
Real Choices in New Haven

Promoting Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Our Community • Winter 2005 Publication



Community Comment Needed On Accessibility Issues in Proposed Building Code Changes

On March 11, 2005, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. at New Haven City Hall in the Aldermanic Chambers the State of Connecticut Department of Public Safety will hold a public hearing on proposed regulations known as the State Building Code – 2005 Connecticut Supplement which will modify the existing building code. The building code states for architects, builders and developers, the requirements for substantial renovations and new construction, including what accessibility features for individuals with disabilities are required.



The proposed regulations include several changes to the current construction requirements for multifamily housing units that may adversely affect individuals with disabilities. One change in the proposed regulations for multifamily housing development will be reducing the number of accessible/adaptable units on the first floor or reachable by elevator from 100% to 20%. These changes would include less accessibility of bathrooms, kitchens, fixtures, wheelchair maneuver space, door clearance and hardware. To review the specific proposals go to:

http://www.state.ct.us/dps/DFEBS/OSBI/TechServ/code_development_news.htm

If you have detailed questions on the specific code changes please contact Gretchen Knauff at the Office of Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities at (800) 842-7303.

We encourage members of our disability community that have an opinion on the proposed changes to come testify on March 11th or submit written comment to Attorney Janet K. Ainsworth, Department of Public Safety, 1111 Country Club Road, P.O. Box 2794, Middletown, CT 06457-9294, by fax at (860) 684-8363 or e-mail to Janet.Ainsworth@po.state.ct.us.

The State Legislature through its Regulation Review Committee must also approve the proposed changes. Therefore, we encourage you to also submit written comment to the co-chairs of the Regulation Review Committee: Senator Jonathan Harris and State Representative T.R. Rowe at the Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106.

Hope to see you on March 11th!



Access New Haven: Accessibility Evaluation for the Shubert Theater

Evaluation by Elanah Sherman, editorial revision by Rahda Shenoy

Located at 247 College Street, the Shubert Theater prides itself on its efforts to provide patrons with disabilities with equal access to theater programs. The Theater can accommodate a total of twenty-six individuals in wheelchairs. Some areas of the Theater include permanent, companion seating, whereas other areas provide space for portable companion seating. The Shubert's Mezzanine provides space for eight people using wheelchairs in the rear, and the Balcony provides space for four persons using wheelchairs (also in the rear).



In the Orchestra section, seating is available in the last row and in the two front side boxes. Four seats in the rear may be removed to provide space for two persons using wheelchairs, and each of the front side boxes can accommodate up to six individuals using wheelchairs. Portable companion seating may be arranged in the boxes, as well. However, the A Box (House Right) corridor is quite narrow; turning space into the entryway is rather cramped, and an open stairway directly behind the turning space is a problem. In addition, the slope in the Orchestra area is quite steep.

Currently, the Theater owns nearly 150 assistive listening sets, the availability of which is publicized in the Theater's brochures. Because the Shubert is a presenting venue, complications often arise with regard to the arrangement of signed performances, which are occasionally scheduled by the education/outreach department.

The Shubert does not provide a parking lot exclusively for its patrons; patrons generally park at the garage next door, which is owned by the New Haven Parking Authority and which offers accessible parking spaces. Traffic and pavement conditions at the garage make drop-off difficult.

The Shubert Theater presents a few other accessibility issues: its exterior door hardware is inaccessible, the front door closes too rapidly, and both the front door and the interior door leading from the vestibule into the lobby are too heavy. Though the Shubert props open the interior door during periods of arrival and exit, the door's weight may still pose problems during other times at which patrons may need to enter and exit the facility. In addition, the Shubert's ticket counters are located too high off the ground to be fully accessible to some individuals with disabilities.

The Theater's ticketing associates receive training on responding to disability-related seating requests. However, the Shubert website, www.shubert.com, indicates that the Theater does not accept online ticket orders for disability-related seating. The reasoning behind this policy is that online orders simply cannot provide sufficiently personalized service for patrons with disabilities.

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Accessibility Evaluation for the Shubert Theater (continued from page 2)

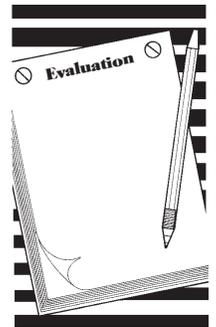
Currently, the Shubert does not have a written policy regarding accessible seat release to the general public. The Theater responds to seating requests from patrons with visual impairments on a case-by-case basis; it does not set aside individual seats or blocks of seats for any length of time.

During its most recent renovation in 1996, the Shubert Theater specifically solicited comments and suggestions from individuals with disabilities in order to improve its efforts to provide highly individualized, equal opportunities to access for theater-goers with disabilities. If the past provides any indication, we may be confident that the Shubert Theater will continue to make modifications to improve what is already a very good level of access.

Access New Haven: Accessibility Evaluation of Bentara

Evaluation by Elanah Sherman, editorial revision by Rahda Shenoy

Bentara, a Malaysian restaurant located at 76 Orange Street, is equipped with a courteous staff, an open physical plan, and excellent overall accessibility to persons with disabilities. The restaurant's accessible entrance is located on Center Street, around the corner from the main entryway. This entrance features a very gently sloping, platform-less ramp that leads to a slightly heavy door (10 lbs.). Directly across the street from the accessible entrance lies an accessible parking space. A large, leafy plant obstructs the area just inside the door, to some degree. The placement of tables and chairs in the dining area slightly narrows the path of travel coming in off of the excellent interior ramp. The main accessibility issue at *Bentara* is the low, 26" average height of all of the tables in the main dining area, which does not allow sufficient room for knee clearance. However, the compliant tables in the rear dining area offer 28" of knee clearance space.



In addition, the restrooms at *Bentara* may pose some problems for patrons with disabilities. The heavy door to the women's restroom (10 lbs.) features a non-compliant button latch and displays a sign that ought to be placed next to the door rather than on it. The women's restroom contains no stall, the toilet area cabinet may obstruct transfer space, the mirror is located too high off the ground at over 49", and a wastebasket to some degree obstructs access to the soap dispenser.

As is the door to the women's restroom, the door to the men's restroom has faulty signage and is quite heavy (8 lbs.). At the sink, a storage cabinet and wastebasket may obstruct knee clearance. The men's only stall possesses a latch that sticks slightly and a coat hook that is placed too high off the ground. The stall's dimensions of 58" by 6' are nearly compliant. Despite the accessibility issues in the restaurant's bathrooms, *Bentara*, overall, provides excellent accessibility to persons with disabilities.

The restaurant is open seven days a week for lunch and dinner except in the **summer** when they are closed for **lunch** on Saturday and Sunday. Lunch is served, Sunday through Saturday from 11:30 AM - 3:00 PM. Dinner is served Sunday through Thursday 5:00 PM - 10:00 PM, Friday and Saturday 5:00 PM - 11:00 PM.

The New Haven Free Public Library

Adaptive Equipment

With the desire to fulfill its technological goal of lessening our community's "digital divide" by providing access to all, The New Haven Free Public Library added adaptive technology on the first floor of the Main Branch, 133 Elm Street. Thanks to an LSTA (Library Services & Technology Act) the library has been able to accommodate the needs of persons with visual impairments who, with the addition of a video magnifier, a stand alone reading machine and a Windows 95/98 screen reader, will have access to software and the internet. The software program, JAWS (Job Access With Speech) is installed on the computer on the first floor and on an additional computer in the Gates Training Lab on the lower level of the Main Branch.

Technological accessibility is only one feature of library services for the disability community of New Haven. Along with a collection of large print books in a variety of genres, the books-on-tape feature new fiction and non-fiction as well as tried and true classics.

Besides the Main Branch at 133 Elm Street, New Haven Free Public Library has several neighborhood branches: Fair Haven at 82 Grand Avenue, Mitchell at 37 Harrison Street and Stetson at 200 Dixwell Avenue, and the new Courtland S. Wilson Branch to be built in the Hill neighborhood on the corner of Daggett and Washington by 2006. For further information please call 946-8125, or TTY 946-6200.



Access New Haven: Accessibility Evaluation of Zinc

Evaluation by Elanah Sherman, editorial revision by Rahda Shenoy

Located across from the historic New Haven Green in the heart of the city's shopping district, *Zinc* offers its unique style of modern American food for both lunch and dinner. The staff and owners of *Zinc* are very knowledgeable with regard to accessibility issues; in fact, the co-owner is even considering the creation of a large print menu to accommodate persons with visual impairments.



Zinc does present a few accessibility issues, however. The sidewalk in front of the entry ramp slopes a bit, and the entry ramp itself is platform-less, which may create complications for some patrons with mobility impairments. Both the exterior and interior doors are heavy; however, the door handles, though somewhat unorthodox, are very easy for most people to use.

Most of the restaurant's dining room tables provide over 27" of knee clearance. Two paths of travel lead from the front dining area to the rear dining area. However, a potential difficulty may arise when the tables are full, since this situation narrows the paths to less than 36" at some points.

Zinc's most prominent accessibility issue concerns entry into the restaurant's unisex restroom. The heavy pocket door, devoid of signage, is undoubtedly quite difficult for most people to open and close, both from outside and inside. Fortunately, the *Zinc* staff is aware of this problem and often offers assistance to patrons in need of help with the door. The bathroom interior offers good accessibility overall, with the only 2 complications: the faucet sticks, and a wastebasket slightly intrudes into the transfer room near the toilet.

Zinc is located at 964 Chapel Street in New Haven. The restaurant's hours of operation are: Lunch – Tuesday through Saturday 12:00 PM - 2:30 PM and Sunday 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM; Dinner – Monday through Thursday 5:30 PM - 9:30 PM, Friday and Saturday 5:30 PM - 10:30 PM, and Sunday 5:00 PM - 8:30 PM. Patrons can get their parking tickets validated at the Crown Street garage.

The Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities

165 Church Street, New Haven, CT 06510 • (203) 946-7833 • TTY/TTD (203) 946-8582

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