

Polling Place Accessibility Proposal Lake George Municipal Complex

Background

The Lake George Municipal Complex in Saint Cloud is an attractive, state-of-the-art facility. Having been recently renovated and remodeled, it is fully accessible and in compliance with ADA regulations. It is in a central, highly visible location on multiple public transit routes, and the site offers ample parking. All of these characteristics make it an optimum choice for use as a polling place.

ADA Compliance

Solutions for Five Common ADA Access Problems at Polling Place, a publication of the Disability Rights Sections of the U.S. Department of Justice, outlines physical barriers to access that are commonly found at polling places. In most of the areas discussed, the Lake George Municipal Complex facility presents no concerns-- parking, sidewalks and walkways, building entrances, and interior hallways have been designed to facilitate maximum accessibility and are in pristine condition.

The purpose of this informal proposal is to suggest a plan to address the final common accessibility problem, which is the voting area itself. Currently, on election days, the entrance area directly inside the main doors at the Lake George Municipal Complex serves as an initial greeting station where potential voters can ask questions and receive information about the voting process. Once their questions are answered and it is confirmed that they are in the correct location, voters are directed to enter the Multipurpose Room to the right of the main entrance.

Inside the Multipurpose Room, voters check in with volunteer election judges at a long table, and then proceed to voting stations. This is where the current setup is vulnerable to congestion. The Multipurpose Room is long and narrow, and when several people are signing in at the table, it can be difficult to maneuver through the crowd to the area where the voting stations are located. As the Justice Department's document notes, "Voting often occurs in a small room or area within a building, with little space at the check-in tables and voting machines, making it difficult for voters with mobility disabilities to move through the voting area and cast their ballots."

Solutions

Fortunately, the Lake George Municipal Complex has the space needed to overcome this problem. We propose that the Multipurpose Room continue to serve as the area for check-in tables, but that the voting stations be located in the adjacent Sun Room. Spreading the voting process out into two rooms would mean that even during high traffic times on election days, there would be ample space for all voters, including those using wheelchairs or other mobility devices, to move comfortably through the facility.

Making this change should present minimal or no additional costs to the city of Saint Cloud, since it requires no physical alterations or additions to the facility. The only potential impact would be that both the Multipurpose Room and the Sun Room would be utilized on election days, but on days that the Lake George Municipal Complex serves as a voting facility, the individual rooms are not available for rental by private parties anyway.