

Watertown Commission on Disability

February 21, 2024

In attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, Megan O'Halloran, Rachel Kay, Carol Wilson-Braun, Cindy Wentz, Patrick George.

Missing: Carol Menton, Lisa Feltner

Guests: Tyler Cote (engagement coordinator for the city), Darian B. Gambrell (DEAF Inc), Beth Rubin (interpreter), Letitia (interpreter)

DEAF Inc.: Darian Gambrell, new to Watertown and Massachusetts. DEAF Inc was in Allston since 1977 and moved to Watertown last year.

Deafinc.ma.org: Darian shared the website.

D: development E: evaluation A: adjustment F: facilities

Help the deaf/hard of hearing community to lead independent lives. Only agency in Massachusetts that is deaf-owned and deaf-led. Five offices across eastern Mass. (Barb Cohen of Watertown is on their board of directors.)

They have adult education courses including financial literacy, tax literacy. Helping members pass US Citizenship test in ASL.

Services for senior citizens: help navigate with caregivers and health care.

ASL: offer online and onsite classes. Also work with external organizations.

Deaf-Blind program: provide sighted providers. We need more! Please encourage people to apply.

Also looking to fill other positions.

Kim: How many staff do you have?

They currently have 18 full time staff and a lot of contractors (more than 50). They are growing!

Also use the website to learn more or donate. Hosting a 5K walk-a-thon in April in Watertown!

Cindy: Do you provide equipment?

Through advocate resources, they provide some equipment (doorbells, things for phones). MCDHH also provides a lot of this or we work with them to provide it.

Megan: Do you have services with schools?

They traditionally have focused on adults, but are now trying to do better with youth. They work with the Horace Mann School who has a deaf program. They are seeing more and more deaf-blind children at

the Horace Mann School. They also have relationships with Community Colleges, train about deaf culture.

Cindy: Seniors may have acquired hearing loss. To what degree does DEAF Inc serve them?

They do have a hard-of-hearing specialist who focuses on senior citizens. They work closely with Elderly Affairs since they do not focus on the deaf/HH community and they need to.

Kim: Have you visited the deaf-blind program at Perkins? Are you familiar with the ICCAN program for Deaf-Blind individuals to help with them with two-way communication?

Darian worked with Ed Bosso at Gallaudet. They do have a relationship with Perkins. And they are familiar with ICCAN. (Kim supervises the ICCAN connect staff at Perkins!)

Darian looks forward to more connection.

Tyler, Community Engagement Specialist.

Second month in the role and a new position (as per the new Charter). Wants us to be as accessible and equitable as we can in all engagement. Wants everything to be translated to the language people need both with materials and facilities at City Hall.

There are slim policies in place for translation and interpretive services. Elevate voices of community so all voices are heard. Helping with Watertown Square project (meeting on Feb 29). Spread community events across different areas of Watertown.

Prior career with youth violence prevention. Want to get young people more engaged in the city. Let Tyler know if we have advice and ways the city can be better.

Kim: we realized there are no policies around accommodations. Can we make sure that every event posting includes something about "reasonable accommodations"? Interpreters, sighted guides: places where it would be hard for a blind person to navigate easily by the arrangement of stuff. Cambridge and Somerville have a lot of resources like newsletters. Can we look at other "reasonable accommodation" policies and see what we can use/adapt?

Cindy: Mass Office of Commission on Disability has really good policy information on their website. Cindy can send that info.

Chair's Report

Follow up to Janet Buck's presentation on WBGC. We all supported them. They're adding an elevator/chair lift, but it's not a variance. Plans were very thorough.

Update on Ordinance for Captioning: Passed! Leave on agenda for Lisa next month.

Training for city employees on deafness/HH etiquette. Patrick is coordinating with the VA as they have some good information available.

Mt. Auburn/Summer/Irving Intersection issues: curb cuts, detectable warnings. John: part of the concern is there is only one crosswalk across Mt Auburn Street.

Health Human Services Study: Rachel and Megan attended part and it felt like a free-for-all of concerns. There was no obvious follow up but we will both continue. Naomi reminded us there was a survey that we should all fill out.

Watertown Square Study: Meeting February 29th on where the study is. Cindy said walkabout when well. Zeke wants to continue that connection. Kim will send around link to meeting (and it is also in person).

Update on next steps for snow removal ordinance: Cindy said it has passed, but it won't go into effect this year. Town needs to do education and develop some policies for implementation.

Miracle Field hearing: Lisa and Patrick went. The conclusion is there is a better location in Waltham, so they are looking to move in that direction and make it community-wide.

DPW/Trash Bin Stickers: Finalized the design. Patrick and DPW are going back and forth. Question about application for and distribution of stickers. Patrick will check with ADA coordinators in other towns. The town should have a list of property owners with tax abatement for disability.

Detectable warnings at Beechwood and North Beacon: Nothing new and nothing will happen until Spring.

Watertown Re-design Accessibility: No new communication. John and Kim would like to invite the building inspector for the town to meet with us. He will be here in April (John won't be here in March). Should we also ask Gideon Schreiber from the planning department? That would be good if he's available.

ADA Funding Request: We did not get the grant. But we are going to submit an RFP with additional parameters to get an idea for the next grant cycle.

Waverly/Belmont Street intersection: No updates. We still need clarify on if it is Watertown or Belmont. Patrick will check in with DPW.

Acceptance of Minutes for December Meeting: Naomi: move to accept. John Second. Passed 7-0.

Treasurer's Report: Grant for food pantry: internal transfer. Also paid CART and \$1500 to St Patricks Church Food Pantry. Otherwise, fines and fees. \$2600: for food pantry and library at the same time. Cindy moves to accept, John seconds. Passed 7-0.

Other reports:

Special Education: Cunniff staffing concerns are being followed up at School Committee Curriculum sub-committee meeting on Wednesday Feb 28. Rachel can report out next month.

Many things still on list and won't be addressed until spring.

New business:

Naomi: there is a *new path behind the Halfway Café* and comes out on Howard Street. It's supposed to link up to field on Moxley Field (site of temporary high school). It goes down to the Charles River path. There is a new parking lot, which appears to be public (2-hour parking) and has no accessible parking. The path is loose gravel and some of it has washed away. This is completely unpassable for wheelchairs. Patrick can reach out to Peter Centola in Recreation for more information. Or it may be a DPW issue? Whose land is it?

Megan: *Highland Ave*, there are curb cuts in process, but they are currently unpassable. This has been going on for a long time. What's going on?

Patrick: *City is updating their customer service tracking*. We are moving toward a 3-1-1 style platform. Can email Patrick, but can email 311@watertown-ma.gov as well. There is also an app for the phone.

Kim: *Got a ballot to cast a ballot online securely*. It's an amendment to the vote-by-mail. Noelle Gilligan is the new city clerk and she's great to work with.

Next meeting at March we will continue to meet remotely.

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Kay.