ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT

An important component of the Campus and Facilities Master Plan is the assessment of the existing physical accessibility of the building and grounds by reviewing the existing conditions and documentation on campus access. Following this assessment the master plan prioritizes and makes recommendations for removing physical barriers and improving access. The accessibility consultant Kessler McGuinness & Associates (KMA) worked closely with Chan Krieger & Associates and the University to identify access issues including the following tasks:

- Walk-through of the campus to identify the principal existing architectural barriers.
- Preliminary review of various University documents related to campus accessibility.
- Jurisdictional analysis that reviewed the University’s obligations under state and federal accessibility regulations.
- Compile the University’s own barrier removal recommendations and reported implementation in order to develop an overview of the barrier removal previously identified and performed.
- Develop a memo that consolidates the information related to barrier removal contained in various University documents.
- Solicit input from members of the University community and general public who have disabilities via interviews and meetings.
- Develop summary memo resulting from these meetings.

The purpose of this summary is to make recommendations, based on a synthesis of the information gathered in these tasks, regarding accessibility issues that should be addressed in the University’s master plan for the Dartmouth Campus. Three factors provide broad guidance for establishing master plan accessibility goals:

1. Correct elements that were not built in compliance with state and federal requirements for accessibility in new construction and alterations - The master plan makes recommendations for prioritizing and addressing elements that were not constructed in full compliance with applicable state or federal accessibility codes/regulations in effect at the time of construction. There have been state access requirements applicable to buildings constructed by the Commonwealth since 1968. Many architectural elements at the campus do not comply with current state and federal accessibility
requirements. Determining whether any specific existing barrier was in compliance with applicable regulations at the time of construction is not within the scope of this project. For example, existing toilet rooms have several elements that are not compliant by today’s standards but may have been compliant at the time of construction.

2. **Remove Barriers to Legally Mandated Program Accessibility** - Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the University has an obligation to insure that all of its public programs and services are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Neither 504 nor the ADA necessarily requires that all facilities be accessible or that all elements in a single facility be accessible. The University can use a combination of policy and operational adjustments as well as architectural barrier removal to provide program access. However, architectural barrier removal can make it easier to provide effective operational responses. For example, increasing the number of accessible classrooms makes it easier to relocate a specific class to an accessible space when necessary.

3. **Remove Barriers to Promote Universal Design** - Improving accessibility for individuals with disabilities improves access for everyone and furthers the University’s educational mission. Whether or not a regulatory obligation exists to remove a particular barrier, the University’s core mission can be advanced by creating a campus where accessibility for people of all ages and abilities is maximized.

The goals for architectural and communication accessibility to be achieved by the master plan must be established by the University. The University’s 1979 504 Compliance Evaluation and subsequent ADA Task Force reports did not contain program access criteria. Such criteria could provide a baseline for creating master plan accessibility goals. At a minimum, the master plan seeks to identify recommendations that insure that all criteria for program access are implemented. The master plan also presents the opportunity for the University to establish a more comprehensive plan for barrier removal. Below are KMA’s recommendations for accessibility issues that should be addressed by the master plan. KMA recognizes that the extent to which any individual recommendation can be fully implemented is dependent on design review and available resources.
Parking

- Provide additional accessible parking spaces immediately adjacent to facilities. Accessible parking is provided in several lots throughout the campus. However, these lots all require individuals to travel several hundred feet to the nearest building. There are accessible parking spaces immediately adjacent to the Campus Center. These spaces appear to be the preferred spaces because they are the closest. It was noted in both meetings and interviews that enforcement to prevent unauthorized use of these spaces should be improved.

- Provide accessible parking spaces adjacent to the principal athletic fields.

- Provide at least one fully compliant van accessible space wherever accessible spaces are provided. Van accessible spaces were not observed in some ring road lots and the access aisle of some existing spaces was not sufficiently wide (8’).

- Provide at least one fully compliant path of travel from all accessible parking spaces to an accessible building entrance. Where there are also inaccessible routes, it is important to identify the accessible route.

- Evaluate and implement means for providing informational signage at critical decision points in the path of travel. Information may include walkway endpoints and when a walkway is not accessible, the nature of the barriers. Providing appropriate information allows individuals to make informed decisions. Interior signs should include information regarding the accessible path, including elevator locations, and the location of accessible restrooms.

Campus-wide Path of Travel

- Provide an accessible path of travel to every campus building and facility (including playing fields) that to the maximum extent feasible, coincides with the route of the general public. Although it may be an appropriate long-term goal for the University to provide fully compliant paths of travel to every facility, there is not necessarily an obligation to immediately remove all existing barriers. For example, the ramps in the quad are longer than the 30’ currently allowed. However, in our meeting with staff of the Southeastern MA Independence Center, no one raised the issue as an obstacle. On the other hand, the ramp at the rear of the Library is non-compliant and was noted by several people as difficult to navigate.
Therefore, it would be appropriate to prioritize barrier removal for the library ramp.

- **Clearly identify the accessible paths of travel.** In the long term, making all walkways accessible will provide the greatest benefit. Until then, critical information should be provided at wayfinding decision points. In addition to indicating accessible routes, information (e.g. slope, distance and surface condition, etc.) should be provided about routes that are not fully compliant so that people can decide for themselves whether they are able to navigate the route or not. In addition to signage, other means of identifying accessible elements should be provided – such as lighting and environmental markers. This is an especially important issue in the quad where the existing ramps are difficult to see.

- **Provide a means to alert individuals to the edges of steps.** Both interior and exterior steps should be evaluated for the best means of providing a visual or other warning.

- **Insure that all emergency call boxes are on an accessible route and all have compliant controls within required reach ranges.** Confirm that a means other than voice communication is provided for accessing emergency assistance for individuals with hearing and/or speech impairments.

**Buildings & Facilities**

- **All buildings should have an accessible entrance that includes an accessible approach.** Where a building

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Existing campus maps do not delineate accessible routes and entrances

Interior signage should incorporate accessible routes and locations of accessible restrooms
has more than one entrance, all should eventually be made accessible. Where entrances remain inaccessible, clear signage indicating the location of the accessible entrance should be installed.

- **All buildings should have an accessible interior path of travel between all levels.** KMA is aware of two buildings that lack accessible vertical access - the Athletic Center and the Auditorium Annex.

- **Providing an accessible path of travel to the Auditorium that is less circuitous and more dependable should be a priority item.** This issue was repeatedly raised in meetings and interviews.

- **Wheelchair locations should be provided in the Auditorium that provide views comparable to those of the general public.**

- **All public toilet rooms should eventually be accessible.** As a baseline, at least one fully accessible toilet room for men and women should be provided on every floor of every building (where toilet rooms are provided) in a central location.

- **As many of the multi-level lounge areas as possible should be made accessible.** These areas appear to be heavily used for study, rest and social interaction.

- **Provide an accessible route to at least one additional dining area in the Campus Center.**

- **Access to stepped classrooms and lecture halls should be improved.** There are many small stepped classrooms and several lecture halls. The wheelchair locations currently provided do not appear to provide equal access for individuals with disabilities. Wheelchair locations should be created that provide better site lines and do not place individuals in locations where they block the ability of other students to enter or leave. In

Decking over the existing Group I stepped classroom will provide potential accessible seating throughout the space as well as access to lecterns and blackboards.
classrooms where student participation is expected at the blackboard, an accessible path of travel should be provided.

- Permanently installed assistive listening systems should be provided in all lecture halls, auditoriums, etc. that have fixed seats and either accommodate at least 50 people or have audio-amplification systems. For other assembly areas, a permanently installed assistive listening system or sufficient electrical outlets necessary to support a portable assistive listening systems should be provided.

- The Athletic Center currently lacks accessible vertical access, toilet rooms and wheelchair seating locations. As the Athletic Center is a critical University program, removal of the existing barriers should be addressed as a high priority. Wheelchair locations should be integrated into all spectator areas and all locker rooms should be made accessible.

- Spaces where an individual may be alone (for example, toilet rooms, practice rooms, labs, locker rooms, etc.) should be prioritized for receiving visual alarms.

- If the amphitheater continues to be used for public functions, an accessible path of travel from wheelchair seating locations (integrated with the general seating) to the stage should be provided.

- In any building where water fountains are provided, provide accessible water fountains or water dispensers.
for individuals who use wheelchairs as well as for people who have difficulty bending or stooping.

- If public pay telephones are provided, at least one in each location must be accessible and in every building with a pay phone there must be a public text telephone. Signage at all phones should indicate the location of text telephones and accessible telephones.

The University has been addressing accessibility on its campus for twenty-five years. During that time the number of students and staff with disabilities at the University has increased significantly. The master planning process provides the opportunity to establish the University’s architectural accessibility goals for the future.

The Technical Appendix of the Master Plan contains the following additional documents related to accessibility:


  A summary of the University’s obligations under state and federal accessibility laws, regulations, codes and guidelines.

- Memo of April 5, 2004

  Reviews materials pertaining to the University’s compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and propose a process to insure the current master planning project appropriately incorporates accessibility issues.

- Summary of Public and Staff Interviews & Meetings (Nov. 3, 2004)

  Summarizes the findings of the interviews and meetings held with members of the University community and general public who have disabilities. The purpose of the meetings and interviews was to solicit input regarding accessibility issues to be addressed by the Master Plan.

- Consolidate Record of Barrier Removal To-Date (Nov. 9, 2004)

  The purpose of this memo is to provide an overview of the barrier removal previously recommended and/or performed by the University.