

## 2021 Annual Report of the Sharon Commission on Disabilities

Commissioners: Paul Remy (Chairperson), Susan Friedman (Vice-Chairperson), Geila Aronson (Treasurer), James Newton (Secretary), Susan Myerson, Ruth Beckerman, Lois Diamond, Asma Abdullah, and Todd Arnold

The Sharon Commission on Disabilities had 10 Zoom meetings and another productive year despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. The Commission sent questions to the League of Women Voters to ask the Sharon School Committee candidates how, if elected, they would help students with disabilities.
2. The Town of Sharon has 14 brick crosswalks. They are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). When bricks are worn and cracked, they become dangerous to people with mobility impairments and women walking on high heels. And damaged brick crosswalks are also unfriendly to wheelchair and scooter users. The Town only had enough funds to replace four of the brick crosswalks with asphalt.

Town Engineer Peter O'Cain asked the Sharon Commission on Disabilities which four crosswalks need replacing first. Ruth Beckerman, a new Commission member, took pictures of the 14 crosswalks. Then the Commission examined the photos and concluded that the crosswalks on Main Street to East Street, Chestnut Street (by Town Hall), Main Street to Chestnut Street (CVS/Town Hall Parking Lot to Wilber School Apts), East Chestnut Street, and Chestnut Street need to be replaced first, because they are the most hazardous. Mr. O'Cain expected that those four crosswalks would be replaced in the summer of 2021, However, the contractor did not come to Sharon to replace them. The good news is that the Town of Sharon received a \$329,55 grant in December from MassDOT, for replacing all 14 crosswalks.

In addition, Ruth Beckerman informed the Town Engineer that the timing on the crossing lights did not give wheelchair and scooter users enough time for crossing the street. He had the timing on the crossing lights lengthen from 24 to 30 seconds. Following Ruth Beckerman's recommendation, Mr. O'Cain also had digital countdown-style pedestrian signal crossing lights installed, in the Town's center, to replace the old ones. The Commission thanked Ruth and Mr. O'Cain for making crossing the street safer for people with and without disabilities.

3. In May, the Commission awarded a Sharon High senior with special needs, the \$1,000 Leslie Kriger Memorial Scholarship. She used the scholarship to help finance her college education.
4. The Commission collaborated with the Sharon Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee (SDEIC) to show the documentary, *Crip Camp*. This Netflix documentary is about disability activists, many of them met at a camp in New York, who fought for civil rights for people with disabilities, and the passing of laws, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). After showing the film, Commission member James Newton and SDEIC Chairperson Kiana Pierre-Louis, who were instrumental in organizing the event, lead an informative and insightful discussion about *Crip Camp* and the impact it has today.

5. The Commission purchased 20 clear window face masks, costing \$182.77, for Sharon special educators and speech pathologists. Such masks make it possible for students with hearing impairments to read lips.
6. The Commission donated \$800 to the Sharon Special Education Parent Advisory Council to purchase essential items and equipment for students with special needs.
7. The Commission donated \$500 to Sharon's One Book, One Town organization. Both organizations are co-sponsoring an autobiographical play by David Harrell. David is an award-winning actor who was born without his right arm. His play is called *Navigating a Two-Handed World... Single-Handedly*, and his performance is going to be on April 10, 2022.
8. Ruth Beckerman noticed that the Town Hall's bench did not have arms, making it difficult for people with mobility impairments to sit down and get up. She informed Town Administrator Frederic Turkington, who is also the Town's ADA Coordinator, about the situation. Mr. Turkington stated that he will look into getting a bench with arms.
9. Gordon Gladstone, Chairperson of the Sharon Standing Building Committee, and Chris Blessen, the lead architect of the Sharon High School, attended the October Commission meeting. They informed Commission members that the new, universally designed school is going to be completely accessible to students and faculty members with disabilities. For example, the four classrooms where special needs students can go if they need additional help are not segregated in one area, but instead, are being placed throughout the facility. This fosters inclusion, allowing students with and without special needs to learn, study, work on school projects and play together. Accessible lunch tables will be located in different areas of the cafeteria so that students in wheelchairs can eat with their friends with and without disabilities. Special ed teachers were involved in the design of the building and choosing the furniture, colors, and textures. These well-thought-out details will help to have a calming effect on those students who suffer from anxiety. In addition, the ADA accessible High School is also going to serve as an emergency shelter.
10. James Newton and a Sharon disability advocate consulted with Peg Arguimbau, Chairperson of the Conservation Commission, to increase the accessibility on the Conservation's property. The Conservation Commission decided to adjust the signage height where possible, increase the amount of benches at appropriate locations, upgrade/improve/create an ADA accessible trail near the Griffin Playground incorporating the Massapoag Trail, and create King Philip's Rock trail to be ADA compliant.
11. Commission members wrote articles about disability issues for *The View*, the Sharon Adult Center's newsletter. Many senior citizens who read *The View* have minor or severe disabilities due to advanced age.
12. Richard Seronick resigned from the Commission.

13. The Select Board appointed Ruth Beckerman and Todd Arnold to the Commission.

14. The Commission is doing well financially:

Handicapped parking ticket fund:	\$ 14,898.17
Donations:	\$ 1,227.97
General fund	\$ 500.00

As of December 22, 2022, the Commission has \$16,626. Funds are used to purchase equipment and services for increasing accessibility and inclusion for people of all ages with disabilities, in the Town of Sharon.