

**Commission for Accessibility
Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 8, 2024**

Meeting Via Zoom

In Attendance: Maureen Culhane, Michael Londrigan, Dave Choplinski, Christine Santori, Tony Phillips, Don Ciota

Guests: Debra Franceschini, Andrea Beebe

Call to Order: 5:00 PM

Public Comment and Follow up on Private Parking Issue:

This section of our meeting was opened by our visitors, who voiced concerns over handicapped parking spots in town. The discussion was twofold, first about compliance, and second about adequacy of spaces. Andrea has spoken with Police Chief Jeffery Kreitz, who discussed procedures that can be employed to monitor compliance. On other occasions Chief Kreitz has been mentioned in these meetings. His responses to questions regarding parking have been characterized as very supportive of enforcing handicapped parking compliance.

At this point the Chair asked Commissioner Michael to relate the progress on an initiative he began in December regarding the lack of sufficient handicapped parking spaces in a series of stores on Danbury Road. Michael wrote to the owner of the property, who responded to say he will be adding a space to complement the existing one. Due to the weather this will probably be done in the Spring. The Commission views this response as a positive note in the quest of educating the public to the mandates of the ADA.

Michael also related to another seemingly common issue regarding handicapped parking, this time at an establishment on Grove Street. Although a handicapped spot exists in the parking lot, a car parked in the striped area thereby precluding use of a vehicle's side wheelchair ramp. The offending car was moved after an announcement inside the facility, but it was noticed the car's owner parked in the same spot after the vehicle with the wheelchair ramp was leaving.

The Commission finds variance of responses to the above two instances of substance with regard to how the non-handicapped public perceives their legal responsibilities to comply with the law, let alone how some show understanding while others ignore, or even show hostility.

Debra brought up a letter written by the chair concerning the expansion of outdoor eating areas during the pandemic, including sidewalks and handicapped parking spaces. These spaces are required by the Act to be in the most accessible spot to a facility, which makes them a desirable and tempting location to add outdoor dining. The Commission forwarded its comment to the Planning and Zoning Commission on this issue:

(please scroll to the next page)

Marc Anthony Gallucci, Esq
<marcanthony@cdr-ct.org>
Rgfid - Tony Phillips
<socialservices@ridgefieldct.org>
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PLANNING & ZONING
COMMISSION

Alice Dew, PZ Director

Hi Alice,

Thank you for your interest in this topic. Tony Phillips has forwarded me the previous correspondence and I would like to make some additional comments for your consideration.

I cannot add to the articulate responses already submitted by Tony and Marc Anthony Gallucci on this sequence. Outdoor dining, initiated during the pandemic, provided a pleasurable relief to patrons at a time when gathering in confined places was restricted. It also helped the businesses to survive, while providing for local employment, all good things. In the time since outdoor dining became prevalent, this Commission has heard comments from the public and discussed the impact of the use of public access space for outdoor dining, the mandates of CT building code, and those of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Commission takes no position for or against the concept of outdoor dining due to its belief this is a public policy issue not within our venue. We do, however, have concerns as to how individual establishments configure these areas and how some were seemingly at odds with mandated paths of access as required by the acts mentioned above. For example, tables set up on narrow sidewalks precluding persons using mobility devices from passing; tables set up on wide sidewalks that "migrate" during the course of an afternoon or evening, restricting or eliminating passage; handicapped parking spaces eliminated or moved from their designed positions to less or non-accessible spots.

I respectfully suggest such issues as mentioned here be addressed by Planning & Zoning when considering local guidelines for outdoor dining, or any other uses of public access space. Although ADA mandates are enforceable only by the Department of Justice, as Tony has pointed out, the town can enforce local building code, which is generally concordant with the ADA, even on private property used for public access. The granting of the use of outdoor space for dining is a privilege that satisfies both patrons and businesses, but one that does come with a cost. That cost should be a policy that includes monitoring and enforcement by the town and the education and

cooperation of the businesses. Perhaps it should be considered that our town's experience with outdoor dining, born as a result of the pandemic, has in this instance yielded a positive and pleasurable experience. Now is the time to set the parameters so that the spirit of these laws and handicapped access can realized.

Yours truly,

Don

Don Ciota, Chairman
Commission for Accessibility
Town of Ridgefield

The Public Comment session concluded with a continued discussion by the Commission to formulate a form letter that can be sent to businesses about whom residents have voiced concerns about accessibility, including parking. The Chair has asked its members to suggest ideas and wording for such a project.

Update up on School Transition Fair

Last month the Commission discussed the planned Ridgefield Schools Transition Plan, which is scheduled to occur the evening of March 6. A telephone call has been scheduled between the Chair and the Transition Fair coordinator, Jessica DiValentino to discuss how the Commission may assist in this function.

Update on progress on Town Wide Transition Plan

This will be the main topic at our next meeting on February 12.

Discussion on U.S. Access Board.

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The U.S. Access Board

The U.S. Access Board is an independent federal agency that promotes equality for people with disabilities through leadership in accessible design and development of accessibility guidelines and standards. Created in 1973 to ensure access to federally funded facilities, the Access Board is now a leading source of information on accessibility design.

The Access Board develops and maintains design criteria for the built environment, transit vehicles, public right-of-way, information and communication technology, and medical diagnostic equipment under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other laws. It provides technical assistance and training on these requirements and on accessible design, and continues to enforce accessibility standards that apply to federally funded facilities under the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA).

History of the U.S. Access Board

1968. The Architectural Barriers Act (ABA).

This is the first federal law to address accessibility. It requires access to facilities supported by public funds and applies to state and local governments, and private industry.

1973. The Access Board is Created.

The Board is charged with ensuring federal agency compliance with the ABA standards.

1978. Major Changes to the Access Board.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1978 expanded the Board's mandate including guidelines to establish minimum levels of accessibility, to provide technical assistance on the removal of barriers, as well as communication barriers.

1982 The Access Board publishes Minimum Guidelines for Design.

These were the first comprehensive set of accessibility requirements established by the federal government.

1990. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Expands the Access Board's Mission.

This is a comprehensive measure to protect the rights of people with disabilities. It bans discrimination based on disability in the private sector and in state and local governments. It also authorizes the Board to conduct research to support and maintain its guidelines in the private and public sectors covered by the ADA.

1991 The Access Board Publishes ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG).

ADAAG is a set of standards that provides guidelines for making buildings, facilities, and other elements accessible to individuals with disabilities. The significance of this lies in promoting equal access and opportunities for people with disabilities in various aspects of public life.

Meeting Dates for 2024:

	February 12	March 11
April 8	May 6	June 10
July (none)	August (none)	September 9
October 7	November 18	December 9

Adjourn: 6:30 PM

Minutes prepared by Don Ciota, Chairman