

Watertown Commission on Disability

Meeting Minutes

August 20, 2025

In attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, Naomi Ridge, Carol Menton, Nayo Franck, Lisa Feltner, Rachel Kay, Cindy Wentz, Tyler Cote, Ellen Vershbow (ASL), Denise Martinez (ASL), Stefanie Farrell (CART), Jenna Bancroft

- 1. Call to Order & Housekeeping – Kim Charlson**
- 2. Audience Issues (takes priority over regular business)**

None.

- 3. Guest Speaker: Watertown Human Services Director Jenna Bancroft**

Kim: The position of Veterans Services has been posted still including ADA coordinator.

Jenna: used to work at Wayside and is happy to be back in Watertown. In between worked in social services for the City of Newton. This position was created from the human services needs assessment done by the city. Jenna has been here six weeks. She has been working on hiring the veterans services/ADA coordinator position. She is also focusing on improving the website to create accessible resources for residents. The department will also take on the Watertown Food Pantry and the Community Wellness department. They will also manage the Wayside contract.

Kim: How does the human rights needs assessment work with your department? I suggested a disability focus group for the needs assessment. (October 9th at 6:45 pm)

Jenna: The budget for the HRC falls under Human Services so we are working together to identify gaps.

Kim: An invitation will be going out and we are encouraged to attend and share. Elizabeth Peck (coordinator of the assessment) wants 10-12 participants, on Zoom. One of our members should also be part of the general public group as well. The focus group will be about 90 minutes long. Since the HRC does not have a budget, I am proposing offering them a budget. Nayo/Carol can help determine what the budget should be.

Lisa: Budget now has a line that includes interpretation services that might fund the assessment rather than our budget. Tyler, can you investigate?

Carol: For 2 interpreters and one CART for 2 hours should be about \$645.

Rachel: What is the difference between the Human Rights assessment and the Human Services assessment? I imagine there is overlap with those as well as the ADA Assessment.

Jenna: I agree, but I am not the right person to speak about the HRC assessment. The more things that show we have gaps in services, the better.

Cindy: How does the senior services fit in within this department? Where is snow removal?

Jenna: Snow removal is still under discussion. Senior Services does not fit under the Human Services umbrella, but I expect we will be strong partners. They are going through some personnel shifts. There is also a partnership with the Wayside. We are already bringing in a digital equity grant with the Senior Services.

Lisa: There is a focus on physical accessibility, but I hope the programming piece does not get lost.

Jenna: I have been looking at the ADA transition plan and we expect the person who takes on this position will begin focusing on this.

4. CHAIR'S REPORT

A. Funding Request from WHRC for ASL &/or CART for October Disability Needs Assessment Focus Group – Kim

As discussed above.

B. Request from WFPL for Funding for ASL & CART for October 20-21 Disability Awareness Events – Kim

Cindy: On Monday October 20, the library will show Crip Camp. It comes with audio description and closed captioning. We are looking for ASL introduction to the film. The following night (Tuesday October 21) there will be a discussion of what has changed in recent years. We will need CART/ASL for that.

Kim: We would like some guidance from you on cost.

Cindy: Speakers are not yet confirmed for the 21st.

Kim: I am confirmed to represent the CoD. Also Charlie Carr.

Cindy: Finn Gerdinar who represents the autism community, and someone with a disability who works in disability research. (Jennifer Lee-Rambharose)

Kim: We will cover local, state, national issues that are on people's minds. It will probably be available on Watertown cable. This will be on our agenda next month with the right amounts from Carol.

Nayo: CART is really one-way, so we have to think about how we want to design the event. It is open to discussion. How much audience participation will there be? It would be good to have communication access the whole way, even during the movie.

Carol: I agree. ASL interpreters the whole time would be important. Approximately \$75/hour x 2 per interpreter x 2 = \$300. Also approximately \$135/hour x 1 CART Captioner + \$65 prep + \$10/hour streaming fee x 2 = \$345.

Tyler: I will check what funds we have available for this type of event as well. Mostly it has been designated from on-demand needs, but I will check and make sure you have full understanding of what is available from the city's budget.

C. Report Back on Tyler Cote/Tom Brady DPW Walk-about in June on Arsenal Street – Tyler

Tyler: We discussed at where the trees were on the southern side of Arsenal Street. The trees have elevated the pavement and narrowed the sidewalk. To remove a tree, would there need to be a tree hearing? Maybe not for ADA. Would there be interest in adding signage to encourage people to go to the other side of the street that is wider? This would be a quicker solution.

Naomi: As a stop gap solution, it is the best we can do, but we should keep pushing to make the sidewalk accessible. The sign won't be helpful for someone who has vision loss, and they could trip.

Lisa: This is not a good solution and not worth the money to make the signs. There is also nowhere good to put the sign. People love trees, but these trees are also damaging property. There is no planting trip there; the trees were put in the sidewalks. We may need to pave the whole think like in front of the Toyota dealer. It is going to be expensive.

Tyler: I wasn't crazy about the idea either, so I will relay this information to Director Brady when he is back in the office. I will continue to talk with the city manager about this too.

Lisa: There is also barely any room for trash or recycling barrels.

John: There is another section like this near Beacon Park. Also across from the tile place near Louise Street.

Tyler: Starting at 197 Arsenal.

Kim: Agree, signage is a poor solution to the problem. You can say with confidence that the CoD says signage is not an acceptable option.

D. Detectable Warnings at North Beacon & Beechwood – Kim

Tyler: There are no detectable warnings at the crosswalks. Tom Brady agreed they need to be there. Today they are placing them! They should be in very soon.

Kim: Please get a timeline for Perkins. Students will be returning to school on September 2, next week staff returns.

E. Update on Waverly-Belmont Street Intersection from Wayne Chouinard –Tyler & Kim

Kim: Belmont Street is not a state highway. The folks at Mass Highway have given me some language to ask if it is in the FY26 budget and we need Belmont as our partner.

F. Update on Francis Food Mart – Tyler & John

Tyler: Asked to see who is the owner. There are grants, but the owner would need to take that step and make that effort. The Code Enforcement team went inside and said there was no blockage as of this week. I will check it out myself.

John: The real thing to check there is the front door locked. If necessary, we need to bounce this to the MAAB. Who really enforces problems like this?

G. ADA Signage as Recommended by the KMA Report – Tyler

Tyler: Jenna and I reviewed the Parker Building with the KMA Report. I am currently in the process of adding ADA notices in all public buildings, starting with City Hall. These signs also describe on-demand ASL interpretation. Also we are working on signs pointing to accessible entrances. They will be updated with the new ADA coordinator's name. They will be larger than standard size paper and something stronger.

Kim/Naomi: Liz Helfer did an evaluation of signage in March 2022.

H. Faire on the Square Planning – Tyler & All

Tyler: I will not be attending since I will be on my honeymoon.

Lisa: There were a lot of potholes where our table was last year.

Tyler: This year they will be using mostly the library parking lot or lower Saltonstall field. There will also be a smaller food tent (as of a month ago). This may have changed. We need to book a table by Friday.

Kim: Who is available?

Rachel can do an hour or two. *Naomi* can do the earlier part. *Cindy* can do some too. *Lisa* can help with set up. *Carol* can help too.

Kim: Our box of stuff is in a closet with a table cloth and give aways. Can you find that?

Carol: We combined with the Veterans Table and we can do that again. Can we have an ASL interpreter?

Nayo: I am happy to help. I can help set up and maybe stay 2 hours. I can help clean up in the end. But what about an interpreter? If I have no interpreter, I can't interact.

Carol: We can have one and a floater. I'd recommend having someone the whole time.

Kim: Who pays for it? We can do it, but the community should support it. We could also use a sighted guide. How can we deal with it this year and going forward?

Tyler: This has been something discussed and the events team has an interest. I'll check what has been done and what will be done for September's event. I will try to set up a meeting ASAP.

Kim: This needs to be advertised since people won't use them if they do not know.

Cindy: This year I'm asking for an accommodation. I have avoided Faire on the Square for years.

Nayo: How do you promote ADA requests? It would be nice to have an email that anyone can use for any city events instead of a phone number. Emails are easier to remember.

Tyler: It will be ada@watertown-ma.gov.

Carol will do the scheduling. *Tyler* will request an accessible table and information about two ASL interpreters from noon to 5 (the whole event). *Tyler* will make sure we have a tent.

Kim: Having a list or document of who is there to see in advance, so they can work with the sighted guides.

H2 Empowering Women in Watertown

Kim: I was one of the speakers this week as well as two police officers and a fire fighter. Officer Raider (the service dog) was also there. Jennifer Nicholson noted they had been trying to provide sighted guides at the Farmer's Market, but one person is taking over the guide for the entire market. I suggested giving them a time maximum right at the beginning.

Cindy: Half an hour to 45 minutes is plenty.

5. New Business

A. Next meeting date in September

Tyler can't be available on September 17. Would someone be available from WCA-TV on September 24? Tyler will check in with WCA-TV. If so, then let's move the meeting to the 24th. Tyler will let us know via email. John will be in Italy. Nayo also won't be available.

B. Nayo Information

Nayo has decided to stop service to the board when the term is up in November. My job at Deaf Inc is changing and my next three years is up-in-the-air, so it is best for me to step down. I have been honored to be hear and I am so grateful.

6. Adjourn