

Burlington Committee on Accessibility Strategy and Plan

Introduction

At its October 15, 2012 meeting, the Burlington City Council tasked the Mayor with revitalizing and making appointments to the Burlington Committee on Accessibility, and approved those appointments on December 3, 2012. The Committee, made up of City staff and community members, was specifically charged with developing a strategy and plan to address accessibility in the City, including reviewing and updating the previous mission statement, suggesting the needed frequency of reporting accessibility needs to the City Council, and devising a process to assess the City's accessibility needs.

The Committee meetings were attended by representatives of the Burlington School District, the City Attorney's Office, the Burlington Accessibility Group, Vermont Center for Independent Living, Vermont Legal Aid, Vocational Rehabilitation, and individual community advocates. A public forum was held in February and many stakeholders were encouraged to participate freely in meetings.

Recommendation

The overarching recommendation of this Committee is that it be permanently charged with assessing and addressing accessibility needs in the City of Burlington. This report recommends expanding the committee as outlined below, giving committee members two year terms, and reforming the permanent committee by April 30, 2013.

Mission Statement

The City recognizes that communities excel when all citizens are able to fully participate in all aspects of community life. The Advisory Committee on Accessibility shall assist and advise the Mayor, the City Council and City departments on ways to increase opportunities for people with disabilities and meet the needs of people with disabilities by encouraging full and equal participation in all aspects of life. This includes the identification and removal of architectural, procedural, programmatic, attitudinal and communication barriers, and strong advocacy for policies, programs and services that meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Frequency of Reporting Accessibility Needs to City Council

Quarterly, either through in-person testimony or a written update.

Suggested Additional Committee Representatives

AARP
Burlington Parks & Recreation
Burlington School District
Howard Center/Pathways

Process to Assess and Address City's Accessibility Needs

Public and Private Infrastructure

- Improve accommodation and accessibility of City facilities and rights-of-way, including City buildings, streets, sidewalks, bike paths, parking, parks, schools, traffic signaling, snow removal, elevators, etc.

Process

- Task the Department of Public Works to work the Committee to compile an inventory of current infrastructure needs and development of a capital plan based on scoring of severity and number of people affected.
- Work with Burlington School District to update inventory assessment for schools.
- Develop and promote an online tool to provide a way for the public to input and prioritize projects (e.g. See Click Fix).

Possible Action Items

- Pursue external funding opportunities to make municipal infrastructure improvements and for capital investments that meet ADA compliance.
 - Integrate curb cuts into sidewalks in more locations, including near accessible parking.
 - Research and implement best practice for Complete Street design and access.
- Ensure the availability of accessible housing in Burlington.

Process

- Identify unmet need for accessible housing and assess against current availability.

Possible Action Items

- Ensure housing that is accessible for people with disabilities, including seniors, is a component of the Citywide Housing Plan update.
 - Work to integrate accessible housing along transportation routes and near the downtown core.
- Improve accommodation and accessibility of private businesses by raising awareness of and removing barriers.

Process

- Promote online tools that allow people with disabilities to rate and discuss the accessibility of public accommodations (e.g. Rolling Gourmet).

Possible Action Items

- Work with Church Street Marketplace and Burlington Accessibility Group to support area businesses in efforts to make their establishments accessible.
- Enhance specific areas of understanding and sensitivity, including use of service animals.

Programmatic Inclusion

- Ensure accessibility at City and School District sponsored and sanctioned programs, events, and activities.

Process

- Determine availability of interpreter services, text to speech technology, and alternative communicate devices and funding to enhance its availability.
- Create a joint City/School District ad hoc committee to better collaborate in serving Burlington families.

Possible Action Items

- Require all events receiving a permit from the City to include an accessibility plan and contact person.
 - Make public information available in alternate forms (i.e. large print, braille)
- Work with CCTA, SSTA, and other services to ensure safe, meaningful, efficient, and affordable transportation for people with disabilities.

Process

- Coordinate with CCTA ADA Committee to address concerns with wheelchair access and treatment of people with disabilities accessing buses.
- Designate a liaison with SSTA to work on addressing Burlington-specific complaints and concerns regarding transportation services.

Possible Action Items

- Investigate funding for transportation services for all people with disabilities serving on a City board or commission.

Community Climate and Awareness

- Develop a culture of awareness. Give voice and visibility to people with disabilities, as well as their families, friends, caretakers, and service providers.

Process

- Identify and remove barriers for people with disabilities in City hiring processes.
- Create a procedure that allows the Committee to share complaints from citizens with the appropriate City Department or individual employee.
- Interface with Planning & Zoning, the Development Review Board, Parks & Recreation, and other departments to assess progress and weigh in periodically.

Possible Action Items

- Require sensitivity and inclusion training for all City employees regarding working with and serving people with disabilities, and invite participation from City Councilors and volunteer board members and commissioners.
- Promote disability awareness education among the general public so all citizens can share in addressing access and communication barriers.
- Work with local business and tourism organizations to highlight accessibility for tourists with disabilities.
- Support and promote an annual Disability Awareness Day.