

Winchendon Commission on Disability Operating Guidelines

Article I: Title and Purpose

- The name of the commission is established as the Winchendon Commission on Disability (“Commission”).
- The purpose of the Commission is to advise Winchendon on the needs of the local disability community, and how to ensure accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities in municipal programs, services, and facilities.
- The purpose of this document is to establish principles and procedures for the Commission's governance to ensure clear, consistent, and effective operations. These suggestions guide the Commission's activities and decision-making processes, providing a framework for its governance.

Article II: Duties

- Investigate the obstacles encountered by local individuals with disabilities, encompassing physical and communication barriers.
- Facilitate the efforts of other local established groups, such as the local Independent Living Center, local Emergency Planners, and other related groups, to address the needs of individuals with disabilities.
- Examine and provide recommendations on the policies, procedures, services, and activities of departments and agencies of Winchendon as they pertain to individuals with disabilities.
- Collaborate with the departments and agencies of Winchendon to promote maximum involvement of individuals with disabilities.
- Foster public awareness regarding disability issues.
- Offer information, referral, guidance, and advice to individuals, businesses, organizations, and public agencies on disability-related matters.
- Identify and recommend potential Commission members to the Select Board. The Commission will seek nominations at least one month before making recommendations.
- Submit an annual report, which will be included in the Winchendon report.

Article III: Membership

- The Commission shall comprise 5 or more members appointed by the Select Board. The Commission members shall include at least one individual with a disability and at least one immediate family member of a person with a disability.

- All members shall serve three-year terms, ideally staggered.
- Members wishing to resign must submit their resignation in writing to the chairperson.
- Attendance is essential. Members who are absent from half of the regularly scheduled meetings within a calendar year may be recommended for removal, unless the chairperson has excused the absences for valid reasons such as illness, family bereavement, adverse weather conditions, or professional obligations.
- In the event of a vacancy, the Select Board shall appoint a new member to serve the remainder of the term, following the same procedure as the original appointment, and ensuring the membership makeup remains consistent.
- Members may be removed for cause by the Select Board following a public hearing, if requested.
- Members must obtain approval from the Commission and the Select Board before making public statements or engaging in activities on behalf of the Commission.
- All members shall possess full voting rights within the Commission.

Article IV: Officers

- The Commission's officers will consist of a chairperson, secretary and/or treasurer.
- The Commission will elect officers annually by majority vote.
- A single member may hold multiple offices.
- The officers' duties are as follows:
 - The chairperson will:
 - Develop the meeting agenda in collaboration with other officers,
 - Preside over all Commission meetings,
 - Appoint subcommittees as necessary, and
 - Authorize necessary expenditures.
 - The secretary will:
 - Maintain records of meeting attendance, minutes, and correspondence,
 - Post notice of all meetings at the Town Clerk's office at least 48 hours in advance; and
 - Send meeting notices and minutes from the previous meeting to members at least three days before the next meeting.
 - The treasurer will:

- Keep records of all financial transactions,
- Develop a budget in collaboration with the Commission, and
- Prepare a financial statement for inclusion in the annual report.

Article V: Meetings

- The commission shall convene for regular meetings no fewer than six times in a calendar year.
- A quorum, necessary for the transaction of business, shall be constituted by 51% of the commission's membership. For instance, in a commission of seven (7) members, a quorum would be achieved with the presence of four (4) members.
- Minutes from each meeting will be reviewed, amended as necessary, and approved by the Commission.
- The chairperson, or 25% of the members (i.e. 2 of a commission of 7), reserves the right to call for special meetings.
- Unless specified otherwise in these guidelines, decisions will be reached by a majority vote of the members in attendance.
- Members will receive notice of meetings at least three (3) days in advance.
- Meetings will generally follow the guidelines set forth in Robert's Rules of Order.
- The meetings may be held in person or virtually or hybrid due to the potential locations of meetings and a person's disability.
- On-line or email voting will be allowed for the commission

Article VI: Amendments

These Operating Guidelines and Goals of the Commission may be amended during any properly convened meeting with a two-thirds majority vote from the members present. However, this can only occur if a written notice detailing the proposed amendment has been distributed to each member at least seven days before the meeting. This advance notice ensures that all members have sufficient time to consider the proposed changes before the meeting where the vote will take place.

Winchendon Commission on Disability Goals

These goals are fluid and not meant to restrict any efforts of the state or town and may allow the commission to work with other organizations than those mentioned to further the inclusion and involvement of people with disabilities.

1. Ensure municipal services, programs, meetings, and employment opportunities are available and accessible to people with disabilities.

- Collaborate with key municipal staff such as the Selectboard, Town Manager, Building Inspector, and Department of Public Works to review regulations.
- Support efforts to evaluate municipal buildings, facilities, and sidewalks for accessibility.
- Assess municipal services, programs, and activities for physical and communication accessibility, ensuring that policies are non-discriminatory.
- Stay informed about new programs, services, or construction projects and engage with relevant parties to ensure they meet the needs of people with disabilities.
- Advise the municipality to ensure town reports, documents, and newsletters are readily available in alternative formats, such as digital, Braille, and large print, upon request for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

2. Ensure the town, businesses, agencies, and organizations are accessible to people with disabilities.

- Implement educational initiatives for municipal departments, business owners and managers about the needs of individuals with various disabilities, such as mobility, hearing, visual, cognitive, and others.
- Inform local business owners about tax deductions and credits such as the federal IRS \$15,000 tax deduction for barrier removal and \$5,000 tax credit for ADA compliance.
- Review on-street accessible parking and curb cuts
- Evaluate transportation needs

3. Provide information and referrals on a broad range of disability issues.

- Raise awareness of the COD
- Establish a way for people to contact the Commission

4. Advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities and disability groups.

- Collaborate with relevant officials and organizations to address and resolve issues

- Partner with the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD).
- Work with the Winchendon Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) to provide awareness in schools.
- Speak to civic organizations such as the Just mistaken Lions Club, Scouts, Chamber of Commerce, and Rotary