

APPENDIX G: ADA SELF-EVALUATION AND COMPLIANCE SUMMARY

Summary

The accessibility of Town conservation and recreational facilities was determined through a self-evaluation process for the OSRP by members of the Natural Resources Department, the Recreation Department, the Land Stewardship Committee, the Commission on Disabilities and the Recreation Commission. The two members of the Recreation Department who surveyed the playgrounds are Playground Safety Instructors certified by the National Recreation and Playground Association. The Board of Directors of the Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Inc. assisted in compiling the Arboretum inventory. Two members of the Commission on Disabilities (COD) have visited the Acton Arboretum and reviewed the improved trails and boardwalks. The COD and Land Stewardship Committee were consulted on the transition plans for improvement to conservation lands, the ADA Self Evaluation Inventory Matrix, and the ADA grievance policy. Three members of the Acton Building Department are certified building officials and are consulted for review of new trail boardwalk plans. Self evaluation forms and transition plans are kept on file in the town offices of the Conservation Commission and the Town Administrator.

Current Accessibility in Acton

Acton has made many improvements to its open space and recreation facilities to make them more accessible. The town is in the process of creating a State-sponsored "Complete Streets" policy, which will make connecting conservation land trails, future rail trails and safe on-street facilities a priority. The goal of Complete Streets is to design and operate streets to provide safety, comfort and accessibility for users of all ages and abilities for users of the roads, trails and transit systems, including pedestrians, bicyclists, Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices (OPDMDs) and wheelchairs. Trails at the Acton Arboretum have been paved in recent years for better access and a more enjoyable experience to visitors. Old boardwalks at the Arboretum are being upgraded. From the outset when NARA Park was created in 1999, a paved trail circumnavigating the park was installed for maximum accessibility and usability by park patrons. The greatest accomplishment in Acton, as well as for the entire State of Massachusetts, was the opening of the first Miracle Field, which is annexed to NARA Park. This field is completely accessible to children and adults with disabilities and has the Miracle League of Massachusetts running regular baseball games each season.

(See <http://www.miracleleagueofma.com/>)

The Miracle League of Massachusetts is "...an all volunteer, non-profit organization that gives children with disabilities a chance to play baseball as part of a team in an organized league at no cost to their family...It's hundreds of dedicated players, parents, coaches, buddies, fans and volunteers who come together...to support, encourage and inspire each other. It's what happens when everyone is included and diversity is embraced." The Conceptual plan has been designed for an accessible, "comfort station" at NARA, located in close proximity to the Miracle Field, with restrooms and a snack bar. Improvements continue to be made at NARA, such as an accessible picnic pavilion under construction and scheduled for 2014 completion, for sheltered gatherings. The Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Inc. and the Recreation Department are always thinking of ways to include persons of all ability levels in Arboretum and other recreational programming. All buildings used for programs are ADA accessible. Public meetings for the Recreation Commission, Land Stewardship Committee, Open Space Committee and Conservation Commission are all held in ADA accessible buildings such as the Acton Town Hall and the Acton Memorial Library.

Potential for Water Access

NARA Park has a paved, accessible ½ mile trail around the pond and a one mile paved loop trail around the perimeter of the park. There is an accessible wooden boardwalk with railings where persons in wheelchairs can fish. The beach is accessible via paved trail and the facility lends a beach-accessible wheelchair, which is free for use by beach patrons. There is also a handicap accessible boat ramp with ADA compliant railings and a dock for enjoyment of the water views and/or for fishing. The dock has toe bumpers to prevent wheelchairs from rolling off the edge.

The Town has a public swimming pool at the high school. It is ADA compliant with an automated lift to accommodate persons with limited mobility. It is available to citizens through publicly noticed hours (<http://comed.ab.mec.edu/openswims.shtml>) and a nominal fee. The Community Education program offers a full Red Cross Swim Program at this pool throughout the year. Parking lots at NARA, the Miracle Field, and the Acton Arboretum have the appropriate number of handicap accessible parking spaces in proportion to the total number of spaces. Information kiosks and signage at NARA, the Miracle Field and the Acton Arboretum are also accessible.

There is much room for improvement at our conservation lands. Of the 18 individual parcels with marked, maintained trail systems, only one has marked and designated handicap accessible parking. We have created a plan for improvement that will provide a better level of enjoyment of these open space parcels than there is today, either by increasing the parking and providing a handicap parking space; adding a bench for resting; or paving a section of trail from the parking lot to a scenic vista. These types of projects require the work of several town departments (Engineering, Conservation, Natural Resources and Highway) to design and build, and can be costly. We strive to complete one improvement project per year. Sites selected were determined by the slope, drainage, surface condition and practicality of building an accessible trail. All conservation land kiosks are equipped with QR (“Quick Response”) codes, downloadable maps when scanned by a smart phone and map boxes stocked with paper maps. A subcommittee of the Land Stewards and the Friends of the Acton Arboretum are currently working to create an improved trail map prototype that provides detailed trail information for the comfort, safety and convenience of visitors with different levels of ability.

Signage

Conservation land trail systems utilize rectangular “blazing” on trees along the trail. Kiosks at trail heads explain the color-coded system with colored maps and notices. Trails are generally well-marked and cleared of large obstructions. A few of the more complex trails have “You Are Here” notice boards at confusing trail junctions. Some trail systems have large wooden signs that indicate the distance to a parking lot or a major road. Most trails have painted arrows indicating the direction the trail may take a sharp turn. A committee comprised of Natural Resources Staff, Land Stewards and Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Inc. board members are designing better maps and experimenting with the creation of interactive web pages that can give more detailed trail information to visitors. Once that prototype is created, town staff and Land Stewards will complete similar maps for the other 17 maintained parcels.

Interpretive programs and Alternative Experiences

The Natural Resources Department, the Recreation Department and the Community Education programs in Acton all provide interpretive programs, hikes, outings and events. Every effort is made to be sensitive and inclusive of interested participants of all abilities. Programs can be adapted as needed for people with different ability levels. The Natural Resources Director goes into the public schools to teach about birds, construct bird houses, and show the students how to draw owls. This program is fully accessible and inclusive. The Acton Conservation Trust and the Friends of the Acton Arboretum provide events, speakers

and meetings at the Acton Town Hall, a fully ADA compliant building. The Town should also make an effort to make all programs more accessible for individuals with a range of disabilities through trained interpreters, technologies, or devices as necessary and appropriate.

Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices

Acton does not yet have an OPDMD policy. Trails are in the process of being assessed for width, slope and cross slope. We foresee the time is coming when we will be ready to create an OPDMD policy in the near future. Trails at the Acton Arboretum and NARA are certainly able to accommodate OPDMD's now. Visitors to the Miracle Field can access the trail around the entire NARA park using an OPDMD.

Communication

Town officials and volunteer committees are looking forward to publicizing the designation of our new ADA Coordinator, notices, policies and procedures for future use by all citizens and employees. Town staff and volunteers will look into implementing regular outreach to and inclusion of the disabled community. Staff and volunteers are looking into possible website links (i.e. Town, Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Land Stewardship Committee) to provide opportunities for questions to be asked and answered and other feedback to be provided.

Individuals Involved in the Self-Evaluation Process

The following people have assisted in the self-evaluation process: Tom Tidman, Jim Snyder-Grant, Joe Will, Cathy Hatfield, Cathy Fochtman, Maura Haberman, Melissa Rier, Frances Portante, Bettina Abe, Frank Ramsbottom, Mark Barbadoro, Steve Ledoux, Janet Adachi, Maryjane Kenney, Marianne Fleckner, Bernice Baran, Steve Baran, Cindy Patton, Daniel Factor, Lisa Franklin, Leslie Johnson, Madeleine Harvey, Wen Li.