

Commission for Accessibility

Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 7, 2024 5:00PM
Via Zoom

In Attendance: Michael Londrigan, Tony Phillips, Christine Santori, Debbie Prieger, Maureen Culhane, Debra Franceschini, Jeff Doyle, Holly Lapine, Antonio Paone, Don Ciota

Note: This Meeting includes 1 MOTION.

5:00 PM Call to Order

Approval of Minutes

MOTION 1: To approve the CfA Meeting Minutes from September 9, 2024

Motion made by Michael.

Seconded by Christine.

Passed Unanimously.

Public Comment

(moved to later in the program to accommodate our guest speaker.)

Guest Speaker: Holly Lapine, Education and Access Specialist, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum; and Antonio Paone.

Introduction: Founded by art collector and fashion designer Larry Aldrich in 1964, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum is one of the oldest contemporary art museums in the United States. The Museum is

one of the few independent non-collecting institutions in the country and the only museum in Connecticut solely dedicated to the presentation of contemporary art.

The Museum presents the first solo museum exhibitions by emerging artists, significant exhibitions of established and mid-career artists whose work is under recognized, thematic group exhibitions exploring topics on contemporary art and society, and newly commissioned work.

Holly described the Museum's community outreach initiative in making the programs available to persons with disabilities, the aging, youth and others who may not be taking advantage of the resourceful offerings of this renowned facility. The use of multidisciplinary presentations allows persons with vision, hearing, and tactile disabilities to experience art as an enjoyable and healing experience. She also described physical access to their facility and grounds as being fully accessible.

Mentioned were numerous access partners from the community and a growing list of additional partners to help achieve the goal of widespread community participation, especially for underserved groups. Other considerations include costs for admission, which may be a factor limiting access for these groups. Antonio mentioned new multi-lingual signage as an additional way of reaching out to the community. He also mentioned outreach programs aimed at the alternate high school, teen programs and intergenerational programs.

In answer to a question by Christine, Holly said access partners were selected based upon the shared belief in the healing nature of art, population, willingness, location and transportation. Christine suggested Sphere, Ability and Special Olympics as possible candidates for participation. Debra F. suggested the Commission on Aging as a resource for that population.

Upon conclusion the Commission complemented the Museum for their fine efforts at accessibility and outreach. Such initiatives add to the

mosaic of community caring and support for those who may not otherwise be able to participate in such a joyful life activity.

Public Comment

Michael reports he has not received a response from the landlord at 80 Grove Street regarding the absence of designated handicap parking spaces at that location. This was the second letter sent on this issue.

He also mentioned the shortcomings of accessibility at the Barlow school athletic field. A letter he sent on this issue has not been answered.

Debbie asked about the advisability of personal contact with a landlord or business owner, which Tony answered by agreeing that was an excellent first step as these laws encourage community discussion.

Service Animals under ADA and Connecticut Law

This discussion will include Service Animals, Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) (otherwise referred to as therapy, comfort or companion animals), and Psychiatric Service Animals.

Many people with disabilities use a service animal in order to fully participate in everyday life. Dogs can be trained to perform many important tasks to assist people with disabilities, such as providing stability for a person who has difficulty walking, picking up items for a person who uses a wheelchair, preventing a child with autism from wandering away, or alerting a person who has hearing loss when someone is approaching from behind.

What does the ADA recognize as a service animal?

Under the ADA, a service animal is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability, including, but not limited to, guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to intruders or sounds,

Does the ADA require service animals to be professionally trained?

A. No. People with disabilities have the right to train the dog themselves and are not required to use a professional service dog training program

Can someone ask me for papers on my service dog?

You are not allowed to:

Request any documentation that the dog is registered, licensed, or certified as a service animal.

Require that the dog demonstrate its task, or inquire about the nature of the person's disability.

How can I tell if an animal is really a service animal:

- Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

Are emotional support, therapy, comfort, or companion animals considered service animals under the ADA?

No. These terms are used to describe animals that provide comfort just by being with a person. Because they have not been trained to perform a specific job or task, they do not qualify as service animals under the ADA. However, some State or local governments have laws that allow people to take emotional support animals into public places. You may check with your State and local government agencies to find out about these laws.

If someone's dog calms them when having an anxiety attack, does this qualify as a service animal?

It depends. The ADA makes a distinction between psychiatric service animals and emotional support animals. If the dog has been trained to sense that an anxiety attack is about to happen and take a specific action to help avoid the attack or lessen its impact, that would qualify as a service animal. However, if the dog's mere presence provides comfort, that would not be considered a service animal under the ADA.

ADA and Connecticut Public Law:

- [psychiatric service animals](#), which help their handlers manage mental and emotional disabilities and might be trained, for example, to do one or more of the following:
 - interrupt self-harming behaviors
 - remind handlers to take medication
 - check spaces for intruders, or

- provide calming pressure during anxiety or panic attacks
- seizure alert animals, which let their handlers know of impending seizures, and might also guard their handlers during seizure activity, and
- allergen alert animals, which let their handlers know of foods or other substances that could be dangerous (such as peanuts).

Neither Connecticut law nor the ADA covers "emotional support animals" (ESAs), which aren't trained to perform specific tasks related to their handler's disabilities. Instead, the presence of an ESA provides a sense of safety, companionship, and comfort to those with psychiatric or emotional conditions.

Although these animals often have therapeutic benefits, your right to bring your ESA into public places in Connecticut isn't protected by state or federal law. Your right to bring your pet to such places also isn't protected by law.

A special thanks to Jeff, who shared with the Commission an experience he described, which prompted the preparation of this subject matter.

In conclusion in addition to its charter assignment of advising the BOS, the Commission seeks to educate the public on issues regarding accessibility. The information we disseminate is meant to help not only persons with disabilities, their families, and the general public, but also business entities that may want to learn more about their responsibilities under the various disability laws.

6:35 PM Adjourn

Meeting Dates for 2024:

Minutes prepared by Don Ciota, Chairman