

2016 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES

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Commissioners: Paul Remy (Chair), Susan Friedman (Vice-Chairperson and Secretary), Geila Aronson (Treasurer), Susan Myerson, Jana Katz, Lois Diamond, Peter Melvin, and Amy Karas

The Commission on Disabilities met nine times in 2016, and worked on numerous projects to increase accessibility for Sharon residents with disabilities. Many of the projects are not completed, so the Commission will continue working on them in 2017,

Projects that the Commission has worked on in 2016;

1. Town Hall accessibility project: Commission members attended the May Town Meeting to support the Town's proposed accessibility project for making Town Hall accessible. Due to Chairperson Paul Remy's speech impediment, Vice-Chairperson Jana Katz read his statement about the importance and the Town's legal obligation, under the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines, to make that facility accessible. But despite this, several town residents pulled the Town Hall accessibility project item for further discussion. The project has two parts; making Town Hall accessible and the design phase of the facility and the existing fire station, which will become vacant when the new public safety facility is completed, ADA compliant. A majority of town residents voted on an amendment for doing the \$600,000 design phase first, hoping to save money on the project.

The Town hired an architectural firm in September. Town Administrator Fred Turkington informed the Commission that the architect's report will be completed in February. Two proposals, (making the current Town Hall accessible and constructing a new structure), are going to be presented to town voters at May's 2017 Town Meeting. The Commission is planning to make an educational video on both options, and the video will be aired on SCTV before Town Meeting.

2. At Town Meeting, Sharon residents approved the Capital Gain proposal for renovating Ames Street Playground. The renovations include making it Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Commission members were instrumental in assisting two Boy Scouts, Noah and Ryan Rosenthal, develop Eagle Scout projects for helping to increase the playground's accessibility. Noah will be involved in the construction of an accessible gaga pit, and his brother, Ryan, is going to be building an accessible picnic table. Their grandfather was Dr. Sydney Rosenthal who helped established the Sharon Commission on Disabilities and served as its Chairperson for 17 years. Like their grandfather, both Noah and Ryan are extremely compassionate about helping people with disabilities.
3. Town Engineer Peter O'Cain, Jeff Dougon from the Massachusetts Office on Disability, and Chairperson Paul Remy met at the Sharon Train Station on August 2nd. According to

Jeff's letter, which he wrote after the meeting, the Commission probably can have the MBTA install a curb ramp near the accessible platform on the Providence side, which would be an ideal drop off/pickup point.

Paul wrote the General Manager, Laura Brelsford, of the MBTA and asked her if her agency could install a curb ramp. Ms. Brelsford responded saying the MBTA is willing to put one in, but currently does not have the funding to do so. However, she would give the Town of Sharon permission to install a curb ramp despite the fact that the MBTA owns the property on the Providence side. Town Engineer Peter O'Cain informed the Commission he will talk with a couple of designers who are experts in this area, but he also noted that installing a curb ramp, which would need to meet the MBTA guidelines, would be expensive, and the town also lacks the funding.

4. The Commission expressed appreciation to Town Administrator Fred Turkington, who is also the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, for his and the town's efforts for installing a temporary ramp at Town Hall. The ramp made it possible for wheelchair and scooter users to participate in early voting. Following the election, Chairperson Paul Remy contacted Town Clerk Marline Chused and asked how many wheelchair and scooter users voted early. She did not know the exact number, but stated that there were many, including Paul who uses a wheelchair.

Commission members wondered if the temporary ramp could stay permanent. Mr. Turkington stated that it might be inadequate for the winter weather. If it was, the Town Hall still needs an elevator enabling wheelchair and scooter users, as well people who have difficulty walking, to get to the second floor. In addition, the facility needs other renovations, such as accessible bathrooms and handicapped signage, to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines.

Mr. Remy also asked Ms. Chused how many voters used the voting machine specifically designed for people with disabilities, especially those with sight impairments. She noted there were none, and added that voters with disabilities preferred to have someone to help them. It occurred to Mr. Remy that they may not know and/or felt uncomfortable using the machine. Perhaps the Commission could educate voters how to operate the voting machine a couple of months before the next election.

5. The Commission awarded a \$1,000 Leslie Kriger Memorial Scholarship to a Sharon High School senior with a disability. He used the funds to help pay for his tuition at Fitchburg College.
6. The Commission and Sharon Community Television are developing a TV show, "Inclusion Matters", concerning disability issues. Plans are to have three 30-minute shows per year. We are hoping that the first show will be aired in January or February of 2017.

7. The Town of Sharon is developing a new traffic pattern for Post Office Square. A Sharon resident, who is a wheelchair user, contacted Chairperson Remy and informed him that she and other wheelchair, as well as scooter users, often do not have enough time for crossing South Main Street before traffic lights change. In addition, drivers taking right turns at red lights almost hit them. This nearly happened to Chairperson Remy, a power wheelchair driver, this past summer. Chairperson Remy forwarded all of the information to Town Engineer Peter O’Cain who is involved in designing the new traffic pattern. The Commission and Sharon residents with disabilities, hope that the town is able to implement the new traffic pattern, which will include slow changing traffic lights, at Post Office Square in 2017.
8. Several years ago, the Adult Center purchased some equipment for an Assistive Listening system, which enables people who are hard of hearing to participate in meetings, conferences, and social events. The center has insufficient funding for purchasing the remaining equipment needed to make the system operational. Commission members are still waiting to learn the cost for the additional needed devices before determining if the Commission has sufficient funds to purchase them.
9. Sharon Greens condominium complex has only one handicapped parking space, which is near the office. A Sharon Green resident contacted Mr. Remy to determine if the 180 unit housing development is obligated under the ADA to put in more handicapped parking for residents. Since the complex is privately own, Mr. Remy did not know. Therefore, he referred the woman to the Massachusetts Office on Disabilities.
10. Commission member Jana Katz began looking into the possibility for the Commission to host a training seminar for public safety professionals to work with people with disabilities. The Commission hopes to have such an event within the next couple of years.
11. The Commission had no fundraisers during 2016 and did not receive much funding from the handicapped parking ticket program. As of December 15, 2016, the Commission’s budget is:

Handicapped parking ticket fund:	\$ 2,929.57
Donations:	\$ 1,901.97
General fund	\$ 500.00

	\$ 5,331.54
12. Chanie Minkowitz resigned from the Commission in October due to family commitments and her job. She is hopeful she can help the Commission as a non-member on future projects. The Commission will miss Chanie.

13. Susan Friedman joined the Commission in June. Being enthusiastic, she wanted to be nominated for Vice-Chairperson as well as Secretary, and she was voted for unanimously, to serve both positions.