

Watertown Commission on Disability

Wednesday January 15, 2025

Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, Nayo Franck, Naomi Ridge, Lisa Feltner, Carol Menton, Rachel Kay, Cindy Wentz, Megan O'Halloran, Carol Menton, Patrick George, Ellen Vershbow (ASL), Claire Kresge (ASL), Stefanie (CART), Peter Centola

Welcome Nayo! Nayo is community coordinator for Deaf Inc. Also parent of two children.

Chair's Report

Health and Human Services Letter: Was sent to City Manager and Chairs of the Human Rights Commission.

Carol: DEIA: with an A for access. This is a federal law, so it's a different category. Does a DEI director want to do spotlighting on zoom?

Rachel: Should we share this with a Committee on Human Services? Can anyone go to the meeting tomorrow?

Lisa: Committee on Human Services is tomorrow night at 6 pm. Carol mentioned some reasons this is more complicated...it would be great to share this. There are well-meaning people who want to be inclusive. Tonight, spotlighting [on zoom] is a more example. There will be more meetings. Letter can be sent to Tony Palomba, Chair, and Council Clerk Brendan McCarthy.

Kim: I cannot attend, but I can forward the letter to Tony Palomba. I assume he will share with other members. I will cc Patrick.

Mt Auburn Street/Summer Street/Irving Curb Cut:

Patrick: This is a project that was quoted, but there was a contract, but something expired? They're trying to figure out logistics.

Patrick will touch base.

Snow Removal: Good Neighbor Awareness

Patrick: We added a message about shoveling tactile strips as part of the Good Neighbor policy.

Cindy: It would be great for all of us to keep an eye on things and call 3-1-1 if we notice people who have not shoveled. I really like the information that came out from the city, but it would be nice if it included information about how people who can't shovel can get a shovel.

Patrick: Policy for how to get an exemption has not been created yet. We have advised people to sign up through the recreation department to get shovelers. This will be the Human Services Director that has yet to be hired (as recommended in the HHS Study).

Kim: I would like this new person to keep us in the loop so we can review what they draft and provide input.

Next Steps on MOD Project Ramp for ADA Self-Assessment

Patrick: We had kick-off meeting today. They are KMA Associates, from Newton. Today was about setting expectations for the next six months. They know about our timeline from the grant. They will be looking for our input.

Kim: It would be great to have them on in February. We should be ready for a day when we spend more time and roll up our sleeves.

Follow up on Conversation about Accessibility Around Victory Field

John: I couldn't go check the parking spaces due to snow. Reading the reports, there are three issues Peter Centola was concerned about.

1. There are not enough parking spaces and few accessible spaces. They are reducing spaces. I will write up something about this.
2. Access to the press box in the stadium and
3. Expansion of the field house and adding a floor. If there was another floor, it would need to be accessible.

Phase 1 was in 2014 and now we're in Phase 2. I understand why Peter is frustrated. A lot of it has to do with Title IX issues which are not our purview. Also we don't need to comment on the Victory Field configuration.

Kim: We do need to make a point out that if there is a second floor, it has to be accessible.

Peter Centola: The elevator to the press box has never worked. Parking needs to allow fire trucks and other safety vehicles. This is Phase 2. But Phase 3 has issues that should be addressed now. Most athletic facilities are doing a ramp and a lift rather than an elevator, but the bleachers are historic. Please look at today's follow up email. I would request you write a letter to the town and request an action plan. Now that I'm not working for the town, I have the ability to reach out.

John: I will write up something, but we usually comment on something after they have been proposed. I need to see plans in order to comment.

Rachel: Can we write a letter saying we need to see plans for how you're going to address these issues and when will it happen?

Peter: There are plans from 2014. Who should I contact about Title IX?

Lisa: The School Department is in charge of Title IX. The manager said this will be addressed at Phase 3 when the field house is redone. Remind me about the elevator.

Peter: The elevator was installed in the early 90s with the bleachers, but it never worked. This would be for photographers, reporters, people who work for cable. This is Phase 3.

Lisa: The plans are on the website, although they may be hard to find since it has been a long time. ADA may not be sufficient, but we have to do that at least with any plans. We definitely have to do this before things are built.

Cindy: There's an elevator, it doesn't work. Isn't that an ADA violation? So can't we address that now?

Kim: We need to make absolutely certain that everything is accessible. We can include this in our self-assessment. But I think we should work on a letter. John can you access the plans and then work on a letter? People need to recognize that some of these concerns are serious ADA violations.

John and Kim will work on a letter. Lisa or Peter can help us find the plans to address.

Belmont Street Signal: Belmont has agreed to add this to their plans in the future. Kim will ask what that means.

Francis Foot Mart: No update yet. Patrick is working on a letter and will try to get in touch with them.

Donations to food pantries: Checks were cut and a transfer was made.

Language Line Translation and ASL CART feature: Nayo, Patrick and Tyler Cote had a meeting and called an ASL interpreter and minutes later, there was one in the zoom room.

Nayo: Quite often, I've used this at health care appointments. We call it virtual-relay interpreting (VRI). It's becoming more common and it's a quick solution if you have a last-minute request. People who use ASL prefer to have someone live since it's in three-dimensions. It also depends on WiFi quality and may not be people who know the area. It is not perfect but good for a last minute response.

Carol: It's great to get things started, but there can be tech problems. It's okay, but not perfect.

Kim: It would be great if it were posted somewhere so people can use it easily. We should make sure staff in the city know how to use this service for ASL.

Lisa: There's a line item in the budget for translation services, including ASL. It would be great to get an update on the costs in about six months.

Reasonable accommodation policies: Tyler is working on this with the city attorney. It will be part of the self-assessment. We do have a policy we plan to add to agendas for public meetings.

Focus Group for Watertown Free Public Library and the development of their strategic plan. Kim participated along with other stakeholders. Tyler Cote facilitated and it was a great group. It was good to have the Commission represented and included.

Meeting Minutes: Naomi votes to approve, John seconds. Passes 8-0 (Nayo had not yet seen them.)

Treasurer's Report: Available balance is about \$66,000. Since last meeting, we have made payments for our annual food donations as well as for CART and ASL services. We have had three different events where we sponsored, so for those events and our regular meetings. We will have additional costs for the Residents Advisory Committee and will have costs for the Unity Breakfast. Cindy votes to accept, Naomi seconds. We vote to approve 8-0.

Plans Review: There was one access board notification on 9 Boyd Street where the variance request was denied and there were delays, so it is a continuation of the current situation.

Special Education: Nothing new.

Safety and Access: Nothing new.

New Business:

Cindy: Are we going to another *Disability event* in the summer? Should we have a committee? It may be time to start thinking about.

Kim: Maybe we should have a celebration for the 35th anniversary of the ADA. I will add that to the agenda for the next meeting.

Saltonstall Park: Could we ask for a write up on what's going on?

Lisa: these drawings don't help the blind community. Could we/you make suggestions on how better to communicate these improvements and plans?

Cindy: I support this! I have a vague idea about Saltonstall, but two to three paragraphs would be helpful.

We will have a February meeting even though we often waive it. We have some business with the ADA self-assessment and the Bike/Ped Committee would like to come and talk with us.

Next meeting: February 19, 2025