

2019 Annual Report of the Sharon Commission on Disabilities

Commissioners: Paul Remy (Chairperson), Geila Aronson (Treasurer), Susan Myerson, Richard Seronick, Lois Diamond, Marcie Ostrow, and Asma Abdullah

The Sharon Commission on Disabilities met ten times in 2019 and the Commission had another productive year:

1. In 2006, the Commission opposed the installation of the brick sidewalks in the area adjacent to the Town offices. Commission members met with the Board of Selectmen and informed them that such sidewalks would be detrimental to wheelchair/scooter users and people with walking impairments. The Selectmen rejected the Commission's concerns and approved the installation of the tumble brick sidewalks. At that time, these sidewalks met the ADA regulations.

Chairperson Paul Remy thought that the Commission could not do anything to rectify the brick sidewalk situation, because it met the regulations of the ADA. But based on statements from two fellow Commission members, Lois Diamond and Amy Karas, concerning the conditions and potential dangers of these sidewalks, Paul felt that this matter needed further investigation to determine if anything could be done. Therefore, he wrote to the Massachusetts Office on Disability for advice. That organization informed him that in 2014 the Massachusetts Architectural Board decided to make tumbled brick sidewalks non-ADA compliant because other communities, such as Boston, were having similar problems.

Armed with this information, Paul wrote a letter in March to Town Administrator Fred Turkington, who is also the Town's ADA Coordinator. Mr. Turkington forwarded the letter to the Board of Selectmen and the Sharon Standard Building Committee. As a result, the Town received state funding to replace the brick sidewalks with cement ones in the area adjacent to Town offices.

2. In June, the Commission awarded \$1,500 to the Sharon Special Education Parents Advisory Committee, to purchase kits with helpful tools for students with special needs in Sharon's six schools. Some items in these kits, for example, are helping students with anxiety disorders so they can study and can participate in mainstream classrooms more effectively.
3. Asma Abdullah, a new Commission member, suggested that the Commission should participate in Square Jam. Participating in this event was a very good idea; it helped educate Sharonites about what the Commission is doing to increase the accessibility in the Town of Sharon. The Commission's table had candy, which attracted many youngsters! This was a good strategy because it made them indirectly aware of the

disability community. When those youngsters get older, such awareness could encourage some of them to work with, or help, people with disabilities. Commission members also distributed information on local agencies and services available for people with disabilities. Two people expressed interest in helping or joining the Commission.

Commission members displayed a communication card, which we got from the Massachusetts Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, to help people with hearing impairments to communicate with law enforcement officials. After the Square Jam, the Commission sent an interested woman the communication card.

4. In October, Paul Remy gave a speech about the Commission at a Sharon Men's Club meeting. He wrote the speech and, because of his speech impairment, Susan Myerson, a fellow Commission member, read it. There were about 100 attendees at the meeting, and the meeting, and the speech were well received.
5. In November, Architect Kevin Paton, who designed the new Town Hall, gave two Commission members, Richard Seronick and Paul Remy, a tour of the facility. They were impressed with its accessibility features.

Not only does the elevator transport wheelchair and scooter users from one floor to another floor, but when the buttons are pressed outside of the elevator, a voice synthesizer tells riders what floor they are on, and when riders press buttons inside the elevator, the audible system informs them which floor they are going to. This is helpful especially for visually impaired individuals. In addition, the Town Hall's meeting room has an assistive listening system so that people who are hard of hearing are now able to participate in Town meetings. The new state-of-the-art facility is fully inclusive and is making it possible for Sharon residents with disabilities, to be fully involved in the town government. Some of the disabled individuals now have the opportunity to work in the new facility and serve as elected town officials.

Three Commission members, Susan Myerson, Geila Aronson, and Paul Remy attended the dedication of the new Town Hall.

6. A HESSCO representative attended the October Commission meeting. HESSCO provides health and related services to senior citizens in Sharon and in 11 neighboring communities. The representative informed Commission members that the organization also has a program, which is underutilized, for people with disabilities, who are younger than 60, and their families.

In April, HESSCO is going to have a symposium on mental health. Marcie Ostrow, a new Commission member, suggested Commission members should attend the event, and everyone agreed with her.

7. In December, Marcie contacted the COA to determine if *the View*, the COA's newsletter, could publish an article related to a disability issue on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. The first such piece is going to be published in *the View's* February, 2020 issue.
8. Commission members Richard, Geila, and Paul attended the November 4 Town Meeting. Paul wrote a statement (read by Jana Katz, a former Commission member) to express the Commission's support for building a new High School. The new facility will benefit students and faculty members with disabilities because it is going to be ADA accessible. In addition, Paul noted that the larger school will better serve as an emergency shelter for Sharon residents of all ages with and without disabilities.
9. Paul was on the Master Plan's Public Health subcommittee. One of his suggestions was to provide information at local health fairs about how people, of all ages with disabilities can get better healthcare. Asma suggested that the Commission should host a health fair. The Commission is considering having such an event in October of 2020.
10. The Commission awarded a Sharon High senior with special needs The Leslie Kriger Memorial Scholarship for \$1,000. He used the scholarship to help finance his college education.
11. The Select Board appointed Marcie Ostrow and Asma Abdullah to the Commission.
12. Susan Friedman and Amy Karas resigned from the Commission in November of this year. The Commission is actively recruiting two additional Commission members.
13. The Commission is doing well financially:

Handicapped parking ticket fund:	\$ 12,498.17
Donations:	\$ 1,227.97
General fund	\$ 451.93

	\$ 14,178.07

The Commission presently has \$14,178.07, which is an increase of \$1,734.85 from December, 2018. The increase in revenue is because the Sharon Police Department issued more tickets for illegally parking in handicapped spots, and the money went to the Commission. Funds from the handicapped parking ticket program are used to purchase equipment and services for increasing accessibility and inclusion for people of ages with disabilities in the Town of Sharon.

