

Watertown Commission on Disability

Meeting Minutes

November 20, 2024

In attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, Carol Menton, Naomi Ridge, Rachel Kay, Megan O'Halloran, Cindy Wentz, Lisa Feltner, Patrick George, Louann Larson (Director of Services for Boston Center for Independent Living), Stefanie Farrell (CART)

Guest Speaker: Louann Larson, Boston Center for Independent Living

Boston is among the oldest independent living centers in the country. There are some in every state including 10 in Massachusetts. They serve anyone who identifies as having a disability in the greater Boston area. People don't have to verify a disability to receive services, they just need a goal they want to work on. More than half of the staff and board members identify as having a disability. Half are bilingual and bicultural.

Housing is a big need for everyone, but adds another dimension when it needs to be accessible. Also helps people with job searches or how to become employable. Connect people with insurance. Help young people develop goals for a successful adulthood.

We help people become independent and access services on their own.

Also we help people find wheelchair repair.

Lisa: How do you help people trying to relocate in the area?

Louann: We have a team to help people get back into the community. For example, a family member wants to bring a loved one back home. Or it is helping them get the funding for the equipment they need to be at home. Assure that they have applied for services they need.

Kim: Do you have specialists who work with deaf/hard of hearing or low vision?

Louann: Definitely. Also people with mental health issues or autism. We don't have specialists...we have people who understand those needs and we make connections.

Louann will share slide deck and materials with Patrick.

Chair's Report

Customer service for deaf/hard of hearing: 3-1-1 system is working on general customer service training that has a module of helping people with disabilities. Patrick will give an update in 3 months or so.

DPW: Mt Auburn/Irving. Work in progress. No moving of signal button yet, but they are aware.

Lisa: people tend to go beyond the Stop Here line from the lot near Subway.

Kim: where does DPW's responsibility begin and end?

Disability Event at the Library: Went well! About 50 people (probably more). Want to do this again.

Tables in back were crowded. There were a lot of kids. It would be nice to have more people who are not part of the disability community there last time (how? We don't know).

Snow removal policy: Tyler Cote is working on phrasing to send around, with an emphasis on being a good neighbor.

Cindy will send some wording to Patrick and Tyler. What about people applying for exemptions?

The rec department is working on an announcement. Patrick will send the announcement to the commission.

Cindy: Who will issue the warnings? Lisa: Code enforcement officer.

VOTE for ASL/CART Support

Request for World in Watertown's Unity Breakfast. They are returning to in-person, Monday January 20th, 2025. Naomi moves for a vote, Cindy seconds. We do not have a dollar amount, but we believe it will be similar to other events (under \$600). 7-0 (Rachel stepped out)

DPW/Trash/Recycle Bin stickers: Let's postpone until they have a new director settled.

We just worked with them on a reasonable accommodation request from a resident.

ADA Self-Assessment Plan: We should hear soon. Wait is longer than normal. We can table the middle school since that is likely to be updated.

Waverly/Belmont Street intersection: Nothing new from Belmont. Patrick will check in with Belmont.

Francis Food Mart: The door for the accessible entrance is still locked, even though they moved the stuff that was in front of it. If we don't get a response, we may need to pass on to the building inspector (Paul Johnson) or MAAB. Patrick will follow up with them and give them another chance before we call MAAB.

Kim: Could this be a fire inspector issue?

John: You can get out now that they moved the piles, so it is just an accessibility issue.

Riverworks: Has the situation changed since the initial permit?

Patrick: I received complaints about accessible parking in the lower lot. I heard they are now allowed to access this parking. I have heard nothing since.

John: Can you check with the management company?

Patrick will find out who it is from assessor's office.

Kim: This is closer to an MAAB complaint filing. George Donohue could be the complainant if he wants or we can do it for him if he prefers. But this is a medical facility, they should have a higher level of commitment.

Vote on CART/ASL for Human Rights Commission event on the evening of December 10th. Motion to support from Lisa second from Naomi. This is a good opportunity to support the HRC in their future work. Motion passes 8-0.

Vote on annual support for Watertown Food Pantry and the St. Patrick's Food Pantry as well as the Watertown Community Fridge. Naomi moves, Cindy seconds. This will be for \$500 for the Community Fridge and \$1500 each to the food pantries. Motion passes 8 to 0.

Mass Area Planning Council: John, Cindy, and Kim will meet with Julia from the Mass Area Planning Council as part of a focus group on Climate Change and Health Assessment Impact. They will report back next time.

Language translation ASL/CART issue in the budget: where is this? Carol: there can be differences in vocabulary if they use people from outside Boston. Carol really likes this and excited we will use it.

Reasonable Accommodation Policy: checked language around attending meetings with lawyer. It is good. Now we will figure out how to add this to meeting agendas.

Meeting Minutes: Move to accept: Naomi, Second: Cindy. 6-0, 2 abstain since they were not there.

Treasurer's Report: We have spent money on CART. We have brought in money from fines etc. We went over our funding for the November 2 by about \$130. Moved: Rachel, second: Cindy. 8-0.

Plans Review: *Willow Park* is being redone. Everything is going to be torn down. Higher buildings will be built for 138 apartments. John reviewed the plans. This is near a big parking garage for all the cars from the site. Parking: where is it for people who need it? John suggested locations for parking, specifically Building A (the largest). Routes between buildings should be clear and minimized distance-wise. Patrick is joining this committee with lots of town departments.

Special Education: No updates (although concerns about funding with the new administration)

Safety: They missed a crack on the path. Naomi called 3-1-1. But nothing will likely happen until after the winter.

New Business

Election Process and online ballot: Kim: this was fabulous, but Ballot Measure 5 was not on Kim's ballot despite being in those precincts. This applies to all with electronic ballots in precinct 9, 10, 11, and 12 that we know. Kim will email Noelle Gilligan. Lisa will send Kim info on the chair of the election commission to cc.

Victory Field: We received an email from Peter Centola on the future work on Victory Field. We haven't had the opportunity to review, but let's put it on the agenda for the next meeting.

Automatic Doors: Lisa: We should keep automatic doors on the agenda. Boylston Properties says they will not do it if it is not required.

Patrick: There was a meeting about Willow Park this morning, and I reminded them that they may want more than is required for compliance.

Kim: Our best chance to make a difference is with new construction.

John: Methuen ordinance is terribly written.

Cable TV PSA Day. Cindy: Should we do that? Friday December 13th at the Philips Building. We should think about a script. We may want to plan this for the next time. We also need some B roll so it's not just looking at our face for 60 seconds.

New Commissioner: Patrick: working with Resident Advisory Committee and will determine if the person has a disability.