



CITY of BEVERLY

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Julia Long

Executive Secretary

Martha A. Lewis

Building

James Butler

DEIB/ ADA Coordinator

Wangari Fahari

COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES

Thursday, May 28th, 2026

Attendees: Bruce Doig James Butler Wangari Fahari Paul Willenbrock Ed Horack
Marilyn Osburn Nevaeh Hourican Chris Ruest, Jennifer Ruest, Amelia Boivin, Bud Rehal

Discussion: Accessibility in Entertainment & Auditory Access

The Commission discussed accessibility in entertainment, with a focus on American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation and hearing accessibility. Members emphasized that auditory access is a right under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and should be considered a necessary accommodation in public entertainment venues.

Public Comment / Presentation – Jennifer Ruest

Jennifer Ruest shared her concerns regarding the lack of accessibility in entertainment and community spaces for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. She spoke about her experience as a teenager seeing limited access in the community and expressed feeling as though opportunities are often taken away due to insufficient accommodations.

Jennifer emphasized the importance of continuing advocacy and noted that members of the Deaf community often have to fight for their rights. She stated that increasing accessibility is one of the issues she hopes to see improved in the future. Jennifer encouraged the community to “never give up” in advocating for access and inclusion.

The Chair thanked Jennifer for her presentation and encouraged her to continue advocating for accessibility.

Jennifer indicated she would like her concerns presented to the ADA Coordinator for further discussion and consideration.

Accessibility Recommendations & Venue Discussions

The Commission discussed accessibility improvements at local entertainment venues, including:

- Expanding access to **ASL interpretation services** for performances.
- Improving access to **hearing assistive devices** and ensuring signage is clearly available for patrons.
- Increasing awareness of accessibility accommodations at entertainment venues.

A recent meeting with officials at the **North Shore Music Theatre (NSMT)**, including the Director of Facilities, was discussed. Proposed accessibility strategies included:

1. Establishing a list of qualified **ASL interpreters** available for performances.
2. Providing **hearing assistive devices** at venues, with an identification system for patrons borrowing equipment.
3. Offering **signed performances**, with seating accommodations located near accessible seating areas to ensure visibility for attendees using ASL services.
4. Exploring partnerships to provide **complimentary tickets for ASL interpreters** and collaboration opportunities with local venues such as the Larcom Theatre and The Cabot.

Jennifer expressed support for these ideas and noted that greater advertising of accessible performances would likely increase attendance.

The Commission also discussed the challenges of relying on volunteer interpreters, acknowledging that theatrical interpretation requires specialized skill and often more than one interpreter due to the complexity of live performances.

Funding opportunities, including **ADA-related funding**, were briefly discussed as a possible avenue to support expanded accessibility efforts.

Additional Discussion Items

- Jennifer highlighted a positive experience with an accessible performance of *The Wizard of Oz* at The Cabot.
- Discussion included the need for stronger **ASL language access in schools**, with mention of local educational needs and broader community support.

- Materials and concerns raised during the discussion will be forwarded to the Chair for follow-up.

Upcoming Topics / Follow-Up

- **End of June:** Discussion planned regarding practices used by Nantucket employees for wheelchair beach access and accommodation systems.
- Continued efforts to **promote the Commission on Disabilities (COD)** and increase public awareness.
- Members acknowledged the City's progress in improving sidewalk accessibility and expressed appreciation for recent accessibility enhancements.

Adjournment:

Meeting concluded following discussion and public comment.