

Mike Charron's report on his site visit to the church

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UU Church Montpelier Vermont Accessibility Improvement Recommendations
The Unitarian Universalist Church, of Montpelier, Vermont, at 130 Main St. has been in existence since 1865. Located in the busy downtown area, the church serves as both a center of religious activity and education, and in support of community activities in the arts and other areas. The Church Accessibility Committee begin a long-term plan to increase accessibility and serve members of the community, including parents with young children, elders, visitors and people with disabilities, in order to remain "welcoming to all". As part of the planning process, members of the accessibility committee requested that the Community Access Program of the Vermont Center for Independent Living tour the building with members of the committee to determine ways in which accessibility might be improved.

The following areas were addressed during the tour, which took place on Thursday, January 15, 2014:

- Parking Area.
- Main Entrance from Ramp
- Thresholds And Doorways
- Restroom Renovations/Construction
- Elevator
- Worship Area and Youth Ed Area

The recommendations for access improvements each element listed. Dimensions and design specifications and referred to in each recommendation come from the current 2010 ADA standards. Use of the illustrations found in the ADA checklist (www.ADAchecklist.org) to guide the installation and design of accessible elements is recommended.

Parking Area

The parking area at the UU church is located on Street, adjacent to the entryway off School Street. This small paved area is next to the ramp entry into the building, and consists of four unmarked spaces which are at this point reserved for church officials and celebrants. The general slope of the law is beyond 1:48 or 2% slope, however the third parking area is within the slope of 1:48 "from the parking area to the ramp. The tar surface of the parking area presents a firm stable and slip resistant surface which is suitable under the ADA guidelines.

Recommendations:

Locate a Van Accessible parking area in the location of the third parking space from School Street. While space is limited in the lot in general, there may be available footage to create the required 8' access Isle and 8' parking space per the ADA Van accessible parking space design. Install a sign, including the

universal symbol of accessibility and the Van accessible parking space signs on a pole per the ADA guidelines, with the bottom edge of the sign being 5 feet above ground level.

Accessible Entryway

The accessible entryway to the UU Church is located on the right side of the small parking area off School Street, and consists of a concrete ramp with a metal rails leading to a level entryway with two large wooden doors which swing outward. The center of the ramp has a crack; the rails are lacking wheel stops; and the doorways are currently opened by operating the latch to physically pull the doors open. There is a large wooden threshold beneath the double doors leading to an atrium, which has a second door leading to the church hall.

Recommendations:

- When appropriate, repair crack in the entryway ramp.
- Install the wheel stop materials on the bottom of the ramp rails per the ADA specs
- Bevel all thresholds which extend over 1/2 inch in height.
- Install an automatic door opener on the entryway doors with the controls at the end of the ramp rise.
- All doors need to be operable by latch type hardware. Replace any knob door openers with latch or loop type handles.

Restrooms

Review of the proposals offered by the UU Accessibility Committee included the renovation of an existing restroom or the installation of a new accessible restroom in an existing storage space. Based upon a general consideration of cost and building structure, it is agreed, generally, that the least costly and most easily achievable accessibility improvement would be to build a new oh accessible restroom in the current storage space per the proposed plans.

Recommendations:

- Install a complete accessible restroom in the storage space per the plans proposed by members of the Accessibility Committee.
- Keep in mind the following information from the ADA checklist (www.ADAchecklist.org).

Priority Number 3 – toilet rooms: one scratch that 1) there must be a 30" x 48" approach space next to the sink, 2) any and all hot water pipes must be insulated are covered to avoid burns 3) the maximum height of the sink or counter face should be no more than 34 inches above the floor, 4) there should be a minimum of at least 27 inches of clearance underneath the sink area in order to allow a person in a wheelchair to approach (Google). 5) all faucets should be operable without grasping, pinching, twisting or turning of the wrist. 6) install a to the mirror no less than 40 inches from the floor over the sink and all of the mirrors no less than 35 inches above the floor for reflective surfaces. 7) Flush controls on the accessible toilet should be placed on the open side of the toilet and not on the side next to the wall.

Elevator

There is an existing elevator from the first floor to the second-floor which is operable by the occupant with reasonably simple controls. While this elevator is only large enough for a person in a standard wheelchair,(and one other occupant) to use at a time, the expense of updating this elevator and the fact that the elevator is a working unit which can be easily repaired, indicates that the existing system would meet current needs for access to the second-floor. There is however no signage for persons with visual impairments to indicate either where the elevator is or how to operate the controls.

Recommendations:

- Install a sign near the hallway entry to indicate the direction to the elevator with Braille contrasting characters on the sign.
- Install a sign next to the elevator indicating that this is an elevator.
- Install Braille characters on the control areas, indicating which control lifts and lowers the elevator. For guidance in installing these signs and information, follow the guidelines found in the ADA checklist (www.ADAchecklist.org). See priority Number 2, pages 9 through 12 – elevators – full-size and LULA.

Worship Area and Youth Ed Area

The second-floor worship area is composed of two rows of typical church pews, separated by a wide aisle between them. Toward the rear of the area are too short pews which are movable, and would allow for access for people in wheelchairs or other mobility devices. There are also available chairs around the perimeter area for seating if one is unable to use a standard pew.

The celebrant and choir area of the church is reached by traversing three stairs which lead to a staging area with the pulpit located on the right side. This area is currently inaccessible to people with disabilities that use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, and is reached with some difficulty by people who have ambulatory mobility impairments.

Recommendations:

- Install handrails where appropriate to stairways.
- Purchase and install a portable wheelchair lift which can be moved from the worship area to the other areas used on the floor as needed, and stored when not in use.
- Research and up-to-date assistive hearing technology for use in both the church halls, the education rooms and in the worship area as appropriate.
- Consider the installation of a closed-circuit television system in order to stream the services and activities to other areas where parents with young children or persons with disabilities may be located within the church building.
- If possible, install a ramp from the youth education rooms to the worship area to allow access to and from both areas.

ADA Standards and Resources

This information is provided by Vermont's ADA technical assistance provider, with support from the New England ADA Center from the *National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR)*, and is for technical assistance purposes and should not be interpreted as legal advice.

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Written by Sam Clark