

Andover Commission on Disability  
Wednesday, February 22, 2023, at 6:33 PM  
Virtual Meeting Andover TV

---

**Call to Order:** Chair Justin Coppola called the virtual meeting to order at 6:33 PM.

**Roll call:** Jemma Lambert, Y; David Kahan, Y; Trish Leelman, Y; Eileen Reilly, Y; Stephen Surette, Y; and Justin Coppola, Y. Carlene Bell Flanagan arrived later.

**Also Present:** Janet Nicosia, ADA Coordinator and Facilities Director, Ellen Townson, Conservation Commission Liaison, and Gail Bloom, Council on Aging Liaison.

**Guest Speakers:** Elaine Ward, Special Assistant to the President for Civic and Community Engagement and Chair - Higher Education Department, Merrimack College, Lori Corcoran, Director of Accessibility Services, Merrimack College, Sarah Simmons, Coordinator of the Activate Program, Merrimack College, supporting Neuro-Divergent Students, and Mackenzie Reynolds, Merrimack College undergraduate.

### **Merrimack College Outreach to ACOD Members**

Justin introduced Elaine Ward and turned the discussion over to her. Elaine greeted commission members, introduced her team and noted previous collaborations with Jemma. A student audit raised the issue of how neuro-diverse students can be better prepared when they take part in their community learning as part of their credits at Merrimack College. Elaine is seeking advice and assistance from ACOD as a resource to better prepare students and the community organizations they wish to work with. A key piece is to research best practices for both students and the community organizations/host sites.

There is an increase of neuro diverse students participating in these community-based learning programs, but not much in the way of research in this area. Knowing that ACOD is a resource for disability issues she asked whether any commission members would like to partner with her team to help with input and guidance on this project. Trish asked for a definition of neuro diversity. Sarah responded that neuro diversity involves the brain processing things differently, and her role is to advocate for this group of students from a strength-based position.

Jemma spoke briefly about the strategic plan of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) with respect to the town's goal of diversifying the workforce through recruitment leadership. Also, under her leadership, the Division of Recreation is actively looking at programming opportunities for differently-abled individuals. Jemma added that neuro diverse includes either lived or learned experience. She asked for further collaboration with Merrimack students on these two goals.

***Action Item: Eileen and David said they would be interested in working with the Merrimack team.***

Gail asked about community or government services in Andover and what prompted this team project. Elaine said both community or government. Some of the students begin their community-based learning during their first semester, coming straight from High School and the goal is to have a program that prepares these students for that work. To get to that point, research is needed into what insights and questions will allow students to be better engaged with their work experience. There should not be a one size fits all training piece given the difference in learning skills among students.

Ellen mentioned a group in Andover called SEPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) which involves parents of various needs including neuro-divergent children and advocates for programs and assistance such as signage in schools, playground design and the like.

Carlene Bell Flanagan talked briefly about SEPAC. Her son is a student representative to SEPAC and ACOD. The schools have programs for neuro divergent students, sometimes adjacent schools are a better fit for students.

Jemma noted summer camp is opened to neuro divergent students and quiet spaces may be provided. Older students from Merrimack College could perhaps help with younger students in Andover and there are opportunities for intergenerational opportunities.

Elaine agreed that it was important to create “intentionality’s” around placements for students and the community so students who are neuro divergent are not just lumped in with other students for their placements but are placed based on “intentionality”.

Eileen asked if there was a standard orientation for students; the training is for the general population with the goal of broadening the group of neuro divergent student at a later time. Again, the goal is to seek best practices for all.

Justin suggested bringing Bernadette into this discussion/project.

***Action Item: Jemma will contact Eileen and David for further information on involvement with the Merrimack Project, and will be in touch with Elaine on this and DEI involvement. Justin will contact Bernadette to see if she is interested in being involved.***

Carlene said she received a number of texts during this meeting asking her to relate to the commission that the student presenter for this evening was not able to be present and was upset with a term used by one of the commission members inadvertently.

Discussion followed on the need for correct terms to be used and for sensitivity regarding the negative connotations associated with outdated terms.

## **Liaison Reports & Announcements**

Janet has available laminated ADA information sheets which are available at the Municipal Services Facility at 5 Campanelli Drive on the second floor for Commission members and liaisons to pick up.

She reported that the design for the Haggett's Pond trail is moving forward and she applied for a grant for funding. Nason's Landing funding request will be on the Town Meeting Warrant.

The bids for town office renovations are coming in next week. The third-floor handrails and other ADA improvements to start in May and end by September.

An Architectural Access Board (AAB) variance request for some issues to be fixed over the next 5 years has been filed for the Doherty School. Janet gave an overview of the Doherty Renovations and showed the blueprints by screen sharing. They showed:

- The layout of the school --- currently there is a steep ramp to the second floor, also ramps to the gym and auditorium.
- Current ramp is ADA non-compliant --- the plan is to reconfigure the area, and add a new elevator and 2 accessible bathrooms.
- Project includes a 3 stop elevator for second floor access, access to the gym and auditorium.
- Goal is to install an elevator by 2024.
- Future plans involve an addition of a second floor over the cafeteria with an additional elevator and rooms for arts and engineering.
- An atrium may connect the wings in the future.
- Included in the scope is to bring the school up to code with sprinklers.
- Some things are scheduled to be done over the next 5 years.
- Currently looking for ACOD support for the variance with a letter of support to the Architectural Access Board (AAB).

Carlene asked about a makerspace which would be part of the engineering room. This is a future installation which will be ADA compliant.

Gail asked about quiet areas with low sensory for students based on the neuro-diverse student discussion earlier. Janet said she is focusing on the time-line for Facilities now, but these features are planned for the High School renovations and this is part of the future plans.

Justin asked for a motion for him to write a letter of support for the AAB variance as put forward by Janet.

It was moved by David, seconded by Trish, and voted 6-0 to approve the Chair's writing on behalf of ACOD supporting the Doherty School Elevator variance.

Roll call: David, Y; Trish, Y; Eileen, Y; Carleen, Y; Jemma, Y; Justin, Y.

Gail—Nothing further to report

Ellen—The Conservation Commission will be voting to support Nason’s Landing and asked for ACOD support. She thanked Janet for her work and said she would like to bring that “lens” to outdoor spaces. Janet suggested the ADA Training - Community Access Monitor program as a resource as it is about buildings and other spaces.

Justin noted the Cam training is now virtual.

Jemma no further announcements

### **Minutes of 1/25/23 and 12/28/22**

It was moved by Eileen, seconded by David, and voted 6-0 to approve the January 25, 2023 and December 28, 2022 minutes.

Roll call: Eileen, Y; David, Y; Trish, Y; Jemma, Y; Carlene, Y; Justin, Y.

### **Old Business:**

- **DPW & ADA Update Accessible Projects --- Justin**

Justin reported that there was a meeting on the ADA Process with our new member, Carleen with Janet, Steve and Justin.

Justin also reported the following:

- Town Master Plan --- Justin attended the latest meeting, and reported that accessibility issues were addressed.
- Story Walk implemented --- children’s book on autism is scheduled for April.
- Placemaking, Andover art and culture activities continues: Andover Illuminates; Justin wrote a letter of support on behalf of ACOD for Ann Ormond’s grant request and Ann has reported that the grant was approved.
- AVIS Goldsmith Reservation Accessibility --- Justin wrote a letter of support on behalf of ACOD for a grant request.
- Nason’s Landing --- Janet and the team did a presentation to the Open Space Task Force.
- Robb Center Accessible Learning Garden --- a new project by Jane Burns.  
***Action Item: Justin will write a letter of support on behalf of ACOD supporting for a grant request.***

Andover High School

Janet --- school designs are chosen and depending if the “new” option high school is approved she thought a new Collins Center for accessibility not only for audience but also for all who participate in events would also be appropriate.

March Disabilities Awareness Month

***Action Item: Jemma will reach out to Liam, Andover High student regarding a newspaper article mentioned at a previous meeting.***

Justin noted the following meetings:

- 3/1 MBTA Communities Zoning Meeting at MHL
- 3/15 Home Loan Modification at the Robb Center

The **next Andover Commission on Disability meeting** is scheduled for March 22, 2023, with Zoom at 6:30 P.M.

### **Adjournment**

It was moved by Eileen and seconded by Trish, and voted 5-0 to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 P.M.

Roll call: Trish, Y; David, Y; Jemma, Y; Eileen, Y; Justin, Y.