

Proposal for Services in Planning and Design for:

Accessibility Plan for the Historic Village Center of Heath, Massachusetts

Prepared for:

Town of Heath, Massachusetts

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Summary

The Town of Heath is committed to creating a community that is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. As a rural hilltown with a rich historic heritage that is valued and celebrated by the residents, Heath's Village Center remains as the cultural, and social heart of the community. Over the years several key civic buildings have been reestablished on property located off Jacobs Road where the Town Offices, the Heath Free Public Library and the Heath Elementary School. However, the Post Office, Church, Community Hall and several historic buildings anchor the Village Center and it still remains an important part of the daily life and rituals of the townspeople. There is a simple rural elegance to the balance between the continuity of open common space and the unique mix of building architecture that define the Village Center. While preserving this distinct character of the Village Centers Nationally Registered Historic District status remains a priority, improving accessibility is essential to ensuring safe equitable access to public spaces, municipal facilities, and community events. The Town also realizes the importance of taking steps towards enhancing opportunities to generate rental revenue, co-working/incubator space or other similar services for citizens and visitors that will ensure a vital and sustainable Village Center for many years.

This proposal establishes a framework for preparing a comprehensive Accessibility Plan for the Heath Village Center portion of the Registered Historic District. The planning and design process will build off of a privately funded Accessibility Study for Sawyer Hall and a more recent Accessibility Study that focused on the primary municipal properties within the Village

Center to confirm and record the barriers to accessibility, recommend practical improvements, prioritize projects based on need and available resources, and provide materials, in written report and drawing form, that will support project budgeting and implementation efforts, and future applications for project funding.

The proposed planning and design process recognizes that accessibility and historic preservation are complementary objectives. Through thoughtful design and phased implementation, Heath can improve access while preserving the architectural and cultural character that defines its village center.

Project Goals & Planning Area

The Accessibility Plan will provide the Town with a long-term strategy for improving accessibility throughout the Town Center while maintaining the integrity of its historic resources.

The Plan will:

- Confirm and record the barriers to accessibility in public rights-of-way and municipal facilities.
- Improve safety and mobility for all residents and visitors.
- Provide guidance to the Town in meeting obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the State Architectural Access Board.
- Support the preservation of Heath's historic village character.
- Prioritize improvements based on safety, cost, and community benefit.
- Strengthen the Town's competitiveness for private, state and federal grant funding by providing pricing and/or bid ready drawings.
- Provide guidance for future capital improvement planning.

The planning area encompasses the civic, cultural, and historic resources that collectively define Heath's Village Center; roughly x acres in size. Municipal buildings, public gathering spaces, playgrounds, historic monuments, historic institutions, churches, and transportation corridors all contribute to the daily life of the community and should be considered as interconnected elements which define this important shared common at the heart of Heath. Equally important are the pedestrian connections, either existing or potential, linking these destinations, as accessibility depends not only upon accessing individual buildings but upon a well-considered accessible network.

The proposed planning and design services and resulting documents will focus on three primary areas of focus to assist the Town in charting the most practical and financially viable way towards meeting the goal of a more universally accessible, fiscally wise and revitalized Village Center.

Understanding Existing Conditions: This section of the plan expands upon the prior study and building evaluations already completed to document barriers, evaluating facilities, and understanding more how people move through the village and assessing how to accommodate future use.

Developing Practical Solutions: The “heart” of the plan which aims to balance accessibility, preservation, community priorities, and financial realities through an inclusive process that values historic and cultural resources and the practical need of the townspeople, .

Supporting Future Investment: Essentially a recommended roadmap for budgeting, grant applications, capital planning, and phased implementation.

Understanding Existing Conditions

The existing conditions assessment will move beyond an inventory of the framework that exists and aims to further examine how residents and visitors experience movement throughout the Village Center. Particular attention will be given to the continuity, safety, and usability of pedestrian routes, recognizing that accessibility extends beyond compliance with dimensional standards to include comfort, predictability, and ease of navigation.

We anticipate utilizing a combination of online available data through MASS GIS, Regional Planning Agencies, Town provided resources, field inventory sketches/measurements, site photographs and in select locations additional survey to develop a more comprehensive existing conditions base plan. This will serve as the baseline drawing for proposed planning and design work and as a valuable planning resource for the Town for this and other projects in the future. As discussed at a previous site visit we will also be sure to obtain better documentation of utility infrastructure for necessary coordination with any proposed accessibility improvements.

Some of the primary elements that will be documented and assessed include:

Pedestrian Walkways/ Routes

- Sidewalk locations and conditions or,
- Shoulder conditions where sidewalks are absent.
- Surface materials
- Cross slopes
- Drainage issues
- Accessibility during winter condition

- Trip hazards
 - Utility poles and roadside obstructions
 - Pedestrian lighting and wayfinding
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Vehicle/Roadway Infrastructure

- Existing curbs; style, location and heights
 - Drainage infrastructure
 - Snow storage zones
 - Overhead and buried utilities within road right of way
 - Parking accommodations; including accessible spaces
 - Crosswalk markings
 - Crossing distances
 - Pedestrian visibility conflicts
 - Traffic calming opportunities
 - Vehicle speeds
 - Road Signs
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Municipal/Civic Use Buildings*

Municipal buildings are among the community's most important civic resources and should provide equitable access to public services, meetings, events and emergency functions. We recommend each facility should be evaluated as a complete user experience—from arrival and parking through building entry, interior circulation, public meeting spaces, restrooms, and emergency egress—to identify both physical and operational barriers that may limit participation.

Each facility should be reviewed or confirmed that evaluation has been completed for:

- Accessible parking
- Exterior routes (Accessible Route)
- Building entrances
- Door hardware
- Interior circulation
- Restrooms
- Emergency evacuation procedures; including areas or rescue.

*Work is to be done in coordination with a more comprehensive review of buildings done by a consulting licensed Architect. We wish to highlight that the most successful accessibility plan will pay careful attention to the interface between the buildings and the landscape to ensure that this important interface is detailed to comply with regulatory standards and

Historic Buildings

A review of the original nomination documents for the National Historic District Designation clearly illustrates that many of Heath's most significant civic and cultural buildings were constructed long before modern accessibility standards existed. While these structures present unique design challenges, they also offer opportunities for thoughtful interventions that expand access without diminishing their historic integrity. The planning process should explore creative and context-sensitive solutions that respect original architectural features while improving usability for residents and visitors alike.

It is notable, and a primary project directive, that there is a concentration of historic building under either town or private ownership which are key character defining elements of the Village Center. Therefore, planning and design recommendations will also take into account the concept of reasonable accommodation within historic settings which follows the available flexibility under ADA regulations for historic properties that encourages practical improvements wherever feasible.

The Accessibility Plan will evaluate opportunities for improving accessibility while respecting historic architectural features through exploring:

- Reversible modifications
- Alternative accessible entrances
- Portable ramps where appropriate
- Improved signage
- Operational accommodations
- Sensitive site improvements

Developing Practical Solutions

The proposed approach and plan is to take cues from the traditions of New England resilience and self-determination along with the practicalities of a small town budget. Following a multi-step process broken down into three primary actions of: Community Engagement, Historic Preservation and Prioritizing Improvements we will seek together solution that will preserve the historic character of Heath, be realistic in scope and budget and respect community. Other larger goals the plan will strive to reach would also include: creating accessible civic facilities, strengthening the accessible network within the public common; enhancing community gathering places, and improving arrival and wayfinding.

Community Engagement

Because accessibility is ultimately experienced by people rather than infrastructure, community participation will be an important component of the planning process. Residents, municipal officials, emergency responders, preservation advocates, older adults, and individuals with disabilities each bring valuable perspectives regarding how the Village Center functions today and where barriers remain. Their collective experience and wisdom will help ensure that recommendations reflect local priorities and practical realities. Additionally, given the small year-round population, direct community participation will be critical to identifying practical priorities that work for those folks that gain to most directly benefit from recommended improvements.

Our past experience with community engagement on Town projects similar to this one suggest that greatest success in providing helpful contributions to the planning and design process, and creating meaningful engagement with community members often include the following types of outreach:

- Public information meetings (during both the information gathering stage and design development stage)
 - Accessibility walking audits
 - Community surveys
 - Meetings with seniors and residents with disabilities
 - Consultation with the Historical Commission and other identified project partners
 - Coordination with emergency services
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Historic Preservation

Heath's historic village landscape is one of its defining assets, and the Accessibility Plan should recognize that accessibility and preservation are mutually supportive objectives rather than competing interests. Recommendations will be developed with careful consideration of the Town's historic buildings, traditional streetscapes, stone walls, mature trees, and other character-defining features. Wherever possible, improvements should employ compatible materials and sensitive design solutions that enhance accessibility while preserving the authenticity and visual integrity of the Village Center. Coordination with the Heath Historical Commission and adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation will help ensure that accessibility improvements contribute to the long-term stewardship of the Town's historic resources.

Proposed accessibility improvements will complement Heath's historic village landscape by:

- Preserving historic stone walls or other human built structures and artifacts (e.g. old foundations, or stone markers).
- Protecting mature street trees.

- Minimizing impacts to historic building facades.
 - Using compatible materials whenever possible.
 - Coordinating projects with the Heath Historical Commission and other preservation partners.
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Priority Improvement Areas

Priority improvement areas will be organized around desired community outcomes rather than individual facilities to better support comprehensive planning and implementation. This framework emphasizes improving access to civic destinations, strengthening the public realm through enhanced pedestrian infrastructure and connectivity, enhancing community gathering spaces and public open spaces, and improving arrival, parking, and wayfinding. Organizing recommendations by outcome reinforces an integrated, place-based approach that aligns public investments with broader community goals and long-term resilience.

Potential recommendations may include:

Public Buildings

- Accessible parking improvements
- Automatic or power-assisted entry doors
- Improved accessible restrooms
- Interior route modifications
- Accessible public meeting/gathering spaces

Village Streets

- Sidewalk improvements where feasible
- Stabilized pedestrian shoulders
- ADA-compliant curb ramps
- Improved drainage
- Safer pedestrian crossings
- Traffic calming measures

Public Spaces

- Accessible seating
- Improved pathways
- Accessible viewing areas during community events
- Accessible picnic areas
- Accessible community gathering spaces

Parking

- ADA-compliant parking spaces
- Van-accessible spaces
- Improved signage
- Accessible routes from parking to buildings

Wayfinding

Recommendations may include:

- Historic District appropriate directional signs
 - Accessible parking signage
 - Building identification
 - Historic interpretation accessible to all users
 - Digital accessibility information on the Town website(TBD)
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Supporting Future Investment

Recognizing Heath's limited financial resources, implementation can be approached as an incremental process that aligns accessibility improvements with routine maintenance, capital investments, and funding opportunities. Early actions should focus on lower-cost, high-impact improvements that address immediate barriers while establishing the administrative framework for long-term implementation. Subsequent phases can build upon this foundation by integrating accessibility into larger infrastructure and building improvement projects as funding becomes available.

A sample phasing strategy might look like the following:

Phase One (1–2 Years)

- Complete ADA evaluation (inclusive of building and landscape components)
 - Conduct detailed accessibility inventory
 - Complete the planning and design process for the Village Center Accessibility Plan
 - Replace priority signage
 - Address minor barriers with low-cost improvements
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Phase Two (3–5 Years)

- Upgrade municipal building entrances
- Improve accessible parking

- Replace priority curb ramps
 - Improve pedestrian routes
 - Incorporate accessibility into all capital projects
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Phase Three (5–10 Years)

- Complete larger infrastructure improvements
 - Improve village streetscape accessibility
 - Expand accessible public spaces
 - Continue monitoring and updating the ADA Transition Plan
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Deliverables

The completed plan is to provide the Town with a practical decision-making framework that combines technical documentation with implementation guidance. Deliverables may include a comprehensive inventory of existing conditions, GIS-based mapping, photographic documentation, prioritized recommendations, conceptual improvement plans, preliminary cost estimates, funding strategies, public engagement findings, and an updated ADA Transition Plan. Together, these materials will support future budgeting, grant applications, project design, and long-term capital planning.

The completed Accessibility Plan at minimum can include:

- Existing conditions report with:
 - Accessibility barrier inventory
 - GIS-based accessibility mapping or other maps of existing conditions
 - Photographic documentation and field notes
- A Planning document including written narrative and drawings with:
 - Prioritized improvement list
 - Preliminary cost estimates
 - Historic preservation guidance
 - Public engagement summary
 - Five-year implementation plan
 - Ten-year capital improvement recommendations
 - ADA Transition Plan update based on federal guidelines
- Design Development Drawing Set at a level of detail to be used for initial construction pricing.
- Summary Notes from Field Visits, and Project Meetings

Estimated Fee for Services

Based on the above planning and design framework and the goals for accessibility improvements as we understand them, we propose the following estimated fee apportioned between three primary project phases: All work will be billed at current hourly rates and invoiced monthly. Report reproduction costs will be estimated at a later date to determine most cost effective way to produce. Incidental expenses are billed at cost only and if to exceed the agreed upon amount written approval will be acquired from the client.

1. Existing Conditions Assessment and Documentation

2. Planning and Design Phase includes:

- community engagement and team meetings
- plan development and consultant coordination
- pricing set drawing production

3. Accessibility Planning Document includes:

- Report with narrative and incorporate plans
- Implementation strategy
- Appendix with resources, summary meeting notes, ADA Transiton Plan updates/guidance.

Total Estimated Hours= **224**

Estimated Fee @ current billable rates* = \$30,360

*Associate Principal Rates \$130/hr; Principal Rate \$170/hr

Conclusion

The Town of Heath has long demonstrated a commitment to preserving its rural character, historic resources, and a strong sense of community.

By taking a thoughtful, phased approach, Heath can improve access to public facilities and community spaces while respecting the historic landscape that defines the Village Center. Accessibility is ultimately about ensuring that every resident and visitor can participate fully in community life. For Heath, that commitment can be realized without sacrificing the historic buildings, landscapes, and traditions that have shaped the Village Center for generations. By

approaching accessibility as an integral component of stewardship rather than a separate obligation, the Town can foster a Village Center that is more welcoming, and better prepared to serve future generations while honoring its past.

The resulting plan will provide a practical roadmap for future investments, strengthen the Town's abilities to seek private or state and federal funding, and support a vision for Heath that prioritizes a welcoming, inclusive, and resilient community for generations to come.