of an accessible rear entrance

- Renovate doorways to meet 36'' clearance
- Investigate feasibility of a universal washroom (single use room) downstairs
- Install push buttons on Universal Washrooms upstairs

See Appendix Items for further details

3. Community Education Campaign

Building on our success of the past few years, town staff should inform the public and also include how we announce our progresses in our Communication Plan. This could include updating our website to reflect our accomplishments.