



Hingham Commission on Disabilities

DATE: Tuesday, August 1, 2023

TIME: 7:00 pm

PLACE: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81527351459?pwd=YXgxSys0eUt2S2JVa2sySmpad295QT09>

Members Present: Stephanie Gertz, Chair; Sharon Allen, Vice-Chair; Megan Baker, Secretary; Jane McGrath, Treasurer; Art Robert

Members Absent: None

Guest: Nicole Nihan, 176 South St.; Gavin Potter, 101 Amesbury Dr.; Kenneth Walsh of Hull

Call to Order

At 7:02 p.m., Chair Gertz called the meeting to order, read the Open Meeting Law statement, and asked whether anyone is recording the meeting. No response. The Town of Hingham is recording the meeting.

Public Comments

Art Robert, Assistant Town Administrator, was introduced as the newest member of the Commission.

Chair Gertz stated many in the community would like to be members on the Commission but don't have the time to commit. She invited folks to attend the meetings to have their viewpoints heard.

Gavin Potter of 101 Amesbury Drive is 29 years old and was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2019 which left him with side effects. He looks forward to learning more about the community.

Nik Nihan of 176 South Street hopes to join the Commission as a member.

She has an older sister with autism and saw first-hand the challenges she faced in the school system, with job opportunities, etc. when she was young. Her father is manager for the MBTA paratransit ride which opened her eyes to challenges facing the disabled community. She looks forward to finding ways to help.

Ken Walsh is no longer a Hingham resident. He & his family are living in Hull to care for parents.

He was past district commander for Hingham VFW. He works with the Veteran's Administration with disabled and homeless veterans. He'd like to learn what is going on to help the disabled in Hingham.

Approval of Minutes - June 7, 2023

MOTION: J. McGrath moved to approve the June minutes.

SECONDED: S. Allen

ROLL CALL VOTE: S. Allen, aye; M. Baker, aye; S. Gertz, aye; J. McGrath, aye. Unanimous.

MOTION CARRIES: 4-0

Introduce New Member, Art Robert

S. Gertz welcomed Art as newest member of the Commission on Disabilities. He is also the Assistant Town Manager and the ADA Compliance Officer. He has lived in Hingham two years. He is a retired veteran of the Army Guard Reserve for 25 years. His wife is an occupational therapist at a regional school for students

with significant developmental disabilities. He explained he and his wife had the privilege of hosting her wheelchair-bound mother in their home for 8 years.

ADA Transition Plan - Status and Next Steps

As ADA Coordinator, Art Robert was asked to create a self-assessment and develop a transition plan.

Under ADA, all municipalities, towns, and cities have to understand whether they're in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and develop a path to address gaps.

Title II requires the Town to provide people with disabilities equal opportunity to benefit from programs, services, and activities. Generally, the standard is about program compliance not absolute compliance. Compliance is about equal access to programs as opposed to all facilities or sites. He cited examples.

With State funding, they brought a consultant on board, the Institute for Human Centered Design. They looked at Town policies and procedures, talked with the Commission on Disabilities, and spent time looking at Town facilities. They developed a comprehensive draft self-assessment and transition plan. The web site Hingham-ma.gov/ada contains the assessment and how to implement improvements, an executive summary, an evaluation of Town policies and procedures, an ADA legal overview, ADA glossary, buildings and facilities as well as GIS maps of some sidewalks.

All work on the web site was accomplished with direct observation by our consultant team.

The Town will hold a public hearing to get community input. The consultant would then provide an overview of the work, another public forum for community input, then present a transition plan to the Select Board for approval and implementation. A. Robert suggested a 60-90 minute CoD Zoom public hearing on the ADA plan on September 27. The goal is to present and seek approval from the Select Board in early October. Members discussed how to publicize the September 27 ADA Public Hearing as a Zoom meeting agenda topic of the Commission on Disabilities.

Action Items

- A. Robert will verify consultants are available on Wednesday, 9/27, for the ADA Public Hearing
- A. Robert will investigate whether Harbor Media would record the Public Hearing.
- S. Gertz will verify the schools, Senior Center, and Linden Pond are available 9/27

Once S. Gertz finalizes the 9/27 date, notify M. Baker to secure the Zoom link and push out to A. Robert.

- M. Baker will advertise on the Hingham Hub, Senior Center and Linden Pond.
- A. Robert will put together a press release to be advertised on the Town's Newsflash function and FaceBook page to push the word out.
- K. Walsh will notify the Veterans Administration and American Legion of the Public Hearing.

K. Walsh asked A. Robert to provide ADA assessment reporting for the GAR Hall for the CoD.

MassDOT Hearing

A. Robert presented an update. MassDOT is paying attention to public outreach on ADA retrofits on projects in the District 5 area including south shore communities of Hingham, Cohasset, Duxbury, Fall River and others. On 8/23/23 at 6:00 pm, there will be an online Zoom hearing. He will send the meeting link to CoD members. They are looking for input. They have projects that turn on the reconstruction of curve ramps to ADA standards of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board.

This is the first time he has seen a State agency say "we are working on big projects. We have ADA components. We'd love to share with you and get your feedback." These State projects do not fall under

the Town's purview - Town Engineer or Building Commissioner. A CoD member should attend to understand how to work with these State groups going forward.

There is a web site with a list of projects for each of the communities - 10-12 Hingham State projects tied to State roadways and ADA compliance for pedestrian access.

Ideas for Next Year

Members agreed to discuss this topic after the ADA Public Hearing on 9/27/23. Some ideas include:

- S. Gertz urged more people to attend CoD meetings regardless of whether they are voting members. We'd like to hear what you have to say.
- Members discussed having a free-form, non-Town web site or FaceBook group. This was discussed a decade ago and the Town said no due to the risk that posting conversation could become a public meeting violation. The School has a FB page and an Instagram page. Maybe things have changed.
 - If it is a Town organized entity, the channel need to be the official Town web page or Town FB page.
 - The challenge for the CoD is the importance to get the word out and difficult to engage in discussion online. Take traditional approach, be conservative.
 - There may be partner groups who can extend CoD's reach such as for future events.
 - Members discussed the FB page for "Friends of" the Senior Center which is not the Town.
 - Could someone start a FB page who is not a member of the Commission on Disabilities?

Member Recruitment Thoughts

Members were encouraged to solicit new members.

Matters not anticipated by the Chair within 24 hours of the meeting

S. Gertz has received complaints that stores are not accessible. ADA is the minimum compliance.

- Members discussed how to take action.
- Formulate a template letter for businesses that should be known not be ADA compliant.
 - Should the letter be from a citizen or from the CoD?
- S. Gertz suggested giving businesses "good public promotion" when there is good access.

N. Nahan offered to review other South Shore CoD web sites to see how to "drive online traffic through the Disabilities Commission" web site (Instagram and public threads). Nik will share the data with members as an October agenda item.

J. McGrath notes the SEPAC FaceBook page for the Plymouth River playground is looking for fundraising ideas.

- Look into another brick campaign. Replace old named bricks with new names for funding.
- The PRS PTO would like to know what the ADA plan recommends for the playground.
- A. Robert recommended the PRS PTO attend the 9/27/23 ADA Public Hearing on the CoD agenda.
- A. Robert suggests there are "implementation grants" for playground surface accessibility.

Next Meeting

There will not be a September CoD meeting. CoD will meet on Zoom at 7:00 pm, Wednesday, 10/11/23.

Adjourn

MOTION: J. McGrath moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:24 pm.
SECONDED: S. Allen
ROLL CALL VOTE: S. Allen, aye; M. Baker, aye; S. Gertz, aye; J. McGrath, aye. Unanimous.

MOTION CARRIES: 4-0

Respectfully submitted,

Dale Michaud
Recording Secretary