

## **Watertown Commission on Disability**

**March 19, 2025**

**In attendance:** Carol Menton, Naomi Ridge, Cindy Wentz, Rachel Kay, Nayo Franck, John Hawes, Megan O'Halloran, Lisa Feltner, Patrick George, Stefanie Farrell (CART), Denise Martinez (ASL), Ellen Vershbow (ASL), Alexandra Sieving (Ai3)

**Absent:** Kim Charlson

### **Presentation on Parker School**

Alexandra Sieving, J George, Josh Safdie from Ai3/KMA

The Parker School was recently rebought by the city for city offices, a day care tenant, the food pantry, and the WIC office. It needs full fire protection, safety code improvements, and full accessibility. They are including door operators, a stair lift, accessible bathrooms, accessible signage (including emergency). They are here to share variances they are requesting: most are time variances. A time variance request is a commitment to bring the building into compliance, but not necessarily in this contract. But there is a timeline. (See spreadsheet)

Some are related to issues around the building site (sloped). Some are related to entrances. Some are related to parking and sidewalks. And some are related to the inside, mostly the day care.

Lisa asked: is braille being considered with signage? Alex from Ai3: Inside signage will include braille where regulations state it to be included. We are requesting a variance on the ones in the elevator, while the city decides to repair or replace the elevator.

Rachel asked about food pantry, whose managers are concerned about accessibility. Alex said there is a ramp in the back, which is not wide enough but usable for most people. The goal is to have both entries fully accessible, in the rear and on the west side of the building. The west side is the same level as the food pantry so would not require an elevator. It is also the side that is closest to the bus stop.

John recommends we read the report in our packet, even though it is dense.

Naomi was impressed the care with which the report was put together and they were careful to cover all the bases.

Cindy clarified that braille in the elevator is delayed until the city decides whether or not they are replacing the entire elevator. Is it possible to have a temporary fix like tape labels in the meantime? Josh (KMA) said they can look into this. Lisa: I have seen braille printed on white printer paper.

### **Watertown Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee**

Jamie Burke is the chair of the Bike/Ped Committee. The committee is working to improve safety for road users of all kinds. They look at recent developments and help advise the city on connectivity for

pedestrian and cyclists. Patrick noted we are trying to open the lines of communication between our two committees. Jamie said they try to look specifically at intersections. We should reach out with issues we would like to see addressed.

Naomi as a wheelchair user as well as past use of other devices: concerned about sidewalks with width and evenness (and roots under trees). This is probably an issue with vision-impaired people as well.

Cindy asked about Jamie's experience on the committee. She has been on for 3 years. Prior experience in advocating. This was the first year they had to think about snow. They have been working with Tyler Cote on messaging.

Lisa asked about safe routes to schools and if they interact with the school department. Jamie stated they have been talking with Stephanie Venizelos from Live Well Watertown. The schools run this program individually so they need to connect more strongly at that level.

Lisa also asked about learning to ride a bike for adults and children. Stephanie is working on a program for adults in Watertown. The Bike/Ped Committee are also looking into grant opportunities to getting that off the ground.

John: we should stay in touch.

### **Chair's Report**

1. Mt Auburn/Summer intersection: Patrick received information from DPW. It is not yet in their scope of work, but that is in the next realm of work.
2. Ai3 Parker School transition: already discussed.
3. Citizen critical comments of CoD: John noted we have been on top of that for years. Patrick joined Ernie Thibodeau (Recreation Director) and KMA at Victory Field. They looked at the Stage 3 structures: stands, locker rooms, and other buildings. The stands have wheel chair accessible cut outs. Right now the sidewalk to get to the elevator to the press box is not accessible. Also the press box is not accessible inside and above. These issues would need to be fixed along with the elevator. If there is someone who needs this, we can work with WCA-TV to help them at another location on the field or from cable access, maybe with a drone. There are options for the locker rooms right now, so it is not a single gender/sport facility. If they add a second floor, but right now that is theoretical. They also looked at accessible bathrooms. All of this will be in more detail in the full report.

John: I'd really like to have KMA address the elevator. We may need to go back to the MAAB and ask for a review and a variance. It was done according to code in 1993 and never used and maybe never worked. If KMA doesn't know, the city should have records.

4. DPW Stickers: Kim moved past this at the last meeting. It is a work in progress.
5. Detectable warnings at Beacon and Beechwood: still pending.
6. Waverly/Belmont Street intersection: We have heard nothing else from Belmont.
7. Francis Food Mart: John went in and saw an accessible entrance with instructions, but the door is locked and there is stuff in the vestibule. Their main complaint was the door will make it drafty and cold. Naomi: in the old Francis, they only had the accessible door.

8. Language/ASL/CART: Carol will do it this month!
9. KMA Self-Evaluation: In process. Patrick is trying incorporate accessibility options into the standard agenda language.

### **Meeting Minutes**

Vote 8-0 to approve meeting minutes.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Everything deposited is related to fines and fees. Anything with cents added includes interest. We have paid additional ASL interpreters.

Naomi commented that the increase in fees means more people are parking in accessible spots. John suggested the fine givers are more active. We were previously down enforcement officers.

Cindy moves to accept, Naomi seconds. 8-0 passes.

### **Committee Reports**

Plans review: None

Special Education: Rachel: SEPAC is Meeting Tuesday March 25 on Zoom to discuss what's happening to special education funding.

Access: cracks in the pavement on the path. Naomi reports a bunch have been filled in, but missed one egregious crack. And now they are starting to open up a little more.

### **New Business**

Watertown Walks: what would we need to do? Patrick envisions this as similar to the Watertown Square walks showing people how people with disabilities experience walking differently. Cindy and Naomi are interested in doing this. Rachel suggested inviting the Bik/Ped Committee. Naomi could come up with some ideas. Carol said we could request of an ASL interpreter as well. John: Electric cars are so quiet, it is hard to hear them coming.

Lisa mentioned disability awareness, which we are talking about for July. Cindy said Watertown Walks could be one thing. Kim had some ideas. Lisa noted that having cable access to come with us on a walk might be great. Patrick: Maybe our walk will be in July for Disability Pride month.

Patrick noted there was an email from the manager about getting agendas and minutes posted on time. We do this.

Patrick is meeting with Kim, Perkins, and DCR around Farren Playground. It is a long path to get into the structure and courts.

Next meeting: April 16, 2025