



Hingham Commission on Disabilities

DATE: Wednesday, September 27, 2023

TIME: 7:00 pm

PLACE: Remote Meeting, Public Hearing

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84069471378?pwd=Yk5oZUduenhKVFA2cHJPeG9CT3F0Zz09>

The meeting will be accessible through Harbor Media for those not in attendance.

Members Present: Stephanie Gertz, Chair; Sharon Allen, Vice-Chair; Megan Baker, Secretary; Jane McGrath, Treasurer; Art Robert, Asst. Town Administrator & ADA Coordinator

Members Absent: None

Guests: David West, Meghan Dufresne of Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD), Diane DeNapoli, ADU Study Committee; Stephen Leary, Human Rights Commission; Bill Ramsey, Select Board, Claire Fabrizio

Call to Order

At 7:01 p.m., Chair Gertz called the meeting to order, read the Open Meeting Law statement, and opened the Public Hearing. No one else was recording the meeting. The Town of Hingham is recording the meeting.

Public Hearing on Americans with Disabilities Act Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan

Chair Gertz introduced Assistant Town Administrator for Operations, Art Robert as the newest member of the Commission on Disabilities and the ADA Coordinator.

A. Robert stated the goal of the meeting is to provide opportunity to address questions about the Town's draft Self-Assessment and Transition Plan per the ADA Act. The Plan and its components are posted on the Town web site: <https://hingham-ma.gov/1028/ADA-Self-Evaluation-and-Transition-Plan>.

The Town launched this project with planning grant funding provided by the **Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD)**. The Town hired the **Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD)** to assist with the self-evaluation process which included assessing the Town's Title II Compliance under the ADA and set a Transition Plan to help the Town establish "program access" to public facilities, programs, policies, services, activities and events and identify and prioritize identified barriers. The Town will develop a plan to correct the barriers.

As consultants, IHCD provided an independent view of Town policies and practices, reviewed our web site, looked at 10 Town buildings, 5 schools, 16 parks and playgrounds, and evaluated 2.7 miles of sidewalk to help us establish a baseline for where the Town is compliant or there are opportunities to improve. All report findings are on the Town web site in two formats including Microsoft Word and Excel for those who need accessible versions: <https://hingham-ma.gov/1028/ADA-Self-Evaluation-and-Transition-Plan>.

Hingham Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan - Scope of Work

Presented by David West, Project Manager for the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD)

This presentation is accessible through Harbor Media for those not in attendance.

IHCD consultants evaluated:

- Programs, services, and activities that connect with members of the public
- Facilities including buildings and sidewalks
- Issues requiring corrective action or gaps were identified in accord with current State compliance

Title II ADA requirements were enacted so government entities do not discriminate against people with disabilities in programs, services or activities. State and local governments must evaluate their programs and establish a plan to comply with the law.

With assistance from the Commission on Disabilities, the Town web site and Town staff, the IHCD developed an online ADA questionnaire which was distributed to 12 Hingham Town departments that had public facing programs, services and/or facilities. Data was gathered to prepare the Part B written reports available on the Town web site: <https://hingham-ma.gov/1028/ADA-Self-Evaluation-and-Transition-Plan> .

He reviewed Town responsibilities under Title II of the ADA Act.

- The Town assigned a responsible employee as ADA Coordinator, Art Robert
- The Town must have an accessible Grievance Procedure
- Post Non-discrimination Notices for members of the public
- Reasonable modification of policies, practices, procedures
- Employment and Reasonable accommodation
- Effective communications - auxiliary aids and services

Hingham must comply with the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design as well as the MAAB Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (521 CMR). The basis for the Self-Evaluation is Civil Rights Legislation.

D. West discussed the law's intent regarding accessible facilities. Generally, when things are altered, they have to be brought into compliance with the more stringent 2010 code.

Building/Facility Report - Key accessibility issues for buildings include: entrance locations, exits, vertical circulation, interior layout and functions.

The Building/Facility Catalog is a database of photos and measurements of areas or things not in compliance.

Strategies for Facilities Report - Ensure accessibility to programs, services and activities in old buildings:

- Relocate program, service, or activity within the current facility
- Relocate the program, service and/or activities to another facility
- Renovation of the facility to ensure access to programs, services and activities

Hingham Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan

Municipal Buildings - Town Hall

Presented by Megan Dufresne, Project Manager for the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD)

This presentation is accessible through Harbor Media for those not in attendance.

M. Dufresne described the challenges to surveying the Town Hall. Consultants met with members of the Commission on Disabilities as well as the Council on Aging to learn what did and did not work for accessibility. High points of inaccessible areas were surveyed and photographed.

This same process was used for other buildings and is described in detail in the reports <https://hingham-ma.gov/1028/ADA-Self-Evaluation-and-Transition-Plan> .

M. Dufresne noted that in some cases the Town goes beyond the minimum ADA requirement.

Town Hall - Best Practice and Inclusive Design

She shared photos and maps of additional accessible parking spaces, a Senior Center Sign and Drop-off Area lacking signage. She discussed a clear method for designating meeting locations and the Wayfinding Study.

East Elementary School

- Accessible route to gardens
 - More strict requirements for routes to and around the playground and to soccer field
 - Unprotected pipes and protruding object (wheelchair user could burn legs on hot pipes)
- A new school would be required to have an illuminated sign with the international symbol of accessibility.

Outdoor Access

M. Dufresne shared photographs:

- Accessible route to Carlson Field practice area
- Edge protection at Barnes Wharf dock
- Accessible route to play elements at Powers Field
- Accessible picnic table at Bradley Wood Park (wheelchair user to site there)
- Mill street/North Street accessible parking space
- Accessible parking at Station Street
- Accessible team seating at Cronin Field

GIS Report - GIS Dashboard

- GIS data was exported to an Excel spreadsheet for everyone
 - Areas surveyed included Hingham Center, Town Hall, downtown Hingham
- Issues were highlighted.

Web Site Report

- Town site requires readers download Adobe Acrobat Reader though most documents are not .pdf format
 - The site is not designed for persons who use screen readers

Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan

IHCD submitted a Self-Evaluation report, an Executive Summary of findings, spreadsheets of all of the issues, and catalogs which they exported for use by Hingham as a live document (Transition Plan Spreadsheets). This spreadsheet details priorities recommended by IHCD for each renovation.

Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan Goals

- All programs, services, and activities when viewed in their entirety are readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities
- Priority of ensuring "program access" with the goal of equal participation for persons with disabilities
- Implementation of this strategy should be integrated into Town planning and budgeting

M. Dufresne shared photographs of good examples in Hingham of accessibility compliance for all.

ADA Coordinator, Art Robert recognized Bill Ramsey, Select Board member in attendance. The Select Board and the public schools teams are very interested in this project. We completed a web site conversion over the life of this project. We entered into a contract for a new scanner with .pdf conversion capability. The Recreation Commission presented a plan to completely rehaul a field with a poured rubber surface. People in charge at the schools addressed items immediately when reports became available. This Self-Evaluation has given the Town a platform to work from.

Questions & Answers

Stephanie Gertz	Q: What is the grievance procedure and how is it publicized? She recommended the procedure be posted to the Commission on Disabilities web page.
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Art Robert	A: The procedure is the means for residents or staff to communicate concerns. Understand there is a timeline. We need to be sure it is visible to different audiences by posting paper and web site posting.
Diane DeNapoli	Q: What is the timeline when the Transition Plan will be voted on for the grant season?
Art Robert	A: The Plan will be before the Select Board within the month. Each department will look at budgets. The Plan will be confirmed for this Warrant Season.
Jane McGrath	Q: Are parking areas found to be deficient privately owned or Town operated lots? If private, does the Town have leverage to make parking more accessible?
David West	A: IHCD looked only at Town, public locations. He does not know if there are any Title II obligations for the public at private lots.
Art Robert	A: Privately owned parking lots fall under purview of the Building Commissioner. He speaks with private owners about inadequate parking.
Claire Fabrizio	Q: Stop 'n Shop has accessible parking but not access from the public sidewalk to the private parking lot. A landscape hedge prevents access to the parking lot for someone in a wheelchair. Who is responsible to make an accessible route from the public sidewalk to the parking lot and to the building? There is a similar inaccessibility to CVS from the sidewalk.
David West	A: The Town should work with the private entity to remedy the accessibility.
Art Robert	A: He will speak with the Building Commissioner regarding where the public property ends and private property begins.
Jane McGrath	Q: To the extent the Town is non-compliant or is allowed to be non-compliant, does this jeopardize any Federal funding because the Town has not addressed these issues?
Megan Dufresne	A: Because you have a Transition Plan, the Town is more protected now than before.
David West	A 3-5 year plan is recommended for implementation by the Dept. of Justice.

A. Robert reviewed the Next Steps timeline:

- Having completed the public hearing, input has been collected
- Work with IHCD to finalize the draft Transition Plan documents
- Present Transition Plan documents to the Select Board for consideration and acceptance
- Once approved, we will look to implement low cost items to start
- For larger projects, we will look at grant funding opportunities
- For larger projects, we may look at capital funding
- We will take deficiencies into account to address accessibility concerns as we consider new projects (roadway repair, sidewalks, improving fields, play spaces)
- As we work on the list, we'll be improving the quality of life for all residents

Adjourn

MOTION: J. McGrath moved to close the Public Hearing and adjourn the meeting at 8:27 pm.

SECONDED: S. Allen
ROLL CALL VOTE: S. Allen, aye; M. Baker, aye; S. Gertz, aye; J. McGrath, aye; A. Robert, aye.
Unanimous.
MOTION CARRIES: 5-0

Respectfully submitted,

Dale Michaud
Recording Secretary