

Watertown Commission on Disability

May 15, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Attending: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, Cindy Wentz, Naomi Ridge, Rachel Kay, Carol Menton, Carol Wilson-Braun, Patrick George, Stefanie Farrell (CART)

Guests: Rob Buchanan (Health Management Associates), Kirsten Bryan (Health Management Associates)

Missing: Lisa Feltner and Megan O'Halloran

Guest Speakers Rob and Kirsten from Health Management Associates (HMA).

Working on Health and Human Services Assessment for Watertown to determine areas of need for the community. Started last fall with public forum. Has done focus groups and survey. Next taking all of feedback and distill it to actionable recommendations, both short term and long term.

Kim: What's the outcome of the work? A report. Draft will be circulated for feedback. A final report later this year.

Cindy: How does this tie into the HRC? This is much broader.

Where do Watertown residents go when they need help accessing services and benefits for individuals and families of individuals with a disability?

Cindy: there are state agencies and non-profits, but not the city. But that may be okay.

Kim: Watertown has four major disability focused organizations: Perkins School for the Blind, Deaf Inc, United Cerebral Palsy, and Alzheimers Association of Massachusetts (are they still in town?).

Kim: 7-8 years ago, we added a fund to the Wayside Multi-Service Center for a human services person.

Carol M: Cindy brings experience from EOHHS. I bring experience from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We as the CoD are also a point of reference and the ADA coordinator.

Rachel: schools have some resources for children.

Are there gaps or barrier that prevent residents from obtaining services?

Naomi: a lot services for older people and children with disabilities, but not that much out there for the middle category.

Rachel: mental health support is lacking.

What other HHS in Watertown do we have? Do people know where to go?

Naomi: I know where to go, but it is a lot of effort on my part over the years. People who are new to the disability world or new to town may not know where to go.

Kim: A lot of people with disabilities are not aware of services and may not have the skills to find the existing services. For example, if they don't have web access or ability. How can we get people the information they need?

Rachel: I worry about people who are new to the country who may not speak English.

Cindy: How do all the components of the city interact with people with disabilities? Example: someone goes to Project Literacy or the Senior Center, would they even know how to offer help with needs? Would people know to request CART services or the like? What about a blind person going to an exercise class at the senior center?

Rob: Some students have access plans (504). Do adults have something like this?

Kim: we are working on language for this town about reasonable accommodations. Both in code, but also educating people in the city. Sighted guides, interpreters at events. How can we provide solutions?

Naomi: with physical disabilities, getting out of the house is hard. The RIDE service is hit or miss whether you get somewhere on time. The library has a book delivery service, but it was hard to find that information.

Carol M: City of Boston and Cambridge may have more language and access plans since they have more paid staff. Universal design can be a game changer. Being intentional in designing access from the beginning.

Rob: If you have follow up thoughts or ideas...where are these things being done well and in a creative way?

Contact Tara at tkelly@healthmanagement.com.

Kim: Newton, Boston, Cambridge and Somerville are communities that are good examples.

Ideally share ideas within a couple weeks.

Cindy can send bullet list of organizations!

Chair's Report

City ordinance for public places and screens: Complete! Removing from the list.

Training for customer service related to people who are deaf or hard of hearing

Patrick: May 29th is a training for local government officials. Still coordinating with Southeast ADA Center to figure out how to pay in bulk. We are tailoring language in in ADA plan from other cities. We will include this with the city's reasonable accommodations policy.

Mt Auburn/Summer/Irving Intersection: No word from DPW. Given Mt Auburn construction, this is a challenge.

Naomi: sidewalk on North side of Mt Auburn from Square to Common Street is a mess with lots of cracks. This is right near the food pantry. (Although food pantry is moving to the Parker School. Space is being retrofitted (Patrick, can you find out when?))

Watertown Square study report:

Monday June 3: Zoning meeting with George Proakis

UPDATE: Watertown Square Meeting with City Council and Planning Board on Thursday June 13 at 6 pm at the Middle School. Childcare is available.

John: looks like crossings and traffic flow will make things much easier for people with disabilities.

Kim: I just created a tactile map of the plan. I will get some copies to Zeke who can give them to Jeff Speck.

Snow removal updates

Kim reached out to Cambridge and Somerville about their programs. She will forward it to all of us. Patrick can pass it along. We can modify and create a policy. Kim and Cindy will work on something for conversation at our next meeting.

Cindy: any updates from the City? Patrick: Council on Aging will be working on drafting. Code enforcement will also have something to contribute. There will be a lot of pieces. Any message we create can be shared with all.

Halfway Café Parking:

Patrick: paving, they are waiting to hear back from the City of Cambridge. They will not respond. Striping for upper part of lot will be followed up with DPW.

Recycle bin stickers: No update.

Detectable warnings: No update.

Watertown Mall: new contact will come to a future meeting. Patrick will follow up.

Also, want Paul Johnson/Gideon Schreiber to come talk to us. Patrick will follow up.

Also want to upgrade need for automatic doors with Arsenal Yards.

RFP process for ADA Assessment

Patrick: working on getting bid out so we can apply for a grant. He's coordinating with Council on Aging. We will get support from other organizations. Deadline is June 14.

Waverley and Belmont St: who does this belong to? This is Belmont property. City line ends at sidewalk not the roadway.

Naomi: Can we send a polite letter to Belmont's CoD?

Disability Access Commission. Naomi and Kim will work on a draft identifying key issues. There are no audible signals.

Meeting Minutes

John moves to accept, Naomi seconds. Passes 7-0.

Treasurer's Report

There was a withdrawal and deposit of \$600 as a mistake, so it evens out. Major expenses are CART and ASL interpretation. Brought in money from fees.

Deposits that are not a set dollar amount are interest deposits. Other things are fines.

Cindy moved to accept, Naomi seconds. Passes 7-0.

No plans updates.

Next year the school district will do a review on Special Education projects. Rachel will provide updates.

Nothing new for safety and access. We sent a lot of information to Tyler about reasonable accommodations.

Cracks in the pavement: still there. Naomi and Patrick did a walk. Make sure these things are in See-Click-Fix. Patrick will add photos to 3-1-1.

Nothing new on Lexington and Main.

New Business

Naomi: Section of bike path behind Target has no lower curbs, so you cannot get onto the bike path from the Watertown Mall Parking lot by wheels. Is this moot with construction for Watertown Mall? John will double check this. Alexandria should be notified and address this. Who owns this?

Patrick: Watertown's technology department is working on internet accessibility grant and they would like our support. Grant should provide reliable internet access, starting in the House Authority buildings. Patrick can write something and send out for our review.

Cindy: Went through See-Click-Fix submission process and found it usable.

MEETING IN JUNE: Will be Monday June 17th since our normal meeting falls on Juneteenth.

Which month are we taking off? It will be July or August.