

Watertown Commission on Disability

December 19, 2024

In attendance: John Hawes, Naomi Ridge, Rachel Kay, Cindy Wentz, Kim Charlson, Patrick George, Stefanie (CART), Mel Miller (POAH: Preservation of Affordable Housing), Emily Hunt (Copley Wolff, landscape architect), Ian Kenney (MASS), Sarah Payton (MASS), Jackie Sullivan- (Watertown Housing Authority), Cat Brownell, Peter Centola

Absent: Lisa Feltner, Carol Menton, Megan O'Halloran

Willow Park Development

Currently 6 buildings that have not been updated since the 1950s. None are accessible now. Proposal to redevelop building with 138 units (currently 60), all affordable, studios to 3 BRs. Also community and open spaces and parking.

Current structures have deep flaws in accessibility. They are trying to design buildings so accessible units are not isolated. They also have a variety of sizes of accessible units to accommodate families. Both mobility and sensory units, with a lot of different accommodations. "Barrier-free access." They want to include automatic doors.

Landscape: design is guided by mature trees. Create outdoor recreation, play areas, pedestrian pathways. It will connect all three parcels via crosswalks over streets.

Lighting: working on meeting all of Watertown's requirements.

Laundry will not be in unit, but it will be in every building and on different floors.

Pickup/drop off area near A and B. Every building will have an individual address.

What's happening with current residents? We are hiring a relocation consultant to work on this. Move out to move in will be less than 2 years.

Units will serve a mix of low-income people.

Kim volunteers us to provide any other support we can for a great project!

Chairs Report

Health and Human Services Study: Final report is [here](#).

Rachel: Draft came out end of October and final report is more recent. I had concerns and wanted to share and see if we wanted to act as a commission. The report recommends a Director of

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the city and wants to move the ADA functions under this position. I am afraid the disability aspects and ADA are going to get lost.

Cindy: I was pleased they even thought about disability within DEI. I'm mixed as I like having the DEI thread throughout the government.

Naomi: I think it depends on the individual.

John: I don't want to lose Patrick on this commission since he has been extremely pro-active. Also ADA is a very specific function. We just learned that the building inspector does not go out to different businesses with ADA concerns, it ends up being Patrick who does this. DEI has a lot of agendas and we could lose out. On the other hand, if Patrick did the whole thing, it would be great.

Cindy: Although he would have too much to do with all that and Veterans Services.

Kim: ADA Coordinator is designated. DEI does so many things, so it is fair to be concerned accessibility will not be a priority. But how can someone do all of that?

John: Gayle was HR, which made sense, but she did very little of the work Patrick does.

Kim: Patrick has taken this position to the new high, including his call with the owners/tenants of Riverworks, which made progress we would not have seen before. This seems like too much for one position.

Naomi: It seems like the people who wrote this report don't fully understand an ADA coordinator is not just about equality like with other aspects of DEI.

Rachel will craft a first round and send to Kim to eventually share with the manager.

Mt Auburn-Summer-Ivring: Patrick reports DPW has a quote from a company, and now determining if they go out to bid. There is a concept of how to fix things.

RiverWorks: Patrick had a zoom with property manager of RiverWorks. I went over and showed them where the parking could be. There is parking for Beth Israel across the street. In the lot behind the building is accessible parking and some BI specific parking. Accessible parking is not just for BI, but for anyone in Riverworks building. Since talking, they have decided to install a ramp directly from accessible spot to building. BI is paying for ADA accessible door buttons at both entrances.

John has communicated some of this with the originator of the complaint (George).

Snow Removal: This year will be an awareness campaign.

Mass Office on Disability: We got the MOD/ADA transition plan and self-evaluation grant. We are working on the contracting with the vendor who submitted RFP over the summer. This will be a thorough look at all city buildings.

Kim: We may need time more than our monthly meetings to meet with the consultants on this.

Timeline: we have until June 25th to get this done.

Accessibility Features for Victory Field: John suggests narrowing this discussion to accessibility/disability.

Field house has been put off until Phase III (about to start Phase II). Field house and press box are not accessible. There is also limited parking. Second floor of field house is inaccessible: it is mostly storage, but wouldn't an elevator help everyone?

Peter: Press Box Elevator does not work. Mostly companies are replacing with a lift rather than an elevator. Also I want them to renovate the field house to have two floors with an elevator. I want them to do this part with Phase 2. I would like CoD to step in with a written statement and comment to fix this inequitable situation.

Patrick: this is a park phase and Phase 3 is the architecture phase.

John: We need more information to make a statement. I would like to see plans for the new field house. Also we need to verify the parking information.

Rachel: Parking is part of Phase II.

Patrick: everything should be available online. I will connect John with the open space plans.

Peter: you can see the current things from a quick ride. I'm frustrated they aren't adding more parking.

Kim: We will continue to talk at the next meeting.

Recycle Sticker: No new information. Next month we will have our new DPW director, the GOAT, Thomas Brady.

Detectable markers/audible signals at Waverly and Belmont St Intersection: Wayne Chinard from Belmont. The part of the intersection that is there, they will hire a contractor to come out and study the audible warnings and detectable panels. It is in their 5 year capital plan.

Kim: ask them to keep us informed and let us know if they need things from Watertown side.

Francis Food Mart: Patrick hasn't had a chance to get there.

Human Rights Commission Event: Rachel and Carol attended. CART and ASL were there and worked fine. It was a nice event introducing the commissioners.

Disability event on November 2: Amount went over the \$1000 we had approved. Cindy moves to approve up to \$1100. Naomi seconds. Motion passes 5-0.

Donations for Watertown Food: Patrick will send it over after we approve the last meeting's minutes.

Mass Area Planning Council Climate Change Health Assessment: John, Cindy, and Kim talked with MAPC about climate change and people with disabilities.

Cindy: It was a nice way to bring issues of disability, climate change, and disaster planning together.

Kim: We talked about navigating when dealing with disasters due to climate change. Example: can you bring a service dog to a shelter? This will circle back to town's emergency planning and how disabilities are involved.

Reasonable Accommodations Policy: Legal is working on it. We need to coordinate with Clerk's Office and IT, but our language is ready to go.

Meeting Minutes

John moves to approve, Cindy seconds. Minutes approved by 5-0.

Budget Report

\$64Kish now, but we are waiting to cash check for multiple CART/ASL services for events in addition to our regular meetings. We also have food pantry donations coming (\$3500). Rachel moves to accept, Cindy, seconds, passes 5-0.

Plans: Nothing new

Special Education: Liz Schorr, music teacher at the Cunniff, awarded the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress Educator of the Year award.

Safety and Access: Nothing new

New Business:

We recognize the passing of Carol Wilson Braun this month and honor her service to this commission and the Watertown Community.

Carol M and Rachel would like to discuss meeting in person. Kim will add it on the agenda for next time.

Patrick: Bike and ped commission is recruiting new members and would like someone from the pedestrian side and could be a representative for people with disabilities. Kim: we should also have the chair come to us at some point in the spring.

John: I want to congratulate Patrick on his Christmas sweater with a shark with a santa cap.

Kim: Lisa wasn't here due to a meeting for the Farren Playground. Director of Perkins reached out to Kim about designs. Lisa also had some concerns. Comments are due to DCR on January 6. Kim will get information from Lisa and Perkins.

John: we're reviewing plans for the new Perkins playground.

Next meeting: Wednesday January 15, 2025!