

Town of Amherst  
Committee on Disabilities  
Monday December 8, 2008

1. Introduction: Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today. On behalf of the Committee, which consists of Joan Evans, Dan D'Andrea, Damon Serota, Jeff Marion, Joe Casazza, and Liaison Deborah Bucki, I want to praise the Town for putting this committee together. Our intentions are simple but our challenges are vast. The committee has identified its purpose as one that will assist the Town in responding to the needs of its residents with disabilities. Sound simple, yes but it is hardly that. The term advocate is a word with many implications but we will do our best to be that for individuals with disabilities in our Town. We will be looking to assist the Town and its council in all matters relative to disabilities. Our initial items of interest are the 2006 accessibility study of Town sites, which serves as a very good base by which to begin. We are also assisting on HR 1125, the saturation study requested by the Council.
2. Disability Awareness-Inclusion; First we need to understand what we don't understand. Arguably, the most discriminated population in society is the disabled. They are America's largest minority and often times the most ignored. As a municipality that prides itself on being progressive, the committee wants to ensure that we maintain that mindset in all facets of our service and responsiveness to the individuals with disabilities in our community. How does society discriminate? Let's look at what the disabled community is asking for- TO BE INCLUDED. From that its main subsets are employment, housing, and transportation.
3. Model municipality; can Amherst be a model municipality? Any municipality can be. It calls for the Council and Town employees to be trained in Disability Awareness and understand what all this entails.
4. Provide direction, information, and guidance on how to do that; prevent avoidance, bad PR
5. Ensure accessibility-think ADA; Have you ever been denied access to a restaurant? Bathroom accessibility an issue? Parks and beaches a problem? Think Accessibility.

6. Response to residents; emergency preparedness, recreation/leisure (Hamburg), law enforcement
7. Welcome through awareness; avoid discrimination label-awareness allows for understanding, acceptance, and behavior. Think of a neighborhood that does NOT want you to move in because of who you are. Amherst has been accommodating but have all the neighbors?
8. Person First language; this starts internally. Avoid outdated verbiage.
9. Employment; 30% of the disabled population is employed, 70-78% want to be. What is the Town's hiring practices?
10. Partner with agencies, associations, and support groups; allow them use of buildings, information sharing. Know what exists, what they provide, and how they can assist and benefit residents.

In representing individuals with disabilities in our Town, all must be considered, thus the reason for a comprehensive report. It is understood that some of this might be more than the committee can achieve over its tenure but all must be recognized and an attempt at assisting the Town in ensuring that everything is addressed is important to the committee and its purpose.

Thank you for your time and efforts.

We are here to help you make the Town of Amherst the most welcoming community to individuals with disabilities in Western New York.

Respectfully submitted,

David V. Whalen

Chair-Town of Amherst Committee on Disabilities