

Commission on Disability
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday February 19, 2025

Attendance: Kim Charlson, Nayo Franck, Lisa Feltner, John Hawes, Rachel Kay, Naomi Ridge, Carol Menton, Cindy Wentz, Patrick George, Mona (CART), Lucy (ASL), Denise (ASL).

Absent: Megan O'Halloran

Guests: Emmanuel Andrade, KMA. Peter Centola

KMA ADA Self-evaluation/Transition Plan

The ADA Self-Evaluation/Transition Plan is sponsored by a grant from the state office of disability. KMA is a design and consulting practice specifically engaged in accessibility work, located in Newton. Emmanuel will be our main point of contact, but there are other staff involved: Josh Safdie, Katie Denis, Mark Simonin, and Juan Gomez Velasquez.

Overview: 1) Community and Staff Evaluation, 2) Evaluation of Programs, 3) Evaluation of Facilities and Reports, and 4) Action Steps (Reports). Both programs and buildings are important...you need to know the bricks&mortars and what goes on in them.

KMA will have monthly meetings with the city. KMA had a staff training on the ADA this month. There will be a public information meeting that the Commission will help coordinate. This will be once Task 1 is done.

They started evaluation of programs last month, including data gathering and assessment. Also will review the website, especially the most used pages.

Fourteen buildings are on the list, but now they've removed the middle school since it is likely to be rebuilt.

We are not doing things like Wayside and the Boys&Girls Club since they are contracted out.

Kim: Can these be added for a later time? Cindy: Or will the ADA compliance be done when the contracts are renewed? Emmanuel: We will make recommendations about them. This is usual.

Lisa: can we add Wayside now? Boys&Girls Club has had a lot of renovation, but Wayside is older. Patrick: I can check.

Rachel: Only the Phillips Building because all the other schools are new? Patrick: Yes, we are comfortable that they are sufficiently modern and therefore, okay.

Today KMA started evaluating buildings, specifically City Hall. They will also look at audit reports. They will include recommendations, photos, and costs to replace any barrier.

For pre-ADA buildings, not everything must be fully accessible, but we will make recommendations to make all services accessible.

Draft self-evaluation will be ready in May, so we will have about six weeks until the final report is due.

Cindy: Aside from the physical buildings, what will you be doing? Emmanuel: we will have a survey for the public that we hope the Commission can help publicize. We also have questions for all division heads about how they work with people with disabilities, specific to their department. We will review all this information and determine what is going well and what could be better. It is less black and white than the buildings but it will help us fully evaluate accessibility in Watertown. There's a lot great in Watertown. We can also share strengths from other cities with Watertown.

Lisa: Will you be looking at recreation facilities and programs? Emmanuel: These were not included in the RFP, but along with schools, this is usually not included for this type of evaluation. We already have this in open space planning. John: we have some issues with Victory field with the press box, field house, parking...we would like your expertise. Emmanuel: We are going to look at this, the parking, the bleachers, the elevator, the press box...all of this. Cindy: So we're not doing the field, but what about a child with autism who wants to do summer camp? Patrick: We are not doing the physical space, but we are including the programs from the recreation department.

Emmanuel will share some resources with us for both cities as a whole and for those focusing on Parks & Rec.

Naomi: What about sidewalks and curb cuts? Are you talking to DPW about their policies around these things? Emmanuel: Yes! We are talking with them about services to the public, but also upkeep and repair of roads and sidewalks. We also need to learn the capacity of the city to maintain sidewalks. We are also inspecting the relevant sidewalks and paths with any buildings.

Kim: What is the role for the Commission on Disability? We will help with the public forum in May/June. Emmanuel: We would like help with advertising the meetings and can give you information on what will be discussed. Perhaps I can come back and give you a preview of the findings and recommendations for your critique. Kim: Would you be able to report back to us in April? Emmanuel: The week prior to your April meeting is when we will have some preliminary recommendations drafted, but it will be very early.

Emmanuel: As soon as your transition plan is complete, you can use it to request funds from the Massachusetts Office of Disability (MOD), so start thinking about this!

Chair's Report

1. Our letter to the City Manager regarding the Health and Human Services Study for Watertown. We received a response: the manager appreciated our feedback and there is an extensive timeline and no decisions will be made immediately.
2. Intersection on Mt Auburn Street/Summer/Irving: nothing to report.
3. Snow Removal and Neighborhood Awareness: Naomi sent out some information from MOD on snow removal policies. It was sent to Tyler Cote and other city leadership. There was some interesting information about exemptions. Lisa: we have fallen off on paying attention to commercial properties. We also need more prompt removal of snow from commercial properties. Cindy: who is going to write the policy? Patrick: The new HHS person who is hired will be responsible for the policy, but they are far from being hired.

4. Victory Field and accessibility elements: working with KMA and city people for Victory Field Phase 2. We are going to advocate for maintaining the three accessible parking spots even if other spots are reduced. We invited KMA to evaluate all of the physical structures and give us recommendations for the field house. The elevator for the press box has never been operational. We want to understand Phase III and all accessibility for the press box before replacing the elevator. There may be more fiscally responsible ways to repair this and KMA will help. John: I'm very pleased KMA will be involved, they will have the most current information and solutions.
5. DPW trash/recycle sticker design and recommendation: Kim recommends you share the information we provided to DPW to KMA, and they can potentially work it into their recommendations. Patrick is also talking to the recycling coordinator.
6. Francis Food Mart: Patrick is waiting for better weather.
7. Language translation ASL/CART test: Carol and Nayo will test it out.
8. Reasonable accommodation policy: we have the language ready and Patrick will send that language to KMA as well. Cindy: I've made requests to different departments and while people are willing to listen, there is no follow through. Even after the policy is in place, we will have to figure out how implementation will work.

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Cindy: I had recommended KMA look at Victory field and the meeting said something a little different.

Naomi moved for minutes to be accepted with an amendment. Cindy seconded. Passed 8-0.

Budget

We have received some fairly significant money from fines. We also have paid for some ASL/CART for Unity Breakfast and our meetings.

Special Education

The special education evaluation is now in progress. Rachel will keep Kim informed so maybe we will request a presentation when it is complete. Also the schools are looking at a deficit this year, so we will see how that goes.

Access

The path to Saltonstall from Moxley has cracks and ice! But hopefully better in spring.

New Business

KMA will be sending out a public survey. We are looking at different formats and different languages. There will be a 4-week turn-around for the survey. Please share widely! Kim and Cindy can take a look at accessibility of survey before it goes out publicly.

We should still discuss a disability awareness event. Kim will add it to the agenda for March.

Next meeting is Wednesday March 19, 7 pm on Zoom.