

Town of Amherst Committee on Disabilities - Annual Report 2023

Committee Purpose/Function:

Mission Statement: The Amherst Committee on Disabilities shall study and offer suggestions and recommendations to improve compliance of the Town of Amherst with the goals and objectives of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as to consider any other issues relevant to and important to disabled town residents.

2023 Committee Membership:

Erica Rodman (Chair)

David E. Wantuck (Vice-Chair)

Rachel Martin (Secretary)

Chong Cheng (Member)

Luci Miranda (Member)

Barbara Robertson (Member)

Thomas J. Roetzer (Member)

David Whalen (Member)

Susan Zummo (Member)

Town Councilmember/Liaison to the Committee: Dr. Deborah Bruch Bucki

2023 Committee Accomplishments:

Social Media Page Created for the Committee:

Through work with the Town Attorney and IT departments, a Facebook page was created for the Committee on Disabilities with the purpose of sharing information and resources specific to disabilities. Members were encouraged to like and share the page and posts throughout the year to get more community interaction on the page.

Inclusive Playground – Amherst Central Park:

The Committee was invited to collaborate on the Amherst Central Park project specifically to talk about an inclusive playground. This also expanded into collaborating on the proposed Ice Ribbon planned for Amherst Central Park. With the Committee's assistance, suggestions were made to make the park inclusive for people with various disabilities, including but not limited to: sensory and physical needs, as well as adaptations for those who are visually impaired and have hearing loss. The Committee had the opportunity to submit questions and make suggestions to the Town Architect, Anne Dafchik, who attended November's meeting.

Collaboration on Training on Disability Awareness and Related Topics:

The Committee worked with Dave Whalen (Committee member) and gave advice and suggestions on trainings for various groups throughout the year including Firefighters, First Responders, and Community Members.

- Dave Whalen and David Wantuck were able to train law enforcement and fire departments in the Town on Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) and expressed their desire to continue training existing and new members to these groups.

- Members of the Committee were invited to attend an Emergency Management Training held in April 2023 to better assist people with disabilities. Erica Rodman (Chair), David Wantuck (Vice Chair), Dave Whalen (Member), and Luci Miranda (Member) attended points of the 2 day training.
- Firefighter/EMS Training on disability awareness held in May 2023.

Collaboration with Town regarding possible upgrades to the Emergency Phones on Bike Paths:

Worked with the Town Supervisor and Chief of Police to express concerns about the existing emergency phones which are located on bike paths throughout the Town of Amherst. The phones were installed in 1986 and the Committee wants to ensure that they are fully accessible for people with disabilities. In 2023, this was not in the Town budget for an upgrade, but the Committee was able to make suggestions for ways they could be made more accessible in the future.

Tabling Events:

Annual Health Fair at Amherst Senior Center – July 15, 2023
 Emergency Preparedness Event at Amherst Senior Center – September 21, 2023

Opportunities to Assist Town Residents on Issues of Concern:

Throughout 2023, two private building projects were brought to the attention of the Committee by concerned residents who wanted to ensure that the projects were considering the needs of people in the community with disabilities. With assistance from the Town Attorney and other representatives from the Town of Amherst, the Committee was guided on how to best assist residents with getting their concerns to the right people and through the proper channels. The Town of Amherst and the Committee on Disabilities want to work collaboratively together to ensure voices of people with disabilities are heard and shared.

Farewell to Deborah Bruch Bucki as Liaison for Committee:

After being an integral part of creating the Town of Amherst Committee on Disabilities in 2008 and serving on it for many years, Debbie Bucki attended her last meeting in November 2023 as she stepped away from her role as Councilmember. We thanked her for her foresight to create the Committee, her support of the Committee for so many years, and her advice and expertise in raising the voices of people with disabilities in the Town of Amherst.

2023 Dates Committee Met*:

January 9, 2023
 February 6, 2023
 March 13, 2023
 April 3, 2023
 May 1, 2023
 August 14, 2023
 September 11, 2023
 October 17, 2023
 November 6, 2023

*(All meetings were held via Zoom)