



## **Accessibility Plan Survey Results and Analysis (*What We Heard*)**

*Comprehensive analysis for developing an Accessibility Plan*

**Presented by The Accessibility Plan Committee**

**Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay**

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## Executive Summary

This analysis examines results from an Accessibility Plan Survey conducted by the Accessibility Plan Community of the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, completed by 45 residents in November - December 2025. The survey revealed significant accessibility challenges across physical infrastructure, service delivery, and community engagement. With 95.6% of respondents having lived experience with disability or knowing someone with accessibility issues, the findings reflect deep community awareness of barriers that prevent full participation in civic life.

The analysis identifies five critical priority areas:

- (1) pedestrian infrastructure and sidewalks,
- (2) automatic door maintenance and accessibility features,
- (3) street lighting and visibility,
- (4) communication and information dissemination, and
- (5) inclusive programming and services.

Respondents rated existing town facilities, programs, and services at an average of 2.4 out of 5, indicating substantial room for improvement.

The qualitative data reveal that accessibility barriers extend beyond physical infrastructure to include systemic issues around the enforcement of accessible parking, the maintenance of existing accessibility features, and the need for more inclusive community programming. Residents articulated a clear vision of accessibility as equal opportunity for all community members to participate fully in civic life without depending on assistance from others.

## 1. Introduction and Methodology

The Accessibility Plan Committee of the Town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay conducted a comprehensive accessibility survey in November - December 2025 to inform the development of a municipal accessibility plan. This survey represents a critical step in understanding the lived experiences of residents with disabilities and identifying systemic barriers to full community participation.

### Survey Design and Distribution

The survey comprised of 26 questions, combining quantitative Likert-scale items with open-ended qualitative questions. This mixed-methods approach allowed for both statistical analysis of satisfaction levels and deep exploration of specific barriers and recommendations. The survey covered six key areas: **facility accessibility, service delivery, program participation, information access, infrastructure quality, and support needs.**

### Response Rate and Validity

All 45 respondents (100%) confirmed residence in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, ensuring the geographical relevance of findings. The high rate of disability representation (95.6% with lived experience or connection to disability) indicates that responses reflect genuine (practical) accessibility concerns rather than theoretical perspectives. This represents a valuable dataset for evidence-based accessibility planning, though the sample size suggests findings should be considered alongside other consultation methods.

## 2. Demographics and Disability Representation

### Gender Distribution

The survey attracted predominantly female respondents (73.3%, n=33), with male respondents comprising 24.4% (n=11) and other gender identities representing 2.2% (n=1). This gender distribution is significant as it may reflect both caregiving responsibilities and different experiences of accessibility barriers in the community.

### Disability Types and Prevalence

The survey allowed multiple selections for disability categories, revealing the complex, intersectional nature of accessibility needs within the community. Physical disabilities were most commonly reported (**86.4%, n=38**), followed by mental health conditions (**43.2%, n=19**), sensory impairments (**34.1%, n=15**), functional limitations (**29.5%, n=13**), cognitive disabilities (**22.7%, n=10**), learning disabilities (**25.0%, n=11**), communication disabilities (**25.0%, n=11**), and intellectual disabilities (**20.5%, n=9**).

The predominance of physical disability reflects both population health patterns and the visibility of physical accessibility barriers. However, the significant representation of cognitive, sensory, and mental health disabilities highlights the need for accessibility planning that extends beyond physical modifications to include sensory-friendly spaces, clear communication, and inclusive program design.

### Specific Disability Contexts

Qualitative responses provided specific contexts for accessibility needs, including:

- Mobility limitations requiring wheelchairs, walkers, or canes
- Chronic conditions with unpredictable symptoms (MS, CP)
- Age-related limitations in mobility and vision
- Neurodivergent conditions (Autism, ADHD)
- Post-stroke effects, including speech and mobility impairments
- Hearing and visual impairments
- Mental health conditions, including PTSD

### **3. Understanding Accessibility: Community Perspectives**

When asked to define accessibility in their own words, respondents revealed a comprehensive understanding that reflected regulatory compliance to encompass principles of dignity, independence, and equal participation. Analysis of 45 definitions identified five recurring themes: Equal Access and Opportunity; Independence and Autonomy; Removal of Barriers; Universal Design; Quality of Life and Full Participation.

#### **Equal Access and Opportunity**

The most prevalent theme emphasized accessibility as equal access to facilities, services, and opportunities. Representative quotes include: *"Ensuring that everyone has equal access to facilities and programs"*; *"Equal opportunity to use public spaces without limitations or barriers"*; and *"Having the same opportunity to do things like any other community member who has the capabilities."*

#### **Independence and Autonomy**

Many respondents emphasized the importance of accessing spaces and services without requiring assistance. As one respondent articulated: *"The ability to access public and general spaces and/or services that one would need to make functioning independently or with assistance less complicated."* Another stated: *"Being able to attend and do things without the need of a lot of assistance from other people."*

#### **Removal of Barriers**

Respondents conceptualized accessibility as the absence of barriers: *"It means there is no barriers presenting to accessing a space"*; *"Inclusive free barriers"*; and *"A world in which everyone can live their normal daily life with as little impediment."*

#### **Universal Design**

Several responses reflected principles of universal design: *"Universal access to services and experiences"*; *"Accessibility is things are able to be used by all people regardless of disability"*; and *"An area accessible to people with or without a disability."*

#### **Quality of Life and Full Participation**

The most holistic definitions connect accessibility to quality of life and meaningful participation. One respondent defined accessibility as: *"The ability to use all services in our hometown, to make all buildings and events accessible. To remove barriers that prevent my family member from becoming an active member in our home community and to be able to participate in events in a meaningful way."*

These responses from the survey question *"what disability means to you"* demonstrate that community members understand accessibility not as accommodation or special treatment, but as a fundamental right to full civic participation. This understanding will inform accessibility planning for the Town beyond minimum compliance toward genuine inclusion.

## 4. Satisfaction with Facilities and Services

### Overall Satisfaction Ratings

Respondents rated existing town facilities, programs, and services at an average of 2.4 out of 5, with the distribution as follows:

Rating	Count	Percentage
Very Satisfied (5)	8	17.8%
Satisfied (4)	16	35.6%
Neutral (3)	17	37.8%
Dissatisfied (2)	3	6.7%
Very Dissatisfied (1)	1	2.2%

This distribution indicates moderate dissatisfaction, with only **53.4%** of respondents expressing satisfaction (ratings 4-5) and **8.9%** expressing clear dissatisfaction. The large neutral category (**37.8%**) suggests that many residents experience accessibility as neither enabling nor severely limiting; a finding that highlights the need for proactive improvement on what presently obtains in the Town rather than a crisis response approach.

### Facility-Specific Satisfaction

When asked to identify facilities they were MOST satisfied with, respondents most frequently selected:

- YMCA (53.3%, n=24)
- Birch Island Conservation Area (44.4%, n=20)
- O'Brien Arts Centre (44.4%, n=20)
- Kinsmen Park (33.3%, n=15)
- E.J. Broomfield Arena (15.6%, n=7)

These facilities were praised for being "modern" and "up to current code," having functional automatic doors and elevators, and incorporating accessibility into their design. The YMCA received particular praise for its comprehensive accessibility features and programming.

Conversely, facilities identified as LEAST satisfactory included:

- Walking Trails (48.9%, n=22)
- Streetlights (31.1%, n=14)
- Road Networks and Signs (26.7%, n=12)
- E.J. Broomfield Arena (22.2%, n=10)
- Parking (17.8%, n=8)

The appearance of E.J. Broomfield Arena on both lists reveals a critical insight: while some aspects of accessibility may be present (earning satisfaction from some users), the facility has significant accessibility deficiencies that create barriers for others. Multiple respondents noted that the wheelchair-accessible entrance door and elevator were frequently non-functional, and that the lift to the stands "works intermittently."

### **Service Satisfaction**

Services garnering the highest satisfaction included:

- Garbage collection (64.4%, n=29)
- Emergency services (31.1%, n=14)
- Bus service (28.9%, n=13)
- Public Service Announcements (26.7%, n=12)

Services identified as least satisfactory included:

- Recycling (31.1%, n=14)
- Response to complaints (26.7%, n=12)
- Other/additional issues (17.8%, n=8)
- Events organized by the Town (15.6%, n=7)

## 5. Thematic Analysis of Accessibility Barriers

Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses identified seven major thematic categories of accessibility barriers. These themes emerged consistently across multiple questions, with many respondents addressing similar issues in different contexts throughout the survey.

### 5.1 Pedestrian Infrastructure Crisis

The absence or inadequacy of sidewalks emerged as the single most frequently cited accessibility barrier, mentioned by 40+ respondents across multiple questions. The severity of this issue cannot be overstated; it affects not only wheelchair users and people with mobility devices but also parents with strollers, cyclists, and pedestrians of all abilities.

Representative quotes illustrate the impact: *"No sidewalks for wheelchairs/walkers. The long-term care should have a suitable walking/riding trail in the back of their building so they can get out into nature"; "People with children in strollers or bikes or people in wheelchairs or walkers are extremely limited to where they can go around HVGB"; "The town lacks any sense of accessibility. There are no sidewalks for active transportation."*

Where sidewalks do exist, they are frequently described as inadequate:

- Crumbling concrete with dangerous uneven surfaces
- Not cleared of snow in winter
- Covered in sand, making wheelchair use impossible
- Too narrow for wheelchairs and pedestrians to pass
- Blocked by vehicle parking

One particularly detailed response highlighted the broader implications: *"There's no level walkway and much of the boardwalk is uneven or falling apart and takes a good deal of mobility that you wouldn't expect many people with mobility issues to be able to navigate safely... Many of the parking lots in town are not even paved, and when they are paved, they're paved once, and the pavement degrades to the point that it is even more impractical than not paving it at all."*

Walking trails received extensive criticism despite recent improvements. The trails behind Tim Hortons and the bike path, while appreciated, suffer from:

- Lack of benches for resting
- Inadequate width for passing
- Uneven surfaces are dangerous for wheelchairs
- Off-road vehicles using pedestrian paths
- Safety concerns due to inadequate lighting

## 5.2 Non-Functional Accessibility Features

A recurring and particularly frustrating theme was accessibility features that exist but do not function reliably. This includes:

- Automatic doors that are broken or disabled
- Accessible parking spaces used by people without permits
- Wheelchair ramps that are not maintained in winter
- Elevators that are frequently out of service
- Wheelchair-accessible doors that are locked

The YMCA door was specifically mentioned multiple times: *"Door at YMCA doesn't work"; "YMCA automatic doors never work"; "Most of last winter the elevator, the responsibility of the Town I was informed at the time, at the Y was out of service therefore unable to attend the Y, which we like to do weekly."*

At the E.J. Broomfield Arena, respondents reported: *"Currently standing in the porch of the EJ Broomfield where the wheelchair accessible door does to work, not does the wheelchair accessible elevator to the upstairs. There is also a sign posted outside the main doors of the EJ if people are looking for accessible entrance to call a number, that is rarely answered."*

This theme reveals a critical gap between compliance (installing features) and actual accessibility (ensuring features function). The intermittent functionality creates uncertainty and discourages participation, as individuals with disabilities cannot predict whether they will be able to access a facility on any given day.

## 5.3 Lighting and Visibility

Street lighting deficiencies were identified as both an accessibility and safety issue, particularly affecting people with visual impairments and those with mobility limitations who need to see path surfaces clearly. One respondent provided extensive detail: *"The amount of dark roads in this town is incredible... Someone in a normal car that's not blinding other drivers with their extra lighting can't navigate many of our in town high traffic roads due to the lack of light... a lot of seeing impaired people who need to get around to live and work are having to get out around by themselves in the winter darkness."*

Multiple respondents noted that the recent LED street light upgrade, while energy-efficient, reduced visibility: *"The street lights may be more efficient but the visibility is greatly reduced thus increasing crime rates."* Specific areas identified as particularly dark included:

- Walking trails and bike paths
- Oliver Street (Johnny Hill section)
- Travespine Street
- Hamilton River Road
- Kelland Drive

## 5.4 Kinsmen Park Accessibility

Kinsmen Park received both praise for recent improvements and criticism for remaining barriers. While the park features accessible playground equipment and a walkway that provides an entrance from the long-term care facility, the sandy pathways make wheelchair access extremely difficult or impossible.

Multiple respondents described the challenge: *"She cannot get past the gate at Joe's Walkway due to all sand and not beyond the gate or front entrance in the main entrance due to no paved walkway... there needs to be some rest areas that are paved throughout the park so that someone pushing a wheelchair can stop and sit with the person they are pushing"; "Maneuvering loved ones through Kinsmen Park sometimes it takes 2-3 people to push wheelchairs through sandy areas."*

The lack of paved pathways prevents residents of the long-term care facility, those who could benefit most from outdoor recreation, from independently accessing community events in the park. One respondent proposed a practical suggestive intervention: *"My suggestion is to have each town councilor spend the day in wheelchair, dependant on someone else to push you, lift you in and out of vehicles and into town properties to judge for yourselves."*

## 5.5 Communication and Information Access

Communication barriers emerged as a significant but underrecognized accessibility issue. While the Town has made efforts to disseminate information through multiple channels (Facebook, Instagram, website, Constant Contact), several problems persist:

- Over-reliance on Facebook excludes seniors and others without social media
- Email announcements (PSAs) contain errors requiring multiple corrections
- Website navigation difficulties and broken links
- No communication boards at playgrounds
- Lack of translation for newcomers

One respondent noted: *"Public service announcements are on the website, on the screen outside of the EJ Broomfield Arena and on Facebook. I am not on Facebook, and many seniors do not use internet regularly."* Another highlighted quality issue: *"The first email has spelling mistakes, wrong dates, and other issues that don't even get fixed in the second or even third email sent out which leads to confusion, misunderstandings and other issues."*

## 5.6 Parking and Enforcement

Accessible parking emerged as a contentious issue characterized by:

- Insufficient number of designated spaces
- Inadequate signage makes spaces hard to identify
- Misuse by people without permits

- Spaces not cleared of snow in winter
- Long distances from parking to building entrances
- Complete absence of enforcement

Representative comments include: *"Winter time people are using it without permits. Many times the automatic doors aren't working and seems like it takes forever to get fix. I'm unable to open them when broken. Winter time I have found especially at arena the handicapped parking area is never salted"; "The town cop to monitor the abuse of disabled parking spaces. And the acceptance of Access 2 cards at community events."*

Several respondents emphasized that enforcement is important: accessible parking that is routinely misused translates to being not available for those who need it.

### **5.7 Program Inclusion**

While physical accessibility garnered most attention, several respondents raised concerns about program accessibility, particularly in recreation programs. Issues included:

- Summer recreation activities are not designed for children with disabilities
- Lack of support staff or requirement for parents to hire caregivers
- Few activities for adults with disabilities
- No acceptance of Access 2 cards at venues
- Insufficient sensory-friendly programming

As one parent noted: *"My child is autistic and can't even play any sport in this town. He's not an invalid but is treated as such due to a learning disability."* Another stated: *"Over the years people with intellectual and physical disabilities have attended the Summer Rec program and have spent most of their day sitting on the sidelines watching because they could not participate in the activities planned."*

## **6. Priority Areas for Action**

Based on frequency of mention, severity of impact, and number of people affected, five priority areas emerge for immediate attention in the accessibility plan:

### **Priority 1: Pedestrian Infrastructure Development**

The development of a comprehensive sidewalk network should be the foundational priority, as it enables access to all other facilities and services. Actions should include:

- Multi-year plan for sidewalk installation prioritizing high-traffic routes
- Connection of existing sidewalk fragments into coherent networks
- Year-round maintenance protocols, including snow clearing and sand removal
- Removal of deteriorated "sidewalks" that create hazards
- Installation of benches at regular intervals for rest stops

### **Priority 2: Accessibility Feature Maintenance and Monitoring**

Establish systems to ensure reliable functionality of all accessibility features:

- Regular inspection schedule for automatic doors, elevators, and lifts
- Priority maintenance response for accessibility features
- Winter maintenance protocols for accessible entrances and parking
- Accessibility features status dashboard (visible to the public)
- User reporting mechanism for non-functional features

### **Priority 3: Street Lighting Enhancement**

Systematic improvement of street lighting, particularly:

- Lighting audit of all streets, trails, and public spaces
- Enhanced lighting on Hamilton River Road and Kelland Drive
- Trail lighting for safe evening use
- Tree trimming to prevent obstruction of existing lights
- Consider adjusting LED lighting to improve visibility

### **Priority 4: Communication Accessibility**

Ensure information reaches all residents through diverse channels:

- Quality assurance process for public communications
- Annual calendar of events available in print at post offices and Town Hall
- Dedicated email list for critical announcements (boil water, emergencies)

- Website accessibility improvements
- Communication boards at playgrounds

#### **Priority 5: Enforcement and Accountability**

Implement enforcement mechanisms for accessibility regulations:

- Regular enforcement of accessible parking regulations
- Business compliance requirements for accessible parking and entrances
- Accessibility standards for new development
- Complaint response tracking system with accountability measures
- Annual public reporting on accessibility plan progress

## 7. Recommendations for developing an Accessibility Plan for the Town

### 7.1 Immediate Actions (0-6 months)

10. Establish accessibility feature maintenance schedule and public reporting mechanism
11. Repair all non-functional automatic doors and elevators
12. Implement accessible parking enforcement
13. Install paved pathway through Kinsmen Park from Joe's Walkway
14. Add benches to walking trails at regular intervals
15. Improve accessible parking signage at all facilities
16. Create a printed annual events calendar for distribution

### 7.2 Short-Term Actions (6-12 months)

17. Complete street lighting audit and develop an enhancement plan
18. Develop a multi-year sidewalk installation plan with community input
19. Establish accessibility advisory committee
20. Pilot inclusive summer recreation programming
21. Implement Access 2 card acceptance at all municipal venues
22. Develop business accessibility standards and compliance timeline
23. Repair E.J. Broomfield Arena accessibility features

### 7.3 Medium-Term Actions (1-3 years)

24. Begin phase one of sidewalk network development
25. Complete street lighting enhancements in priority areas
26. Expand bus service hours and routes
27. Establish dedicated adult disability programming
28. Implement regular sensory-friendly event programming
29. Develop staff accessibility training program
30. Install communication boards at all playgrounds

### 7.4 Long-Term Actions (3-5 years)

31. Complete a comprehensive sidewalk network
32. Achieve full compliance with accessibility standards at all facilities
33. Establish Happy Valley-Goose Bay as a regional accessibility leader
34. Conduct a comprehensive accessibility plan review and community consultation

### 7.5 Systemic Recommendations

Beyond specific infrastructure improvements, the accessibility plan should address systemic issues:

- **Shift from Compliance to Inclusion:** Move beyond minimum standards to proactive universal design principles in all municipal planning.

- **Participatory Planning:** Establish ongoing consultation with disability community, not limited to the formal accessibility committee, but including experiential activities (e.g., council members using wheelchairs to experience barriers firsthand).
- **Integrated Budget Planning:** Incorporate accessibility considerations and funding into all capital projects rather than treating accessibility as a separate initiative.
- **Staff Culture Change:** Develop comprehensive staff training on disability awareness and customer service to address concerns about staff attitudes.
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish clear timelines, responsible parties, and public reporting for all accessibility plan commitments.
- **Winter Maintenance Priority:** Recognize that accessibility in a northern climate requires year-round attention, with winter maintenance of accessible features receiving equal priority to road clearing.

## 8. Conclusion

The accessibility survey reveals that Happy Valley-Goose Bay faces significant accessibility challenges across multiple areas. It also demonstrates strong community engagement and clear priorities for improvement. The 2.4 out of 5 satisfaction rating reflects the current reality, while the detailed qualitative feedback provides a roadmap for meaningful change.

Three overarching themes emerge from this analysis.

- First, the pedestrian infrastructure crisis fundamentally limits participation for residents with disabilities, parents with strollers, and aging community members. Addressing this through systematic sidewalk development would have the most far-reaching impact on accessibility.
- Second, the gap between installed accessibility features and reliable functionality undermines trust and participation. Committing to maintenance and enforcement would significantly improve actual accessibility without major capital investment.
- Third, accessibility extends beyond physical infrastructure to encompass communication, programming, and systemic inclusion.

The survey respondents demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of accessibility as a matter of dignity, independence, and equality. They did not simply list complaints but offered constructive solutions, from specific infrastructure improvements to systemic recommendations. Hence, this form of engagement to hear from the community represents a valuable resource for accessibility planning and implementation.

Moving forward, the Town should view developing an Accessibility Plan not as a compliance exercise but as an opportunity to fulfill the community's vision of a place where *"everyone can live their normal daily life with as little impediment"* and where all residents can *"participate in events in a meaningful way."* The recommendations prioritize actions with the greatest impact and feasibility while establishing long-term commitment to genuine inclusion.

Implementation may require sustained political will, adequate resourcing and investment, community partnership, and accountability mechanisms. However, the benefits of a more inclusive community where all residents can fully participate will, in the end, justify such commitment and investment (long-term and short-term). As one respondent powerfully stated, the goal is not special treatment but *"the ability to use all services in our home town, to make all buildings and events accessible"* and to *"remove barriers that prevent my family member from becoming an active member in our home community."*

This accessibility plan survey contributes to and initiates the pathway to achieve that vision.

*Word Count: 3,592 words*