

MAPC Accessibility Issues

I. OVERVIEW

This report presents my findings regarding physical accessibility issues in the MAPC offices based on a general understanding of the regulations (see disclaimer below). My analysis included measuring many but not all aspects of our spaces. I measured the height of light switches and other controls, counters and table tops, telephones and fixtures within the restrooms (women's only on the assumption that the men's rooms were similar). I also conducted a wheelchair survey during which I went into every common area under our jurisdiction and several individual offices. The wheelchair survey allowed me to understand what difficulties a wheelchair user might encounter but I did not do a similar analysis of how a person using a cane would be able to get around. Some of the difficulties I encountered may be due to the fact that I have no wheelchair skills and others may not have the same difficulties.

In general I found the offices to be very accessible. The building construction and fixtures generally appeared to meet the regulations but I did find some deficiencies that surprised me. Many of the access bottlenecks that I found were a result of how we use the space and can be easily fixed.

II. DISCLAIMER

My review of the MAPC offices was done to provide us with an overview of how our space generally meets the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (AAB) regulations. This is based on my general knowledge from reading the standards and attending the Community Access Monitor training. I took measurements and attempted to access all three floors of the building in a wheelchair. The regulations are complex and vary depending on when construction occurred. My recommendations are not meant to imply any legal requirements and when presented to the building management, should not be represented as such.

III. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND RELATIONSHIP TO STANDARDS

I have prepared a floor by floor analysis highlighting specific problem areas but many of the recommendations apply throughout our three floors. I have summarized these general recommendations along with providing the standards that apply.

Keypads

On the third and fifth floors we have a number of keypads that require using an access code to get through a door or to use the restroom. The standard for door handles is that they must be able to be opened using only one hand, held in a fist. This is because a person who has limited use of his or her hands may only be able to use a fist. This standard is also used for controls such as electrical controls, mechanical controls or self-service controls. The key pads cannot be easily opened by someone with a closed fist. The small buttons and close spacing would be impossible to operate without fingers or at least knuckles. Some of these keypads provide access to restricted areas such as our conference room and would only be an issue if we had a staff person with a disability. Others, such as those for the restrooms, would be used by the general public.



Figure 1
The access key pads require the use of your fingers

Recommendation:

- Bring this to the attention of the building management and ask them to research alternatives that may be more accessible. If these exist, they should be installed on all restroom doors.

Self-closing hinges

Throughout the offices, many of the doors to the restrooms and the outer doors to the offices have self-closing hinges. I found some of these to be slightly easier to get through than others. The regulations state that a door must be able to be opened with a maximum of 5 pounds of pressure and that self-closing hinges take 6 seconds to close.

Recommendation:

- The building management should inspect and recalibrate all doors if necessary.

Housekeeping

Many of the obstacles to easy access are self-inflicted. We have a tendency to store boxes and equipment in the hallways which narrows their usable space. This was particularly a problem on the third floor. ADA regulations require a 5 foot circle or a T-shaped space for a person using a wheelchair to reverse direction. Although I was often able to back up out of a space, we need to be sure that the aisles are as clear as possible.

Recommendation:

- For each floor we should evaluate what is stored in the hallways and find a more suitable location to relocate these boxes to. This should also be reviewed periodically to guard against “box creep”.

Restroom door handles

The standard for door handles is that they must be able to be opened using only one hand, held in a fist. This is because a person who has limited use of his or her hands may only be able to use a fist. Generally this is accomplished by using lever handles rather than knobs. All of our office doors have levers but the one place where this is not done is in the restroom stalls. All of the restroom stalls are opened and closed using small round knobs that have a small raised strip in the middle. This makes it very difficult to open or close with a closed fist.



Figure 2:
This knob on the handicapped stall cannot be opened with a closed fist

Recommendation:

- Replace all the hardware in the accessible stalls with levers.

IV. BUILDING ACCESSIBILITY

A. Parking

There are two handicapped parking spaces at the far end of Temple Place across from the Boston Common. These are standard on-street spaces and are under the jurisdiction of the city.

Recommendation:

- When we create a page regarding accessibility on the MAPC web site we should indicate the location of these accessible spaces.

B. Accessible approach from Red Line at Park Street and the handicapped parking on Temple Place

Temple Place has curb cuts at every intersection and the sidewalks are in relatively good condition.



Figure 3:
Typical street and sidewalk conditions

C. Entry from street

The sidewalk in front of 60 Temple Place is smooth and the entrance has automatic door buttons on the street side and in the vestibule.

D. Elevator

The elevator appears to be fully accessible. It has visible and audible door opening/closing signals and floor indicators although it does not announce which floor you are arriving at. The call buttons on all six floors are at 42 inches high. The controls inside the elevator have raised lettering as well as Braille. The door jambs at all six floors have raised numbers and Braille identifying the floor. The emergency phone/intercom controls have Braille and raised letters and a push to talk button. There is also a button that can be pushed to send a message so it can function without voice communication. The intercom is identified by Braille and raised letters.

The one deficiency is that the door to open and access the intercom/phone has a small handle that does not pass the closed fist test.

Recommendation:

- Discuss with the building management whether the handle on the intercom is an industry standard or if more accessible options are available. If more accessible options are available one should be installed.

V. THIRD FLOOR

Offices

The door into the office area was relatively easy to open. There is a coat rack on the left side of the hall which has hooks at two heights, making it easy to use from a wheelchair. The copy machine directly in front of Sheila Wynters' office made it difficult to make the turn into her office. The cube spaces were easy to access and easier to turn into than the office doors. However, the hallways are heavily used for storage and the accumulation of boxes can impede the use of a wheelchair, particularly when turning is concerned.



Figure 4:
This coat rack can be used by someone in a wheelchair



Figure 5:
The small copy machine makes turning into offices difficult



Figure 6:
Boxes in the hallway narrow the aisle

Recommendations:

- Investigate alternatives to the key pad.
- Test and adjust the self-closing door hinge to ensure it meets the standards for less than 5 lbs. of pressure to open and a minimum of 6 seconds to close.
- Relocate the copy machine opposite Sheila Wynter's office.

- Have staff undertake general housekeeping to relocate boxes that are stored in the hallways.

Kitchen

When trying to turn into the kitchen the placement of a trash can and recyclables bin made it impossible to get between the two tables and turn into the kitchen. These items had to be moved in order to get into the kitchen. Inside the kitchen there is a step stool that is stored on the right side of the door. This also narrowed the aisle and made it difficult to maneuver. I was able to reach the coffee maker, the microwave, the paper towels and the refrigerator. There is a slanted panel under the sink but it is not deep enough to allow easy access to the sink faucet and the soap dispenser. The telephone is on a table at a convenient height.



Figure 7:

Trash cans and the placement of the tables makes it difficult to get into the kitchen



Figure 8:
There is not enough space to pull up close to the sink

Recommendations:

- Relocate the trash can and recyclable bin away from the entrance to the kitchen.
- Move the two tables farther apart to ensure that there is 36 inches between them.
- Move the step stool away from the kitchen door.
- Remove the panel under the sink so that a wheelchair can be placed closer to the sink.

Conference room

I had no trouble getting into the conference room. I was able to reach the light switch. The coat rack was reachable but not easily. The placement of the red chairs did not allow enough space to reach the table without moving several. There is not enough clearance on either side of the table to go to

the front of the room. The conference room table is 28 inches high which is the minimum height allowed.

The AAB regulations for places of assembly apply to facilities with a capacity of more than 150 persons so there does not appear to be a regulatory requirement for providing accessible spaces. However, the standard for providing a wheelchair space is that each space should be 60 inches long and 36 inches wide.



Figure 9:
The seating makes it difficult to get to the conference room table



Figure 10:
Too many chairs creates difficulty getting to the table

Recommendations:

- Reconfigure the bank of red chairs so that there is a 36 inch wide aisle left clear from the entrance to the table as an accessible path of travel.
- Delineate one 36 by 60 inch wide space for a wheelchair and provide a sign indicating that this is reserved for wheelchairs.
- Add one accessible coat rack.

Restrooms

The third floor restrooms have the same issues as all the others. The key pads are not useable by someone with limited use of their hands and the handicapped stalls need to have levers installed. The restrooms met all other requirements for space under the sinks, number and position of grab bars and the height of all controls and fixtures.

Recommendations:

- Install lever handles on handicapped stall doors.
- Investigate installing more accessible key pads.

VI. FIFTH FLOOR

Offices

It was difficult to maneuver through the door with only one side open. The wooden threshold was a problem for me to get over. Moving throughout the office area was easy because of the relatively open layout and lack of boxes and equipment. The copy machine was accessible from a wheelchair as well as the recycling bin.

Recommendations:

- Replace the threshold with a smoother transition.

Kitchen

The rim of the sink is at 34 inches high. The cabinet doors need to be opened to get a wheelchair under the sink.

Recommendations:

- Remove cabinet doors under the sink to allow easy access.

Restrooms

Because of the BCIL, the rest rooms have automatic doors. However, these restrooms also require the use of a key pad for access.

Recommendations:

- Install lever handles on handicapped stall doors.
- Investigate installing more accessible key pads.

VII. SIXTH FLOOR

Woman's rest room

The door handle inside the accessible stall is a small, round knob that is more or less flush with the door and not easily opened with a closed fist. The threshold at the door may exceed the standards and presented an obstacle. The wooden table creates an obstruction by narrowing the path of travel to 26 inches wide. The paper towel dispenser top is 52 inches high and the rim of the waste receptacle is 41 inches high. The door handle to the bathroom door is 37 inches high but requires almost 9 pounds of pressure to open. Because this is not a public rest room, there is no key pad.



Figure 11:
This table blocks access to the handicapped stall

Recommendations:

- Remove the wooden table.
- Install lever handles on handicapped stall doors.
- Test and recalibrate the self-closing hinge.

Path of travel throughout the office

In general, the hallways are wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair and all areas were accessible for straight-ahead travel. The location of file cabinets or equipment immediately opposite an office door made it difficult, although generally not impossible, to turn into an office. The carpet is smooth and was not a problem.



Figure 12:
The office hallways provide the required 36 inches of width

Kitchen

The sixth floor kitchen is a heavily used space. The automatic light sensor does not work. The water cooler and counter top height is 34 inches. In order to get under the sink, one would have to open the cabinet doors and push aside the many cleaning items that are stored there. The coffee machine and microwave are reachable although coffee supplies may be out of reach. There is a trash can and recyclables bin that block access to the sink.



Figure 13:
It was necessary to move the trash cans to get to the sink

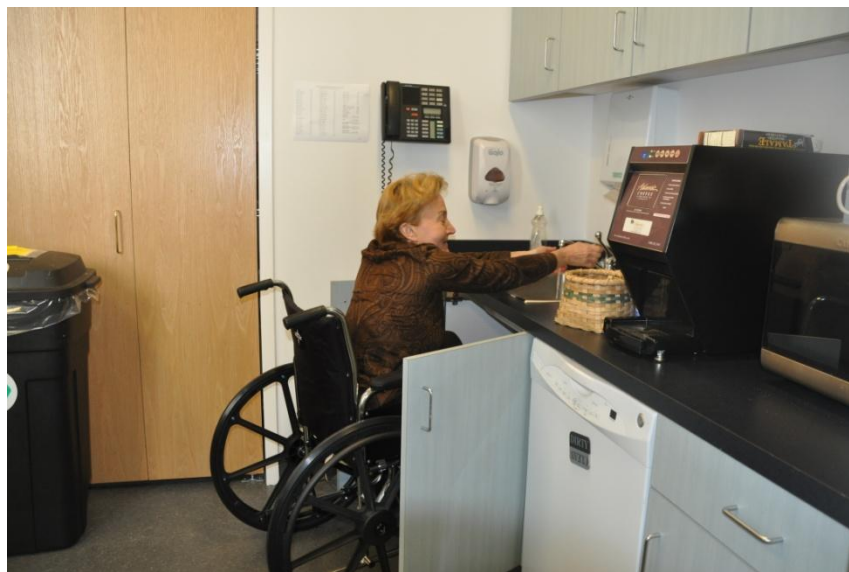


Figure 14:
Removing the cabinet doors would make it easier to reach the sink

Recommendations:

- Remove the doors under the sink and relocate stored items.
- Lower the telephone.
- Relocate the trash can and recyclable bin.

Copy room

At 44 inches, the aisle between the two copy machines is adequate but there is no turn around room at the end. The controls on the large copier would be difficult to reach. The far counter is 30 inches high and accessible. The supply and machine counter is 37 inches high with 42 inches of space underneath. Some of the equipment on that counter may be difficult to reach. The telephone is 56 inches high and only 17 inches of space to get to it.

Recommendations:

- Move the phone to another location and if wall-mounted, lower it. It could also be placed on a counter.

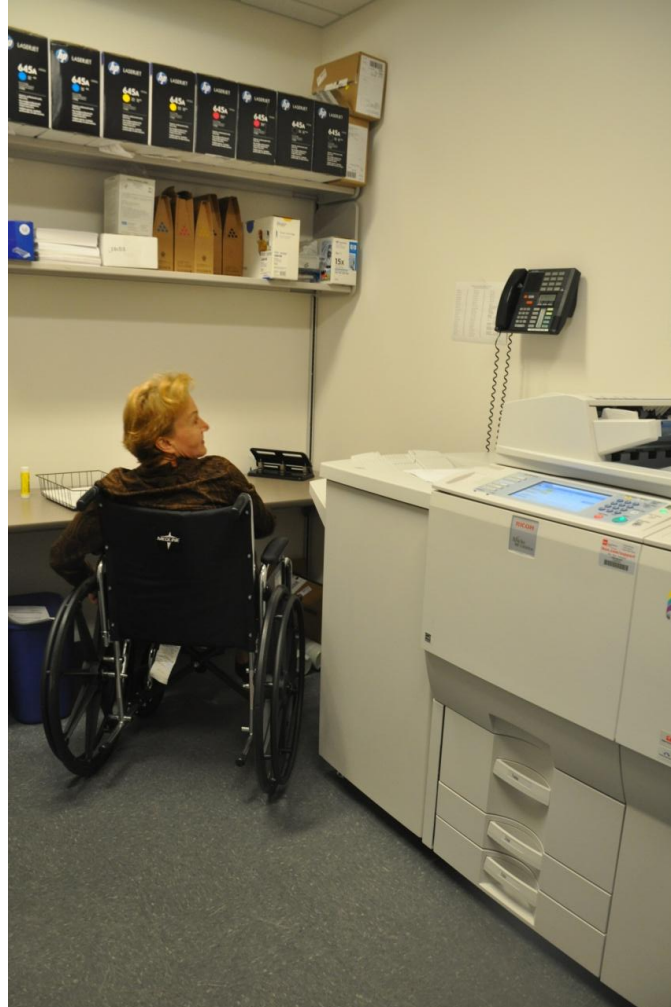


Figure 15:
The telephone is not accessible from a wheelchair

Supply cabinets/mail boxes

The height of these units would only pose a challenge if an employee used a wheelchair.

Individual offices

All offices have doors with levers and are wide enough for a wheelchair. Because of the variety of desk and bookshelf configurations, some would be easier to access than others but there are conference rooms if a staff member needed to have a meeting.

Reception area

This is a wide open space and easily accessed. However, if you use the elevator closest to the closet, you will encounter a chair in front of you. I was able to get around it but someone in a power chair might be going fast enough for it to be a problem.

Map Room

Access to this conference room is not a problem except that chairs would need to be shifted around to make more space upon entry.

Front conference room

This room is easily accessed and has a two level coat rack and the phone is on a table.