



DISABILITY ACCESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of September 8, 2020

This meeting was recorded on Zoom and may viewed on the Town of Amherst YouTube Channel. See link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAd4oJ6hHbs>

The meeting was called to order at 11:30 a.m. with the following members:

PRESENT: Myra Ross, Chair; Victoria Dixon; Seren Derin; and Ruth Smith;

ALSO PRESENT: Maureen Pollock, Planner and DAAC staff liaison; and Town Council member/ DAAC staff liaison Pat De Angelis; Barbara Thorpe, President of Disability Access Consultants, Inc.; and Jennie Grover, Director of Administrative Services of Disability Access Consultants, Inc.; Joseph Tringali; Gerry Weiss;

ABSENT: Elysse Link

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

NEW BUSINESS:

OLD BUSINESS:

- 1. ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan** – In keeping with its ongoing efforts to serve all members of the public, The Town of Amherst is updating its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation & Transition Plan. The project is grant funded through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). The existing Self Evaluation Plan & Transition Plan was last prepared in 2006 and is now outdated.

Under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Town of Amherst is required to complete a self-evaluation of the Town's public facilities, programs, services, activities and events to determine compliance with the ADA and any barriers to accessibility. Once the Self-Evaluation is complete, the Town will develop a Transition Plan to prioritize the identified barriers and how they will be corrected. The Town has hired Disability Access Consultants, LLC (DAC) to assist with the self-evaluation and transition plan process.

As part of this project, the Town of Amherst seek input from the community members, organizations assisting persons with disabilities, and Town of Amherst employees. Feedback will assist in addressing and prioritizing current and future accessibility needs.

Consultants assisting with the project - Barbara Thorpe, DAC President and Jennie Grover, DAC Director of Administrative Services were present to provide an overall presentation of the project and to ask for DAAC members for their input.

Jennie Grover stated surveys were available from May 8 until July 11 for community members, organizations assisting persons with disabilities, and Town of Amherst employees to complete and returned. The Town provided many ways to help promote the surveys, such as making a dedicated webpage on the Town website, press releases, mailings, targeted emails to community members, organization and Town of Amherst employees, among other ways.

The Town received 120 completed surveys, including:

- 70 surveys from community members;
- 20 surveys from organizations; and
- 30 surveys from Town of Amherst employees.

In mid-July, two DAC accessibility specialists came to Amherst to take measurements and photographs of the interior and exterior of Town properties as part of the survey process. These Consultants performed their on-site audits from Tuesday, July 14, 2020 and were complete on Thursday, July 30th.

Below is a list of Town Facilities that were audited:

Buildings:

1. Public Works Building
2. Boltwood Parking Garage
3. Town Hall
4. Bangs Community Center
5. Munson Library
6. Amherst Police Department
7. Central Fire Station
8. North Fire Station
9. Amherst Community Child Center (North Amherst Headstart)
10. Jones Library
11. North Amherst Library
12. North Amherst School Building
13. Waste Water Treatment Plant
14. Cherry Hill Golf Clubhouse
15. Transfer Station & Recycling Center

Conservation Land & Trails and Parks

1. Mill River Conservation Area
2. War Memorial (this includes the Community Field –baseball, football and softball field and the War Memorial Pool and old playground)
3. Sweetser Park
4. Kiwanis Field

5. Cherry Hill Golf Course
6. Amethyst Brook Conservation Area
7. Puffers Pond
8. Amherst Common
9. Mill River Conservation Area
10. Plum Brook Recreation Area
11. Markert's Pond
12. Larch Hill Conservation Area
13. Orchard Arboretum Conservation Area
14. Kevin Flood Memorial Trail
15. Middle School Pool (this include the adjacent play fields outside including the tennis court area.)
16. North Amherst Field
17. Groff Park

The Jones Library was not included in this audit, as both Town Staff and DAC consultant agrees that it would not be needed as the Jones Library recently completed its own in-depth accessibility study. To see a copy of the Final Report for the Jones Library Accessibility Review and Recommendations, Prepared by Kuhn Riddle Architects, Dated June 10, 2020, see link: <https://www.joneslibrary.org/DocumentCenter/View/5979/Jones-Library-Accessibility-Review-and-Recommendations-June-10-2020-PDF>.

Additionally, the regional schools and local schools were not included in the audit, as they recently conducted their own in-depth accessibility studies.

The Town of Amherst website has been reviewed and will be included.

The consultants are currently developing the Transition Plan to prioritize the identified barriers and how they will be corrected. The prioritized list will be based on survey responses, Town plans and documents, and the on-site audits.

Barbara Thorpe stated that she hopes to submit the draft findings and recommendations for the Self Evaluation & Transition Plan to the Town of Amherst by September 16, 2020 for review.

Seren Derin asked if the Town of Amherst website could be voice activated. Jennie Grover responded that a voice activated device could be possibility. Stated she will look into it. Maureen Pollock stated she will ask the Town's Communications Manager & Community Participation Officer, Brianna Sunryd into this as well.

Myra Ross stated that audible beacons at various crosswalks in town sometime do not work properly. Stated she would like this to be reflected in the Plan.

Maureen Pollock stated she will share the Draft Plan with the DAAC when it becomes available. Stated she wants this Plan to become a living document and to be included in the capital budget planning.

Gerry Weiss, Amherst resident and former member of the DAAC stated he knows of a locations in downtown Amherst that are not properly treated for snow removal and ice removal. Stated he will email the list of locations to Maureen Pollock so she can forward the list to the consultants. Stated he would like this reflected in the Plan.

Seren Derin stated the only on-site handicapped parking spaces in close proximity to the Jones Library is on the opposite side of Amity Street. Stated she would like to crosswalk located in front of the Jones Library entrance to have blinking lights. Stated she would like a ramp installed at the front entrance to the Jones Library.

Barbara Thorpe and Jennie Grover thanked the DAAC members for their input and said that they will include their comments into the Executive Summary.

OTHER BUSINESS NOT ANTICIPATED WITHIN 48 HOURS:

- 1. Mass Office on Disability (MOD) Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Improvement Grant Program- FY21 Cycle** – Maureen Pollock updated the Committee about a grant opportunity. The grant application is due by October 9th.

Project Grants of up to \$250,000 will be awarded to successful Applicants to remove barriers and create and improve accessible features and programmatic access for persons with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth. Awarded projects must be on Town of Amherst property. It cannot be on private property.

Based on previous grant cycle awardees, on average, grants are awarded for much less money per community \pm \$50,000.

The consultants working on the ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan are hoping to submit the draft plan by September 16, 2020 so identifying a project for this grant opportunity could be perfect timing.

Last year, the Town was successfully awarded grant money through this grant program for the following improvements:

- Crosswalk Replacements - replacing the crosswalks at North Pleasant St at Cowles Lane (at Brueggers Bagels), and at 76 North Pleasant Street (in front of CVS), and
- Sidewalk Replacement - replacing the Pleasant Walk sidewalk (adjacent to the old Starbucks location which leads to the Boltwood garage).

These improvement were supposed to be completed this summer (2020) but due to COVID-19, the State gave the Town a 1-year grant extension to complete the work.

Maureen Pollock asked the DAAC whether they would like to meet on September 22nd to discuss the draft plan and help identify possible projects for the MOD Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Improvement Grant Program.

The Committee all agreed that would like to meet on September 22nd.

For more information about this grant opportunity, please visit this website:

<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-municipal-americans-with-disabilities-act-ada-improvement-grant>

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD: None

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION: Moved by Myra Ross, seconded by Victoria Dixon, and voted 4-0, to adjourn and to hold the next meeting at 11:30AM on Tuesday, September 22, 2020