

ADA and Accessibility Compliance Plan Reviews

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Clients often want to know why a plan review is needed when it is the responsibility of their architect and contractor to design and construct their projects in compliance with the applicable Standards. Some recent court decisions place the direct responsibility/liability for compliance on the owner, not the design and construction team. Also, the number of accessibility standards (about 1000 under the ADA alone), building codes, zoning ordinances, OSHA and EPA requirements that apply to new construction and alteration projects has expanded so drastically in the last few decades that no design professional or contractor can be familiar with all of them. A team comprised of a host of specialists now usually handles the design and construction process. ADA and access compliance specialists are increasingly being added to the project teams, especially in states like Texas that require it.

If access compliance specialists are added to the team, what should they do? Some clients only want to know if their architect has done a reasonable job. They may not want to commit a lot of effort to a review until they know generally how well the design complies with the applicable Standards. Other clients want to find every barrier remaining in the documents and, therefore, opt for a full review with a detailed report.

Finally, it is important to note that even the most thorough plan review can find only about 50% to 65% of the noncompliant conditions that are typically built into the completed project. There are many reasons for this, such as vendor-supplied items, construction errors, improperly coordinated construction changes, etc, but a good plan review should pick up the most expensive problems to fix, such as door maneuvering clearances and toilet room layouts, before they are cast in concrete. The others can only be avoided or identified during construction.

To meet the needs of our clients, we offer plan review services with three main variables: 1) **Timing** of the Review, 2) **Thoroughness** of the Review, and 3) Level of Detail in the **Report**.

Timing

The review services can start as early as the initial concept studies for critical facility types such as large assembly facilities, transportation facilities, and campus master plans. They can also start as late as construction documents or construction observation. Obviously, the later the reviews start, the more difficult and expensive it will be to catch and correct oversights and deficiencies in the design and construction.

Thoroughness

Thoroughness breaks down into 1.) the applicable standards under which the documents will be reviewed (usually under the ADA Standards, sometimes also under state or local standards, and sometimes under UFAS and/or the New ADAAG); and 2.) the speed and approach to performing

the review. Sometimes our clients want to identify only the types of barriers that can be found in the documents. They will take that information and hand it off to the designer to follow through and identify all other occurrences of the same types of conditions. Other clients want a complete review to identify every barrier we can find. Because of these differences, we offer four options:

Our **Quick Plan Review** is the most limited service. It typically includes a specified number of hours of technical review to identify the most serious and most common problem areas in the design. We circle barriers on the plans as we find them but do not always give references to the Standards section numbers. It usually includes a minimal report or none at all, just the redlined drawings showing the types of barriers we found and maybe a verbal review with the client and/or their designer.

Our **Barrier Types Plan Review** will typically specify each of the types of barriers we find with examples marked on the provided drawings. This is a more detailed review, and we note directly on the drawings every barrier we identify along with section numbers from the applicable regulations or ADAAG.

Our **Detailed Plan Review** is the most comprehensive plan review. We identify every barrier we find and note more thorough comments and ADA references on the plans. On some projects, especially where the project is under tight time constraints, we might be asked to sketch solutions to any problems that might not be obvious to the designer.

Finally, our **Detailed Review of Construction Documents**, including project specifications and shop drawings, is the most thorough review because it includes everything from which the contractor will build. We note all barriers we can identify on any of the documents along with Standards references, and ideas for equivalent facilitation and/or simple solutions where appropriate.

Report

Most clients want a report of some kind in addition to the marked-up plans. These reports range from a one-page summary to a detailed and categorized listing of every barrier identified in the documents to facilitate response tracking for each. The report may also identify design requirements that we could not fully review due to insufficient information in the documents.

Fees

Our fees for plan review services depends on the type of review and level of effort required. We prefer to preview typical drawings or the entire set before giving an estimate. This helps us determine how detailed and thorough the drawings are and how careful the client's professional team was in designing to the applicable Standards and, therefore, how much time and effort would be needed on our part.

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