



**Commission for Accessibility
Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 10, 2025**

Meeting Via Zoom

In Attendance: Debbie, Pregor, Michael Londrigan Debra Franceschini, Divya Dorairrajan, Tony Phillips, Don Ciota.

5:03 PM CALL TO ORDER

N.B. There were two motions made during this session.

MOTION: To approve CfA minutes from January 13, 2024 meeting.

Motion by Michael, Second by Debbie
APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

MOTION: To accept the invitation from the Ridgefield Public Schools to Participate in the Second Annual Transition Fair to be held FROM 6:00-8:00PM at the high school on Thursday, March 13, 2025.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Our two guests, Debra Franceschini, Chair of the Affordable Housing Committee, and Debra Dorairrajan, asked questions about the town wide self-assessment, which was conducted in compliance with ADA mandates, the school's Transition Program, and availability of closed captioning on Zoom meetings. In response to Debra's question about the town wide assessment document, known as the transition plan, is available online and at town hall. It was added that the file is very large to download, but a hard copy can be reviewed at town hall.

In answer to Divya's question about the school's Transition Program, an explanation was given how children with disabilities are often diagnosed as early as birth and receive appropriate specialized therapy provided by CT social services until age 3 when the CT public school system assumes this responsibility. As these students approach the aging-out phase, which can be ages 22-23, the Transition Program seeks to emphasize skill sets and achievements to prepare them for a happy life in which they can be as independent as their abilities will allow.

Divya also ask about the availability of closed captioning on Zoom. Upon this request, Tony turned on this feature. Such a feature would make Zoom meetings accessible to persons with hearing disabilities.

Robert's Rules of Order & ADA-Accessible Voting.

"Robert's Rules of Order" was first published in 1876 by U.S. Army Brigadier General Henry Martyn Robert, who developed the rules after a frustrating experience leading a church meeting where he lacked knowledge of proper parliamentary procedure; he decided to codify the practices used in the U.S. House of Representatives to create a guide for regular

organizations, ensuring fair participation and orderly discussion during meetings, with the goal of preventing chaos and allowing everyone a chance to be heard.

The basic principles behind *Robert's Rules of Order* are:

- Someone has to facilitate or direct the discussion and keep order.
- All members of the group have the right to bring up ideas, discuss them, and come to a conclusion.
- Members should come to an agreement about what to do.
- Members should understand that the majority rules, but the rights of the minority are always protected by assuring them the right to speak.

Basic Principals of Parliamentary Procedure:

- Take up business one item at a time.
- Promote courtesy, justice impartiality, and equality.
- The majority rules, but the rights of individual, minority, and absent members are protected.

CfA – Voting procedure for Persons with Disabilities under the ADA and Robert's Rules of Order

Question: During a town meeting conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order, the chair calls for a voice vote. But one

individual, who has a speech-related disability, objects and requests a paper ballot vote. How can this be handled by the chair in consideration of ADA requirements?

Under **Robert's Rules of Order** and the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**, the chair should accommodate the individual's request to ensure equal participation. Here's how the chair can handle this situation properly:

1. **Acknowledge the Request** – The chair should recognize the individual's concern and state that accommodations will be made.
2. **Allow for a Paper Ballot Vote** – Under Robert's Rules, a voice vote is a common method, but if any member requests a different method (such as a paper ballot, raising hands, standing, etc.), the chair should consider accommodating that request for the entire assembly. If the rules of the body require a motion and a second for a ballot vote, the chair can invite a motion or propose an alternative accessible method.
3. **Use an Alternative Method** – If a paper ballot is not feasible or efficient, the chair could suggest another accessible voting method, such as:
 - Raising hands (if the individual can do so)
 - Written submission (if they can write or use assistive technology)
 - Electronic voting (if available)
 - Another reasonable accommodation that ensures equal participation
4. **Ensure ADA Compliance** – The ADA requires that public meetings provide reasonable accommodations to

individuals with disabilities. The chair should ensure the voting method chosen allows the individual to participate fully and fairly.

5. **Follow the Organization's Rules** – If the organization's bylaws specify a procedure for changing the voting method, the chair should follow that process while still ensuring accessibility.

By making this accommodation, the chair upholds **both parliamentary procedure and federal disability rights laws**, ensuring fairness and inclusivity in the meeting.

Follow-up Question:

If the chair offers to allow this individual alone to use a paper ballot, would that violate the intent of ADA by unnecessarily calling attention to a person with a disability?

The **singling out the individual** by allowing only them to use a paper ballot could violate the intent of the **ADA** by unnecessarily calling attention to their disability. The **ADA requires reasonable accommodations that integrate individuals with disabilities in a way that does not stigmatize or isolate them.**

A better approach would be for the **entire group** to vote by paper ballot, ensuring equal treatment and maintaining confidentiality. If switching to a full paper ballot is not feasible, the chair should consider another **inclusive method** that does not highlight the individual's disability, such as:

- Using **anonymous electronic voting** (if available)

- Offering **written ballots for all** without drawing attention to the individual
- Suggesting **a standard alternative voting method** that everyone can use (e.g., raising hands, standing, or another pre-established method)

The key principle is that accommodations should be provided in a way that is seamless and does not unnecessarily spotlight or segregate the individual with a disability.

6:05 PM ADJOURN

2025 Meeting Dates

Mar 10

Apr 7

July n/a

Oct 6

May 12

Aug n/a

Nov 10

June 9

Sept 8

Dec 8

*All meetings are Via Zoom on Monday of the dates above at 5:00 PM.

Minutes by Don Ciota