

ADA Accessibility Improvement Report for Smithville, TX

Prepared by: Jose Rivera Marrero – Community Engagement Coordinator

Introduction

Improving accessibility in Smithville is an important step toward ensuring equal rights for all citizens and visitors, and it also provides a key opportunity for economic growth. The necessary upgrades to meet the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** standards will not only reduce the risk of costly lawsuits and fines, but they will also show the community that we care about inclusivity and equal access for all. In rural communities like Smithville, ADA improvements can drive local economic development, attract tourism, and create a stronger, more welcoming community.

By taking proactive steps to address accessibility issues, Smithville can demonstrate a commitment to providing equal opportunities for all while improving its standing as a progressive, business-friendly city. The cost of inaction can be far greater than the cost of making improvements—both in legal risks and lost economic potential.

ADA Law Overview

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** was enacted in 1990 to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to all public services, programs, and activities. For municipalities like Smithville, complying with ADA is not only a legal requirement but an investment in the city's future. Failure to comply with ADA can result in costly lawsuits, fines, and the potential need for expensive retrofitting.

Key ADA Requirements:

- **Accessible public facilities** (sidewalks, curb cuts, parking spaces, etc.)
 - **Proper signage** for accessible spaces
 - **No barriers** obstructing access to public services
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Key Observations and Issues Identified

1. **Police Station Curb Cut-Out**
 - Concern: Potential non-compliance with ADA standards.
 - Recommendation: Minor repairs to meet accessibility requirements.
2. **Parking Lot Across from Dog Park**

- Concern: Lack of designated ADA parking spaces.
 - Recommendation: Install ADA-compliant parking with appropriate signage.
 - 3. **Dog Park**
 - Concern: No ADA-compliant parking; unclear or inaccessible entrances.
 - Recommendation: Make improvements to entrances and parking for better accessibility.
 - 4. **MLK Covered Area**
 - Concern: Step-down entry prevents wheelchair access; ADA parking located far away.
 - Recommendation: Provide level entry and closer parking spaces for accessibility.
 - 5. **Railroad and Park Museum**
 - Concern: Inadequate access and blocked curb cuts.
 - Recommendation: Improve sidewalks and clear curbs for better flow and accessibility.
 - 6. **Library**
 - Concern: Insufficient ADA parking; unsafe curb cuts.
 - Recommendation: Update curb cuts and provide additional accessible parking spaces.
 - 7. **City Hall**
 - Concern: Lack of accessible entrances during after-hours events.
 - Recommendation: Ensure full accessibility for public participation during events.
 - 8. **General Business Compliance**
 - Observation: Need for city-wide ADA audits of local businesses.
 - Recommendation: Audit businesses to ensure ADA compliance, promoting inclusivity.
 - 9. **Event Accessibility**
 - Concern: Limited accessible parking during city events.
 - Recommendation: Designate accessible event zones with temporary ADA parking, restrooms, and clear pathways.
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Economic Development Opportunities

1. **Attracting New Visitors**
 - According to the **CDC**, 26% of U.S. adults live with a disability, a segment of the population that represents a significant market. In rural areas like Smithville, improving accessibility can help tap into this market, which includes both individuals with disabilities and their families. When communities like Smithville embrace accessibility, they open the doors to a **\$490 billion annual market** for discretionary spending.

2. Boosting Local Tourism

- The **Texas Economic Development Council** reports that rural tourism contributes **\$10.3 billion** annually to Texas' rural economies. ADA improvements make Smithville more appealing for tourism and regional events, potentially boosting revenue by **\$500,000 to \$1 million per event**. Improved accessibility means more people—especially those with mobility challenges—can visit and stay longer, bringing in more revenue for local businesses and restaurants.

3. Supporting Local Businesses

- Accessibility improvements don't just benefit individuals with disabilities—they also benefit businesses. Cities that are known for being accessible attract businesses looking for progressive, inclusive communities. ADA-compliant infrastructure signals to businesses that Smithville is forward-thinking and supportive of all customers. The failure to invest in ADA could mean missing out on **local job creation** and economic opportunities.

Legal and Safety Considerations

1. Liability Risks

- Current issues, like hazardous sidewalks near local businesses, put Smithville at risk of lawsuits. Advocacy groups are likely to pursue legal action when they identify compliance gaps. Defending ADA-related lawsuits can cost municipalities **\$25,000 to \$75,000 per case**, and this doesn't even include the cost of settling the case, which could be far higher.

2. Fines for Non-Compliance

- The Department of Justice (DOJ) can levy fines of up to **\$75,000 for the first violation** and **\$150,000 for repeat violations**. These fines can put a significant strain on a small city's budget and will ultimately take away from other community projects. Ensuring that Smithville is fully ADA-compliant today can save the city money in fines, lawsuits, and retrofitting.

Cost Estimates for Accessibility Improvements

Here are some estimated costs for the most common accessibility upgrades needed in Smithville:

- **Sidewalk Repairs and Curb Cuts: \$2,500–\$4,500 per site**
- **ADA Signage and Parking Markings: \$120–\$250 per sign; \$400–\$800 per parking space**
- **Crosswalk Painting: \$400–\$1,000 per crosswalk**
- **Installation of Poles/Barriers: \$200–\$450 per unit**
- **Accessibility Audits: \$1,500–\$3,500 for city-wide assessments**
- **Community Outreach Programs: \$800–\$2,000 for materials, workshops, and public campaigns**

Cost of Legal Action and Non-Compliance

Category	Cost of Improvement (Rural TX)	Cost of Lawsuit/Non-Compliance (Rural TX)
Legal Fees/Settlements	\$0 (if improvements are made)	\$25,000–\$75,000+ (per lawsuit)
Fines for Non-Compliance	\$0 (if compliant)	\$75,000–\$150,000+ (per violation)
Missed Revenue from Disabled Market	N/A (enhanced accessibility attracts more visitors)	Loss of \$1 million to \$3 million annually from tourism and local businesses
Loss of Event Opportunities	N/A (improved accessibility increases event attractiveness)	Loss of \$500,000 to \$1 million in local event revenue
Business Attraction	N/A (businesses are attracted to inclusive cities)	Loss of new businesses and jobs, which could equate to hundreds of thousands in lost local economic growth
Public Confidence	Increased trust and engagement	Decline in public trust and community cohesion, leading to lower voter turnout and local involvement

Recommendations

1. **Immediate Actions (1–3 months):**
 - Address hazardous sidewalk near Anytime Fitness.
 - Install ADA-compliant signage and parking.
 - Repaint crosswalks and implement minor repairs to curb cuts.
2. **Short-Term Goals (3–6 months):**
 - Audit ADA compliance for public spaces and businesses.
 - Add accessible parking near key facilities and public spaces.
3. **Long-Term Strategies:**
 - Incorporate ADA compliance into future city planning and development.
 - Establish an accessibility task force to oversee continued improvements.

Conclusion

Investing in ADA improvements is an economic development strategy that benefits Smithville in multiple ways. By addressing accessibility issues now, the city will save on potential lawsuits and fines, while simultaneously attracting new visitors, businesses, and events. This is not only a smart financial decision but also a clear message that Smithville is committed to inclusivity and equal access for all. By investing in these changes today, Smithville can grow its economy, strengthen its community, and set itself up for a more prosperous future.