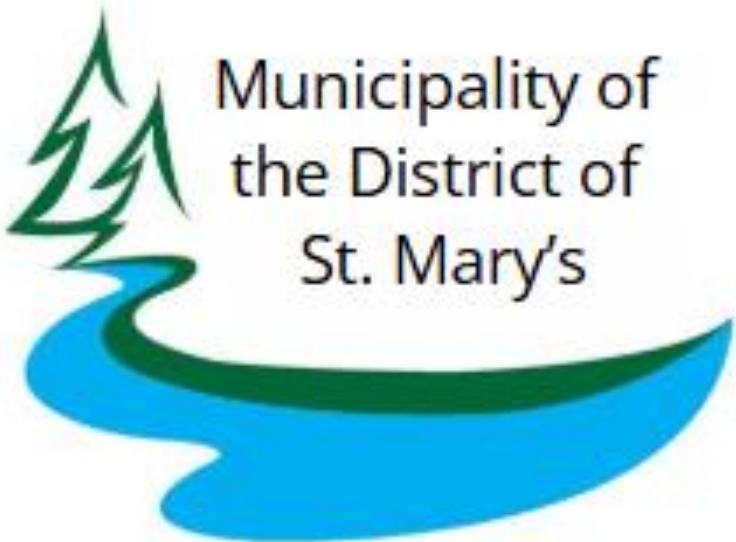


**Municipality of the
District of St. Mary's
Inclusion Plan
2026-28**



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1 Background

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible community where residents and visitors of all ages and abilities can fully participate in civic life. The Inclusion Plan is a strategic tool designed to guide the Municipality in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers in municipal facilities, programs, services, and public spaces.

This Plan builds on previous accessibility initiatives and reflects the Municipality's ongoing commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. It provides a framework for implementing practical improvements, setting priorities, and monitoring progress over time.

The development of the Plan was informed by the Nova Scotia Accessibility Act and the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act. It also draws on input from community members, municipal staff, and other stakeholders to ensure the Plan responds to the real experiences and needs of those who use municipal services.

The Municipality aims to foster a more welcoming and accessible environment, promote safe and equitable participation in community life, and ensure that inclusion is considered in all aspects of municipal decision-making and service delivery. In 2023 the Municipality of the District of St. Mary's published its first Accessibility Plan, with a revised Plan published in March 2026. Barriers to inclusion were assessed throughout the Municipality and a list of actions was created to support the removal of these barriers. To support this, we engaged in a process to update and refresh the Plan's actions that address the needs of residents in our community.

2 What We Heard: Community Consultation

Community engagement was a key component in completing the Inclusion Plan. Residents are the primary users of municipal programs, services, and facilities, and their lived experiences provide valuable insight into what works well and what barriers exist. To gather this

information, the Municipality conducted a range of consultation activities in the fall and winter of 2025, including two in-person workshops held in September, an online survey available to all community members, and attendance at community events across the Municipality. Through these efforts, feedback was collected from over fifty-one participants, helping to identify inclusion needs, priorities, and opportunities for improvement. This input has directly informed the recommendations and initiatives outlined in this Plan.

2.1 Feedback Summary

Community feedback played a vital role in shaping this Inclusion Plan. Through in-person workshops, an online survey, and engagement at community events, residents and visitors shared their experiences, identified barriers, and suggested opportunities for improvement.

51 responses were received during the consultation period representing a range of ages, genders, and identities. Most respondents were seniors (57% aged 60+), predominantly White (82%), with representation from 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals (22%), persons with disabilities (14%), religious or faith-based minorities (8%), as well as Black (4%) and Indigenous (2%) residents. Many respondents identified as members of underrepresented or underserved communities, with seniors being the largest group.

Residents highlighted positive experiences with municipal programs and services, including recreational activities, seniors' events, holiday trips, low-income tax rebates, water distribution programs, and responsive staff and councillors. These programs were recognized as improving social connection, participation, and quality of life.

Barriers to access were identified, including geographic isolation, limited transportation, program costs, lack of childcare, online-only communication, and accessibility challenges. Cultural and social barriers were also noted, such as experiences of microaggressions, lack of representation, and systemic bias toward newcomers, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racialized or Indigenous residents.

Residents suggested several opportunities for improvement, including expanding cost-free or low-cost programs, enhancing transportation and outreach, improving communication in multiple formats, and offering inclusive educational and recreational activities. Policy recommendations included integrating an IDEAA lens in municipal policies, promoting anti-racism and anti-oppression measures, celebrating cultural diversity, and ensuring meaningful participation of underrepresented voices in decision-making.

Feedback highlighted differing perspectives within the community. Some residents strongly support targeted inclusion initiatives, while others prefer uniform treatment for all. Despite these differences, there was broad agreement that action, communication, and meaningful engagement are key to fostering a sense of belonging.

In summary, while municipal programs are valued, residents identified opportunities to address structural, cultural, and informational barriers to ensure that all community members can fully participate. Implementing these recommendations will support a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible Municipality of the District of St. Mary's.

This section highlights the ways the Municipality has taken action to create a more inclusive and accessible environment. Each initiative and improvement reflects our shared commitment to supporting all residents in living, working, and engaging in St. Mary's.

3 The Built Environment

The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's is committed to advancing equity by ensuring that all public buildings and spaces are welcoming and accessible to people of every age, ability, and background, whether those spaces are owned, leased, or operated by the Municipality. Recognizing that systemic barriers and historical inequities can limit participation, the following recommendations provide practical, actionable steps the Municipality can take to remove

obstacles, enhance accessibility, and foster a community where everyone has a fair and meaningful opportunity to engage, belong, and thrive.

3.1 Achievements

- In 2024, automatic door buttons were installed on all public washrooms and dressing rooms at the St. Mary's Recplex, improving ease of access for all visitors.
- In 2025, automatic door buttons were installed at the Sherbrooke Public Library entrances, exits and the washroom, improving ease of access for all visitors.
- In 2025, new rubber flooring was installed at the St. Mary's Recplex, designed to eliminate gaps and heaves for safer, smoother movement.
- In 2025, accessible parking spaces were added at the St. Mary's Recplex to support convenient access for visitors with mobility needs.
- In 2025, accessible parking spaces were added at the 16 Main Street Parking Lot, enhancing access to Pioneer Park.
- Residents appreciate well-maintained sidewalks, parks, and public recreational spaces, such as the Recplex, which provide safe spaces for seniors and families.
- Recreational spaces and facilities such as the St. Mary's Recplex, St. Mary's Fitness Centre, and seniors' event spaces are valued for providing safe and welcoming environments.
- Sidewalks and paved areas in key locations (e.g., Streetscapes improvements in Sherbrooke) enhance safety and accessibility.

3.2 Recommendations

- Provide accessible seating at key community facilities, including St. Mary's Recplex and the Sherbrooke Public Library, to ensure all residents can comfortably participate in programs and activities.

- Provide seating throughout Pioneer Park and Stonewall Park to improve accessibility along trails and open spaces, ensuring all residents can comfortably enjoy outdoor areas.
- There currently are no fully accessible washrooms available in municipal spaces. Ensure at least one fully accessible washroom is available at each of the four municipal facilities.
- Support community partners, local businesses, and organizations in making accessibility improvements by promoting available funding programs and sharing information about grants, resources, and best practices.
- Improve lighting in municipal parks to increase safety, accessibility, and usability for all residents, including during evening hours.
- Equip public and staff washrooms at the Municipal Office with push-button access to improve accessibility and independence for all users.
- Equip the Community Room at the Municipal Office with push-button access to improve accessibility and independence for all users.
- Extend sidewalks and accessible pathways from Maple Manor and other residential areas to downtown and community hubs.
- Ensure all municipal buildings and program spaces are wheelchair accessible, with appropriate seating, ramps, and temperature controls.
- Include child-friendly and age-friendly design in municipal spaces to encourage participation from families and seniors.
- Add culturally inclusive signage and art in public spaces to reflect local Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, and other historically underrepresented communities.

4 Information and Communication

The Municipality is committed to advancing equity by ensuring that all information and communications are clear, accessible, and inclusive for people of every age, ability, and background. Recognizing that barriers such as complex language, limited formats, or digital access can prevent residents, visitors, and stakeholders from fully engaging with municipal services, the following recommendations outline practical actions the Municipality can take to remove these obstacles, enhance accessibility, and ensure that all members of the community can receive, understand, and meaningfully participate in municipal programs and decision-making.

4.1 Achievements

- In 2025, the audio-visual equipment in Council Chambers was upgraded to improve clarity and accessibility for virtual meeting attendees.
- Municipal newsletters, water alerts, and email notifications help residents stay informed about events, programs, and services.
- Some residents acknowledged direct outreach by staff and councillors as supportive and responsive.
- Visible support for Pride events, flags, and cultural celebrations was noted as encouraging for LGBTQ+ and other communities.

4.2 Recommendations

- Establish a Communications Strategy that clearly outlines how to ensure all municipal communications are accessible, inclusive, and available in multiple formats to meet the diverse needs of the community.

- Develop programs and resources to help residents, staff, and community partners better understand accessibility, remove barriers, and foster an inclusive community for everyone.
- Provide multiple communication formats, including mailed letters, posters in public spaces, phone calls, and in-person briefings, to reach residents without internet access.
- Use plain-language materials, visuals, and videos to make information more accessible to people with disabilities or limited literacy.
- Improve awareness of available programs, including community picnics, educational workshops, seniors' events, and recreational activities.
- Establish a "Welcome Wagon" program to provide new residents with information on municipal services, supports, and community groups.

5 Employment

The Municipality is committed to advancing equity by ensuring that employment opportunities are accessible and inclusive for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Recognizing that systemic barriers, bias, and exclusion can limit participation and advancement, the Municipality strives to create workplaces and employment practices that provide fair access for both new and existing employees. Building on this commitment, the following recommendations outline practical actions the Municipality can take to remove obstacles, foster an inclusive workplace culture, and ensure that every employee has an equitable opportunity to contribute, grow, and thrive.

5.1 Achievements

- In 2023, the Municipality adopted a new Human Resources Policy that strengthens inclusive employment practices by supporting the hiring, training, and accommodation of individuals with disabilities.
- Standing desks were purchased, supporting workplace accessibility and comfort for employees with diverse needs.
- Staff and councillors are recognized for being responsive and helpful, contributing to residents' positive experiences with municipal services.

5.2 Recommendations

- Develop an inclusive hiring strategy to promote diversity, equity, and accessibility in all recruitment and staffing processes.
- Deliver Foundations of Accessibility training to municipal staff and Council to build awareness, strengthen capacity, and support inclusive decision-making.
- Encourage leadership and staff to model inclusive language and call out harmful language when it occurs, fostering a respectful and supportive environment.

- Establish a clear process for employees to request accessibility support, ensuring all staff have the tools and resources they need to work effectively.
- Offer training for staff and councillors on diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion to reduce unconscious bias.
- Develop and promote mentorship or support programs for underrepresented groups seeking municipal employment.
- Develop programs for seniors, persons with disabilities, and racialized communities to engage in community volunteer or advisory roles.

6 Services

The Municipality is committed to advancing equity by ensuring that all programs and services are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Recognizing that systemic barriers, social exclusion, and economic inequities can limit participation, the Municipality strives to design and deliver services that provide fair opportunities for everyone to engage fully and meaningfully. Building on this commitment, the following recommendations outline practical actions the Municipality can take to remove barriers, enhance accessibility, and create programs and services that foster belonging, participation, and equitable outcomes for all community members.

6.1 Achievements

- The Municipality's Equipment Loan Program has expanded its inventory to include adaptive equipment such as sleds and sledges, making recreation more accessible for everyone.
- Recreation programs are open for registration both in person and online, ensuring easy access for all community members.
- The Municipal Low-Income Property Tax Rebate and assistance with the Provincial Property Tax Rebate helps seniors and low-income residents maintain housing stability.
- Residents highlighted positive municipal programs, including Merry & Bright Holiday Trip, 55+ Games, summer day camps, free skates, fitness programs, and water distribution.
- Seniors' social events and community programs were recognized for reducing isolation and increasing community connection.

6.2 Recommendations

- Deliver recreation programs throughout all districts of the Municipality, helping remove location-related barriers and improve access for all community members.

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- Create a subsidy to help residents overcome cost-related barriers, ensuring that municipal programs and services are accessible and inclusive for all community members.
- Develop a family-based registration form that allows families to register as a unit, rather than requiring individual forms for each family member, making participation more convenient and accessible.
- Offer flexible service and program options to support participation by residents who are unable to attend during regular hours.
- Enhance the Equipment Loan Program by adding accessible equipment for all seasons, ensuring residents of all abilities can enjoy recreation year-round.
- Ensure residents can attend fitness programs without requiring a companion, supporting independence and participation.
- Expand cost-free or low-cost programming to make events accessible to youth, families, seniors, and low-income residents.
- Schedule programs at varied times, including evenings, to accommodate working residents.
- Increase cultural representation and inclusivity in programming, including recognition of Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ histories and contributions.
- Introduce educational workshops on cooking, financial literacy, or local history to foster skills, awareness, and community belonging.
- Ensure childcare options and accessible facilities are available at all municipal events to reduce participation barriers.
- Develop a Use of Municipal Public Spaces Policy.

7 Transportation

The Municipality is committed to advancing equity by ensuring that transportation options are accessible, dependable, and inclusive for people of every age, ability, and circumstance.

Recognizing that lack of mobility, geographic distance, and systemic barriers can prevent residents from accessing services, programs, and community opportunities, the Municipality strives to provide transportation solutions that support fair and equitable participation.

Building on this commitment, the following recommendations outline practical actions the Municipality can take to remove obstacles, improve mobility, and ensure that all residents can travel safely, independently, and fully engage in community life.

7.1 Achievements

- To improve access and connectivity for residents, the Municipality supported the development of a non-profit transportation service. In 2023, the St. Mary's Association for Rural Transit was formed, helping community members travel more easily throughout the Municipality.

7.2 Recommendations

- Develop an accessible multi-use trail network connecting Main Street, Sherbrooke, and northeast Sherbrooke, improving safe and inclusive access to schools and essential services through active transportation.
- Explore creating a network that connects residents who need transportation with those willing to provide it, improving access to municipal programs, services, and community activities.
- Provide low-cost or subsidized transport to municipal programs, services, and events.
- Include accessible vehicles, such as trikes for seniors and those with mobility challenges to the Equipment Loan Program.

8 Implementing & Monitoring the Plan

The Municipal Inclusion, Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Anti-Hate & Accessibility Advisory Committee, along with appointed staff and council are responsible for adopting and overseeing the MODSM Inclusion Plan.

The Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for implementing the plan and assigning an Inclusion Coordinator.

The MODSM Inclusion Coordinator is responsible for receiving and responding to public concerns, complaints, and suggestions. You can contact the Inclusion Coordinator at <mailto:info@saint-mary's.ca> or by calling [902-522-2049](tel:902-522-2049).

The Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Hate and Accessibility Advisory Committee is responsible for giving feedback and recommendations to the Municipal Council. The Municipal Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Hate and Accessibility Advisory Committee will prepare an annual report for council for the fiscal year ending March 31st of each year. This report card will measure the performance of the actions in this plan. The Committee may also make recommendations to improve the plan. The annual report will be a public document that will be posted to the MODSM website.

9 Glossary

Accessibility – the practice of making information, services, transportation and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible.

Accommodation – a personalized adaption of a service or environment to overcome the barriers faced by individuals of all ages and abilities.

Active Transportation – refers to all forms of human powered transportation. Most commonly, it refers to walking and cycling, but also rollerblading, skateboarding, running, wheelchair use, skating, canoeing, kayaking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

Anti-Hate – Actions, policies, and initiatives aimed at preventing, reducing, or responding to hate, discrimination, or harassment in the community.

Anti-Racism – Policies, practices, and actions that actively challenge racism and work to create equitable opportunities for all racial and ethnic groups.

Barrier – anything that stops or challenges the full and effective participation in society of an individual of any age or ability.

Belonging – The sense of being welcomed, valued, and included as part of a community.

Communication – the process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.

Disability – Nova Scotia’s Accessibility Act defines a disability as a physical, mental, intellectual, learning or sensory impairment, including an episodic disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders an individuals full and effective participation in society.

Diversity – The presence of differences within a community, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and more.

Equity / Equitable – an individual or group is provided with the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has a different circumstance and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.

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IDEAA Lens – The practice of reviewing programs, policies, or decisions to identify potential impacts on diverse and underrepresented communities and promote fairness.

Inclusion – The intentional practice of ensuring all community members are welcomed, respected, and able to participate fully.

Plain Language – language that is clear and easy for the reader or listener to understand.

Underrepresented Voices – Individuals or groups whose perspectives, experiences, or needs are often overlooked in municipal decision-making.

2SLGBTQIA+ – An inclusive term for individuals identifying as Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, or other non-heterosexual/non-cisgender identities.