

Watertown Commission on Disability

Wednesday March 20, 2024

In attendance: Kim Charlson, Cindy Wentz, Naomi Ridge, Lisa Feltner, Carol Menton, Naomi Ridge, Carol Wilson-Braun

Absent: John Hawes, Megan O'Halloran

Also in attendance: Patrick George, Mona (CART)

City Ordinance for Public Places for Captioning: In effect! No complaints yet. Yay!

Deafness/Hard of hearing training for city employees: Patrick found a manual from the ADA Southeast. Working on cost for all city employees. Patrick will send it out for our perusal.

Mt Auburn/Summer St/Irving St: DPW has not responded. Patrick will follow up. Mt Auburn Street design starts west of that.

Lisa: can something be done with paint that wouldn't be expensive? Some of that plaza is private property with new owner. It would be great to include the sidewalk portion.

Update on Watertown Square study report: Two options being considered. There will be bike lanes across the river, but also more pedestrian friendly areas. How wide will the sidewalks be, including with outside dining? Also looking at Galen Street and bus stops.

FYI Bus stops have been moved closer to the lab on Water Street.

Next meeting is Thursday April 4 at 66 Galen Street (new life sciences). There will be free parking. The dream is for the plan to come to Council in the fall.

Zeke would like to do a walk with us (Cindy and Brian) again to explore the Square. Naomi would like to join.

Snow Removal: We need to do an education piece to get people ready. It would be worth while for the Commission to write something with ideas.

Patrick: we need to figure out documentation required to have an exemption.

Kim: It would be helpful for the draft to be presented before the Commission when it is ready.

Cindy will attempt to draft some suggestions.

Halfway Café Parking lot: John sent pictures and did some work. Patrick talked to ?. The problem is the gravel is on top of a City of Cambridge water pipe and Watertown needs permission from Cambridge in order to pave over. Still an issue with marking an accessible parking spot, but that's not related to the path being paved.

Lisa: we should make some recommendations of what can be done now.

Naomi will draft recommendations. Patrick will connect with DCR resources.

Kim will come up with some language about an accessible space. Patrick will follow up with DPW.

DPW Trash/Recycle Bin Sticker Design: Turned in suggestion. DPW is going to order the first 100 or so. Patrick will check that the trash companies know about the stickers. We still need to figure out how to distribute.

Detectable warnings at Beechwood: No update.

Watertown Mall redesign: things are on hold.

Arsenal Yard conversation: next month with Building Inspector/Planning. Can we require automatic doors? Watertown can choose to exceed requirements of the Commonwealth.

ADA Self Assessment: next grant cycle is open now (a little early). Patrick working with procurement department for RFP. State Office of Disability will have a seminar on the grant and Patrick will attend.

Intersection at Belmont and Waverley: Do we know if this is Watertown or Belmont? No updates. Lisa also checked in with Vinnie Piccirelli.

Acceptance of Minutes: Correct to include Naomi was in attendance. Naomi voted to approve with that correction. Rachel seconded. 5 voted yes. Lisa and Carol M voted presented since they were not here.

Treasurer's Report: Additional expenses last month with DEAF Inc and interpreters. Cindy moved to approve. Naomi seconded. 7 voted to approve.

Plans Review: No updates.

Special Education: The new Assistant Superintendent, Emilys Pena, has a background working with students who are hard of hearing and is fluent in ASL!

Safety and Access:

Cindy sent information to Tyler with reasonable accommodation statement. Patrick will follow up with Tyler. When Human Rights Commission is up and running, we can meet with them about this.

Cracks in the pavement on path from Whites Ave to Waverly Avenue: now chunks of asphalt are missing and pads with missing benches. It is getting worse. Patrick will ask DPW their plan. Lisa: if there's any rain, there's a section that totally floods. Naomi: wheelchair gets stuck now.

New Business: DEAF Inc got a \$2 million grant from McKenzie Scott!

Other CoDs advocate for particular areas and help prioritize. Do we want to do something like this? We have extra money from Fair Share and this will come up at Council. Lisa will let us know when this will come up so we can go and advocate.

There's an audible warning out at Mt Auburn and Main St. Also one at Arsenal/North Beacon.

3-1-1: Not functional yet. Probably will not launch until June. We would like to invite this staff person to our meeting in May or June. Patrick will coordinate with Laura, the 3-1-1 director. See Click Fix is in effect now, but less user friendly.

Go-go Grandparent grant is starting at Council on Aging. Open for two free trips for seniors and people with disabilities (self-identified). Let's invite Lydia to a future meeting!

What places in Watertown are truly accessible? Lisa has found that not all the hotels really are. Naomi: every time I go to a new hotel or restaurant, I call. What is the height of the bed? What is the width of the door? Are there any steps? Where do you put a cane or a walker?

Halva (new Turkish restaurant) has steps to get in. Diner at North Beacon has steps and narrow door too. ADA does not require changes for old buildings in many cases.

Watertown Square: how much space is between outdoor dining and fire hydrant? 36 inches is required, but 48 inches is recommended.

April Meeting: Hoping to have Building Inspection supervisor, Paul Johnson, and Gideon Schreiber from Planning.