

Watertown Commission on Disability

May 28, 2025

In attendance: Kim Charlson, Carol Menton, Naomi Ridge, Lisa Feltner, Rachel Kay , Patrick George, Cindy Wentz, Nayo Franck, Ellen Vershbow (ASL), Mona (CART), Tyler Cote (Community Engagement), Emanuel Andrade (KMA), Katie Denis (KMA), Claire Kresge (ASL), Rita Colafella

Absent: John Hawes, Megan O'Halloran

Acknowledging Patrick George, our ADA coordinator. Patrick is leaving the city for a new role at the Veterans Office for the state. He has worked for the city in Veterans Services and in a variety of other roles since 2019.

(Tyler Cote will be the ADA coordinator until the Human Services Director is in place.)

Report on ADA Self-Assessment

Emanuel and Katie are reporting. The assessment began in January and conclude in June.

ADA Title II requires the self-evaluation and transition plans.

Public survey had 106 responses, which was very successful.

65% had difficulty accessing a municipal building.

75% had difficulty getting information about accessibility for an event.

71% did not know how to request materials in alternate formats.

78% did not know how to request an accommodation.

Qualitative information focused on sidewalks: conditions, blocked ramps, etc. Also it should be easy to find information about accessibility before events, not at events. There was concern about lack of seating in city events, while waiting for transportation. Also we could use more quiet sensory friendly spaces.

Major findings: we have a lot of ADA-related people and procedures in place. We have established employee training and emergency plans for people with disabilities.

Recommendations for ADA Coordinator: The name should be posted in all municipal facilities. Employee training can be improved. The attendant at the DPW Recycling Center should have specific training for working with people with disabilities. Move public activities from Phillips to accessible location.

Programmatic Recommendations: All events hosted in accessible facilities. Develop protocols about accessible events with advertising. Ensure applications for everything are accessible to people with

disabilities. Develop a service animal policy. Provide auxiliary aids and alternative formats in a timely manner.

Human Resources Department: all job descriptions should include equal opportunity policy, accommodation policies, and a point of contact for accommodations.

Town Clerk: Audit all polling places for accessibility.

Recreation department: relocate the press box functions at Victory Field (upon request), until Phase III renovation is complete.

DPW, Buildings and Recreation Departments: Develop program for routine inspection of facilities (automatic doors, warning strip for ramps, parking lots, sidewalks and ramps being maintained). Create a policy for accessible toilets. Review accessibility in all capital projects. Ensure online payment is available for bills (some in person at DPW...this is a hard building to access between sidewalk and large parking lot).

Emergency Management Departments (police, fire, health, public works): we have a robust emergency plan. Ensure that there are two accessible entrances in all buildings: if not, ensure emergency personnel knows how to help people with disabilities. Include an accessible phone right at the entrance of police and fire. Check signage for accessibility symbol. Also develop evacuation maps at all exit doors. Share all of this with city staff. All staff should attend MEMA training.

Buildings: more detail will be in report. Throughout, restripe parking and regrade sidewalks. Also upgrades to toilet rooms.

City Hall: Install directional signs at inaccessible entrances and throughout the building.

Parker Annex: Install and replace handrails. Include directional signage to accessible entrances.

Library: the parking is confusing. Some book stacks in Childrens Room are too close. The local history room doors are too narrow.

Senior Center: this is a high priority. Ramp to the accessible entrance is too steep. Counters need to be lowered in reception and the kitchen counter. Install new directional signs at inaccessible entrances.

DPW: regrade parking spaces and raise parking signs. Add a "van designated" spot.

Police Station: Replace curb ramp on Main Street (too steep). Install an emergency phone at entrance on Main Street.

Fire Stations: 95% staff and 5% public. Replace ramp handrails and stair handrails (#1). Lower counter at #1. Rebuild ramp at #2.

Commander's Mansion: Add a "van designated" sign. Install new directional signs. Study an accessible route between event tent and toilet rooms.

John A Ryan Arena: New signage. Install accessible bench and lockers. Retrofit showers (at least one) in locker rooms. Regrade sloped walkway and rebuild exterior ramp.

Victory Field: Rebuild ramps and install handrails at toilet and locker rooms. Lower concession stand's counter. Regrade area near drinking fountain. Retrofit shower stalls in locker rooms.

Questions!

Lisa: did you look at the parks and playgrounds? Specifically bathroom and storage. Emanuel: No, this belongs under the Open Space plans (which we did last year).

Lisa: Minor or moderate upgrades in toilet rooms: does that involve raising the toilets? Emanuel: It is mostly fixes that DPW can do, rather than a specialist/architect.

Cindy: We had been working on access to City Hall for people who are deaf/hard of hearing. How is this working in other buildings? Patrick: we hope to have this available soon.

Lisa: We didn't cover the Wayside Center? Emanuel: We did audit the facility and spent a few hours there. Patrick: This will be brought to the city and shared.

Lisa: Have you come across requests for increased street parking in any communities? Katie: PROAG is being adopted in different cities, so that might be a place to look. Emmanuel: You need to calculate on-street parking differently than off-street, but PROAG has guidelines.

Rachel: What repairs are needed on the Phillips? Emanuel: They are significant, and given it is primarily a staff building, it is better to move public functions (meetings and voting) to other buildings than to update.

Patrick: We have created an ADA@watertown-ma.gov email address for ADA grievances and accommodation requests. This will be added to all agendas going forward.

Lisa: is the gym at the Phillips building accessible, since it is used by the Senior Center? Emmanuel: most problems are in the hallways and bathrooms. There is an elevator. The gym was in pretty good shape. The ramp is too steep and is missing handrails. The doors between the Senior Center and gym are in good shape.

Kim: What are the next steps? Finish the report, then what? Emanuel: I defer to the city on how best to answer that question. Patrick: First, we want to ensure that the report matches work being done on the Parker Building. Then we need to think what is being done and how we can incorporate the suggestions. Kim: I assume MOD will get a copy of the report. Patrick: they have asked for updates. Katie: this is a living document, so use this over time. Kim: we will also make recommendations for the city about what are priorities.

Next meeting will be Wednesday June 18 at 7 pm on Zoom. At the June meeting, we will make decisions about summer meetings.