

## 2023 Annual Report of the Sharon Commission on Disabilities (CoD)

Commissioners: Paul Remy (Chairperson), Susan Friedman (Vice-Chairperson), Geila Aronson (Treasurer), James Newton (Secretary), Susan Myerson, Lois Diamond, Todd Arnold, Rusty Callaway, and Select Board Liaison to CoD Hannah Switlekowski

The Sharon Commission on Disabilities had 9 meetings (four of them were in-person) and another productive year.

1. Christopher Blessen, the lead architect of the new Sharon High School, attended the February Commission meeting. Commission members informed him that the handicapped button at the school's main entrance should have clearer signage and be in Braille. The original button was replaced with a wave-handicapped button with proper signage and Braille.

Another concern the Commission had was that the Sharon Community Television's entrance did not have a handicapped button. For security reasons, SCTV informed the architect it decided to install a ring camera at the door. This way they can see who is at the door before deciding to open it.

2. The Commission was concerned about the High School's security and safety, especially if an active shooter enters the facility, for students with disabilities. Police Chief Coffey and Fire Chief Madden attended the March Commission Zoom meeting. They ensured Commission members that their departments went through training and followed protocols to safely protect and rescue students with special needs.
3. Commission members believed that they had an obligation to inform Town voters about the inaccessibility and safety of the old library. The Commission's Chairperson, Paul Remy, was stunned to learn that the facility's emergency exit was not accessible. People with disabilities, especially wheelchair and scooter users, would not be able to climb the three-step staircase to safety if there were a fire or another disaster. The facility's elevator is too small and the book isles are too narrow for wheelchairs and scooters. In addition, the Library size is not big enough for patrons with and without disabilities to study and work on projects together. Paul wrote a statement about the conditions at the non-ADA-compliant library. Due to his speech impairment, his personal care assistant read the statement at Town Meeting. On behalf of the Commission, his statement also encouraged town voters to approve the proposal for building the larger ADA-compliant Library.
4. A Sharon resident with a sight impairment attended the August Commission meeting. The resident stated that he and others with sight impairments are having difficulty navigating some sections of the brick sidewalks around the center of town, due to uneven bricks and other obstacles. Commission member, Rusty Callaway, took pictures of the brick sidewalks. He also discovered that the uneven bricks are problematic for wheelchair and scooter users to cross these sideways. Some sidewalks around Sharon Market are too narrow. And Angel's seating can gravitate onto the sidewalk. Rusty and the resident are writing a report concerning this issue.

5. Andrea, President of the Sharon Special Education Parents Advisory Committee (SSEPAC), asked the Commission if they wanted to collaborate on the Assistive Technology Fair that she is organizing. Both organizations hosted the event in October at Sharon High School. Organizations, such as Easter Seals, demonstrated how AT helps people with disabilities and senior citizens, in all aspects of life. The Fair was not well publicized, so many did not attend. But Sharon Community Television recorded the event, interviewing representatives from the organizations and participants and aired the video. SSEPAC and the Commission are thinking of having a similar event in 2024.
6. In December, Commission member, Susan Freidman wondered if the Commission could financially help the Sharon Middle School's Special Education Program. Students with special needs need equipment, such as dynamic seating, tools for focusing while in classrooms, group work, and individual work. The Commission will ask one of the special education coordinators to attend a Commission meeting in early 2024 to get additional information before deciding how much to donate.
7. Beth Israel Lahey Primary Care in Sharon does not have automatic door openers, making it difficult for people with disabilities to enter and exit the building. In addition, the Commission became concerned that the facility's entrance platform might be too small and could be dangerous for wheelchair and scooter users. The Commission is looking into assessing the platform to determine if it is ADA-compliant.
8. Commission member, Todd Arnold, informed the Commission that the Sharon Post Office does not have automatic door openers and a lower service desk, making it difficult for people with disabilities. Todd spoke with the local Postmaster regarding the inaccessibility. She told him she would do something to correct the situation, but she never did. The Post Office is a Federal building, so Paul wrote to Congressman Jake Auchincloss' District Director, Dana Hanson, asking her what steps the Commission needs to take to get the facility completely ADA-compliant.
9. In May, the Commission awarded a Sharon High senior with special needs, the \$1,000 Leslie Kriger Memorial Scholarship. The recipient used the scholarship money to help finance her college education.
10. Rusty Callaway was appointed to the Commission.
11. Voters approved Article 20 at the 2023 Town Meeting. Article 20 permitted the Commission on Disabilities to appoint a special member to the Sharon Standing Building Committee (SSBC). Rusty Callaway is interested in serving as liaison to the SSBC. If appointed, he will give perspectives from people with disabilities on how to increase accessibility while designing ADA-compliant features for existing and new buildings.
12. In November, Rusty and Paul went on the tour of the old Library. The Library Reuse Committee, SSBC, and the Commission are going to have a meeting in January to discuss ways to make the facility ADA-compliant for its future use.

13. The Select Board interviewed Geila Aronson in October for another term on the Commission. During the interview, Geila stated that the Commission should be diverse. Paul asked her if she wanted to be the Commission's liaison for the Sharon Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee. She said, "Yes," and the other members thought this was a good idea.
14. Paul had surgery in September. During his leave of absence, James Newton and Susan Freidman did an excellent job in co-chairing the Commission. In December, Paul resumed as the Commission's Chairperson.
15. Commission members continued to write 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.
16. The Commission donated \$150 to the Sharon Education Foundation in recognition of Crescent Ridge to increase its business' accessibility.
17. The Commission is doing well financially:

Handicapped parking ticket fund:	\$ 18,520.67
Donations:	\$ 1,327.97
General fund	\$ 500.00

As of December 21, 2023, the Commission has \$20,348.64. Funds are being used to purchase equipment and services for increasing accessibility and inclusion for people of all ages with disabilities, in the Town of Sharon.