

PLAINFIELD ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

DRAFT MINUTES

MAY 6, 2026

Present: Dawn Fancher, Mitch Pauley, Allison Joyall, Alicia Weiss, Andy Robinson SB Liaison, Laurie Vetch, Michael Billingsley **Absent:** Mary Lane .

Review/edit/approve draft minutes of April 16: The committee approved the minutes from their previous meeting.

Review, propose changes, adopt agenda: The agenda was reviewed and approved.

Public Comment: Michael Billingsley noted that the last couple of Select Board meetings were not accessible to those with hearing loss, due to inconsistent use of microphones, especially by members of the Select Board. It was noted that repeated reminders are needed for all attendees to use microphones at public meetings. Andy noted that multiple members of the newly constituted Select Board are scheduled to receive training on the audio and recording systems for Town Hall and he would bring Michael's feedback to the Board.

Additional concerns were voiced about the accessibility of public town meetings in general. Laurie noted that Town Meetings are not accessible for residents who are hearing impaired, which had resulted in a request for the language of articles to be written in a large format. This led to a discussion of the need to plan for including captioning, accessible seating and aisle space for persons with mobility devices, and the ability for elders and people with mobility impairments to cross Route 2 in safety. Michael provided updates on accessibility improvements at Town Hall, including Ethernet upgrades and a congressional earmark request he has successfully obtained to replace the non-compliant lift, install air conditioning, and establish a pet shelter for emergency evacuations.

Passing of Joanne Svwed: The Committee marked the sad recent passing of Joanne, who had offered important perspectives as a disabled Plainfield resident during past meetings. Michael discussed Janet's contributions to the Hazard Mitigation Committee, particularly her advocacy for accessibility issues and her role in improving town hall accessibility. Michael shared personal experiences working with Janet, including helping with accessibility challenges and providing support during floods. The group strongly supported Alicia writing a letter of condolence to Joanne's partner Paul on behalf of the Accessibility Committee.

Letter to the Select Board: The Committee reviewed the draft provided by Allison, with some edits by Alicia, to be sent to formally notify the Board that the group will be proposing an article regarding accessible voting for Town Meeting Day 2026.

Opera House Parking ADA Compliance: Alicia presented a draft note to the Select Board and Road Commissioner regarding the work needed to bring the parking space into ADA compliance, including widening the space and addressing grading issues of the lawn behind the

paved space. Michael provided some clarifications. After minor edits, Alicia will submit the letter, requesting a timeline for completion, emphasizing the importance of keeping Michael Billingsley informed as the project manager for the grant.

Recreational Field Accessible Path: Jaime Spector of the Recreation and Public Arts Committee (RPAC) presented that group's interest in creating an accessible path around the Rec Field, with access points to facilities such as the shelter benches, soon-to-be installed water fountain, and accessible port-a-potty. RPAC would like to partner with the Accessibility Advisory Committee on the project, including fundraising and requested a point person from this committee be identified. Michael suggested: better lighting in the parking lot and picnic shelter, and ensuring portable restrooms remain handicapped accessible. Dawn shared insights from a Vermont Trails and Greenways Council meeting about accessible paths, noting that benches were commonly requested features. Alicia provided links to that group's resources and offered insights into accessibility standards for outdoor spaces. The group discussed challenges with the steep grade from the parking lot to the lower area of the rec field and the need for appropriately placed accessible parking space. Allison offered to connect Jamie with ADA-certified experts at Vermont Center for Independent Living who could provide valuable resources and expertise for the project. The Accessibility Advisory Committee is enthusiastic about the project, but as Dawn noted, it also has an ambitious agenda for this year, so members' ability to take on the Rec Field path will likely be limited in the short-term.

Senate Bill 298 Progress Update: Alicia provided an update on S. 298, originally drafted as a voting rights bill, but which had been stripped of much of its voter-focused language (including rights of older and disabled residents), by the time it left the Senate. The House further struck out important right to public action language that would have provided a remedy for voters if constitutional rights were violated. Heather Thomas of the Vermont Progressive Party testified about the exclusion of "disability" from the "protected classes" language and about the voting inequities facing Vermonters with disabilities. On the last day of House committee discussion, RevUp members were finally given a chance to testify; advocates urged the recognition of "disability" as a protected class and that the right to private action be restored. While "disability" was added as a protected class before the bill left the House, private right to action was not replaced. It is hoped the bill will go to conference committee to allow additional advocacy to the latter provision.

Public Outreach/Education Plan for Accessible Voting: Dawn will work on getting available voting data. Survey development will draw from prior work done by this committee and the items used by the Town of Jericho. Committee members will assess and communicate with allies, including members of the Hazard Mitigation Committee and the Resilience Hub. Gathering stories of people impacted by barriers to accessible voting will be important to providing insight to town residents about disability exclusion.

Next Meeting: Scheduled for June 3rd, with plans to discuss committee reporting protocols to the Select Board and invitation to Gaye Symington of Jericho about their Reimagining Town Meeting process and outcomes.

Meeting Convened at 7:33 pm

Respectfully submitted by Alicia Weiss