

WEST WINDSOR: Disabilities Act compliance questioned

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WEST WINDSOR — Township Officials say they're looking into a report filed by a resident alleging that several township buildings and parks are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Michael Ogg and a group of residents spent several weeks in February reviewing municipal buildings and parks to see whether they were ADA complaint. According to the report, submitted to the Township Council on Feb. 16, there are violations in the Municipal Building, including a non-accessible courtroom/dais, non-compliant interior stairways, restroom doors, and more.

"I've been a wheelchair user for many years and I can give you a long, long list of issues just getting around the township," said Mr. Ogg.

Township Council members said they were unaware of the violations and would review Mr. Ogg's report.

"We need to give the administration time to review the list of ADA complaints," said Councilwoman Linda Geevers during the Feb. 16 council meeting. "Let's talk about what we can do short term and what we can do long term and do whatever we can to make them ADA compliant."

Mr. Ogg's report covers the inside and outside of the Municipal Building, the Health and Recreation Department, and township parks including Van Nest, Hendrickson, Ron Rogers Arboretum, Community Park, Conover Road Athletic Complex, Zaitz Park, as well as public walkways and sidewalks.

Violations the group found in the Municipal Complex include handicapped parking issues, and sidewalks in the Municipal Complex with broken paving slabs, excessive grades excessive steps, obstructions and insufficient clearance.

Inside the Municipal Building and court house, there is no wheelchair access to the dais used by the Township Council and other township boards, problems with a handrail at the north side interior stairway and the fact that the elevator is often turned off after 5 p.m., according to the report.

In Van Nest Park, alleged violations include non-accessible restrooms, an unprotected boat dock, no access to an existing barbecue pit, and no wheelchair sitting in the picnic area, according to the report.

In Hendrickson Park, there is no accessible parking and a path from the parking to the tennis courts to the Ron Rogers Arboretum is too steep. Once at the arboretum, the paths near the Sept. 11 memorial are uneven and broken, according to the report.

In Community Park, there is no accessible drinking fountain and no accessible route to Water Park from the Princeton-Hightstown Road entrance.

At the Conover Road Athletic Complex, there are no accessible routes to any of the fields, a particular issue since Mr. Ogg coaches his daughters' soccer teams.

"I've been coaching my daughters for many years in the West Windsor-Plainsboro Soccer Association ...," said Mr. Ogg. "I'm not a typical wheelchair user, I don't let too many things top me. It's very difficult getting to the park, and at Zaitz Park there is a very heavy coarse gravel that I get stuck. I often have people pull me out of it."

Township officials said they would review the report and do what they can to make improvements.

"We've continued to make improvements not only with existing buildings but with new buildings," said township Administrator Bob Hary. "At the Senior Center, we took great pains to make sure the doorway opening was such that it was ADA friendly."

Mr. Hary said the township recently made modifications at Mr. Ogg's request to allow for easier wheelchair access to the council chambers.

"Through new construction we've been very cognizant of ADA requirements. We don't want to give people the impression that nothing has been done."

According to Mr. Ogg's report, in 1992 West Windsor adopted a resolution approving its Americans with Disabilities Act

Transition Plan. He said that after visiting township sites, it seems as very little if anything has been done since then.

"It's one thing to do it badly, but it looks like when that report was approved it was just put in a desk drawer and never looked at again," Mr. Ogg said.

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