

## Watertown Commission on Disability

October 22, 2025, 7 pm

**Attendance:** Kim Charlson, Lisa Feltner, Megan O'Halloran, Naomi Ridge, Cindy Wentz, Carol Menton, Rachel Kay, Denise Martinez (ASL), Ellen Vershbow (ASL), Mona Leviton (CART), Tyler Cote, Zeke Mermell, George Donahue (guest), Laurie Garden (guest)

**Absent:** Lisa Feltner, Megan O'Halloran

### 1. Call to Order & Housekeeping – Kim Charlson

This is Nayo's last meeting! Tyler will join us again next month.

George Donahue will join the commission next month!

**2. Audience participation:** Laurie Garden is introducing the annual request for CART and ASL for the 2026 Unity Breakfast (January 19). It will be in person at the Hellenic Center. We anticipate 400 community members. There will be speakers, music, and conversation. The price should be similar to what we used for the Disability Rights session. Tyler will make the request for the interpreters for the date in January. We will vote on this in November.

### 3. Guest Speaker: Summary Report on Watertown Transportation Study: Zeke Mermell, Senior Transportation Planner, City of Watertown

Watertown Transportation Study has just been completed. There are five key strategies recommended. The goal is to reduced miles traveled by single-occupancy vehicles by 50% before 2050. Discovered that getting east to west in Watertown is do-able via bus, but North-South is challenging. Arsenal Yards and Boston Landing are becoming popular destinations. Two-thirds of trips in begin and end in Watertown. Cindy helped develop a walking map with crossing walks with and without lights.

To expand local transit, the study recommends expanding the Watertown Connector Route, potentially going into Perkins campus. Zeke would like the COD to write a letter recommending expanding the shuttle, including adding Arsenal Yards and Boston Landing.

Another strategy is micro-transit: it can bring you curb-to-curb within Watertown. Zeke also shared the costs for this and Watertown Connector expanded routes.

Another recommendation is to do more with Universal Access Design, including creating an Accessible Design Guide. There are specific proposed corridors. Some of these will have different priorities including bus service. This might also include expanding some of our routes, such as going to the Longwood area.

Zeke is happy to talk to us more and will come to us. This presentation is available as a pdf from the City's website. (<https://portal.laserfiche.com/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=132622&repo=r-5ece5628>) John

requested it be sent as a pdf, but apparently the file size is too big. Tyler is willing to print it out for any of us.

#### **4. Chair's Report – Kim**

##### *A. Update on Waverly-Belmont Street Intersection from Wayne Chouinard – Tyler & Kim*

Wayne will get back to Tyler to ensure this is fully accessible. Zeke noted that Waverly is one of the priority corridors.

##### *B. Update on Francis Food Mart – Tyler & John*

John saw that the entrance on to Belmont Street is now operational without stuff blocking it. Due to an air system issue, the door keeps opening, but they should be able to fix that. John will continue to monitor. Naomi will attempt some shopping there.

##### *C. ADA Signage as Recommended by the KMA Report – Tyler*

No updates from last meeting. Some signs have started to go up. This will continue.

##### *D. Reasonable Accommodation Language on City Agendas & Event Notices – Tyler*

We have final language, but Tyler needs to check with Jay. Lawyers have approved it. Language will be slightly different for events than agendas. The clerk's office will integrate this, but they are currently busy with the local election, so after that.

##### *E. 311 Request Tagging to Include Accessibility Option Updates – Tyler*

We would like to have them come to a meeting. Tyler and Laura have worked on a starter to-do list. Would it be better for a separate ADA category with topics under it? Or would it be better for ADA to be under other categories? Cindy suggested the latter as this may be how people think about their request. Naomi agreed, since that will ensure it gets to the correct department. Kim said we would be interested to have Laura here to learn more about what types of calls she gets.

##### *F. Arsenal Park Amphitheater Path Surface – Lisa & Tyler*

John met with the planning department about gravel size previously and how it is difficult for people with wheel chairs, with mobility issues, and even for people without. John suggests we pass this to Steven Magoon and Gideon Schreiber to put the correct type of gravel. Kim suggested they plan to do it before spring time when people begin using the amphitheater. Tyler will share John's photos with Jay and Steve/Tom Brady.

##### *G. Accessible Entrances at City Hall – John*

David Leon requested the entrance to the basement on the library side be made accessible like it is on the Saltonstall side. John noted the problem is space that is not available on the library side. To do this, you would lose program space. So John does not believe this is a good use of funds and not realistic. The choices they made were the only reasonable choices at that point.

Kim noted we should have good signage about the accessible entrances (as per KMA recommendations). Tyler noted this has come up and is in progress.

#### *H. Report on WHRC Disability Focus Group October 9 – Cindy & Naomi*

Cindy noted she saw new faces there. She thought there were good questions asked. There may be some issues raised that would be of interest to the Commission. Does the movie theater not have open captions? Naomi has seen people with a device for captions. Nayo said you can ask the manager for a movie with open captions. If there is enough interest, we can have community-wide open captions. Kim noted they also have a device for audio description as well.

Naomi said it was a listening session to hear disability concerns. Sidewalks and transportation came up a lot. The Commission will be included in the loop on the findings.

#### *I. Re-Visit Path Issue Behind Halfway Café – Naomi & John*

The issue is that the path is gravel and over water pipes owned by Cambridge. John noted some of it has been paved, but not all. Tyler and Jay will figure out who owns this issue and what is their timeline. Zeke noted this is part of the community path network across communities. Zeke will be part of this conversation and the larger network. Naomi said replacing large gravel with packed dirt would be a huge improvement. Kim noted it can be done similar to the Braille trail.

#### *J. DPW Trash/Recycling Disability Sticker – Kim*

Kim will loop back with DPW. Tyler will share the final version after this meeting.

#### *K. Update on Arsenal Street Sidewalk Issue – Lisa & Tyler*

Tyler has spoken to the City Manager about this. If the COD would like a tree hearing about this, we could request one. Kim suggested we discuss with the tree warden before we go to a hearing. Tyler will suggest the tree warden go take a look.

#### *L. Holiday Donations*

We have traditionally donated to both food pantries and the community fridge. John noted the community fridge is moving to the Parker building [update: it is [moving to the library](#)]. John suggests we increase the amount we donate given our sizable budget and the cuts to SNAP. This will be on the agenda next month.

Cindy noted that moving the food pantry and the Community Fridge to the Parker building is less accessible for people. Zeke said it is one stop from Watertown Square on the 59 bus, but it is still out of the way for many. He also noted there is a Blue Bike station outside the building.

### **5. Summary of Disability Events at the Watertown Free Public Library this week**

*Crip Camp* was shown on Monday. There was a panel last night, including Kim. Cindy observed the panel was diverse in multiple ways with multiple generations. Kim and Charlie Carr were able to talk about past accomplishments and changes until now. The other two speakers were very interested in intersectionality. Cindy suggested we send a thank you to all the presenters. Bevin Croft of World in Watertown has already sent thank yous, but we should as well. Nayo noted there was a search for the ASL interpreters last minute that were finally found from New Hampshire. The quality was not up to

what Nayo is used to. CART was helpful. The shared space and partnerships were wonderful. Cindy noted an interpreter did not show up on Monday night.

## **6. Acceptance of Minutes for the August & September Meeting – Discussion/Vote – Rachel & Tyler**

Naomi moved to accept. Nayo seconded. Voted 7-0 to accept.

## **7. Treasurer's Report – Tyler**

Tyler sent an update this afternoon. The document has FY25 and FY26. Current balance: \$131,119.06. Current encumbrances: \$2240.99 Tyler will continue to update until Jay is ready to take over. This will be sent out with the agenda for all future meetings.

Naomi suggested we consider what other programs we could fund given we have a significant amount of money. For example, could we have ASL interpreters for the high school plays and musical? Kim will put this on a future agenda.

## **8. Committee Reports – Ongoing Business**

### *A. Plans Review – John*

At Mt Auburn Street near Summer Street, a six-story building is going up in a vacant lot. Additionally, another project will be replacing Dunkin and everything in that lot. There is also a building going in behind the house at Summer and Mt Auburn. There is not much detail at this point. But John is looking at parking. The one where Dunkin is is missing a handicap parking spot, but John contacted Gideon about this.

### *B. Special Education Update – Rachel*

Given the federal shut down as well as funding cuts, Rachel is concerned about ability for districts to provide services as well as the ability of families to seek help if they feel their rights are being violated. Stay tuned.

### *C. Safety and Access – Kim*

1. Cracks in Pavement on Pathway from Whites Avenue to Waverly Avenue –Kim & Naomi

Still there.

2. Detectable Warnings at Lexington & Main Streets Being Referred to Mass Highway – Kim

Being fixed by the state.

## **9. New Business**

Naomi sent an email that went to the school district that was completely inaccessible. Matt McCarthy from the School District sent out a sincere apology. We will all watch to see if they do better. Kim and Cindy are grateful Naomi's advocacy! Tyler will offer help to make sure everything is accessible.

Cindy noted that the second phase of the ADA Assessment is applying for grants. Tyler said this is in the works.

George asked if donations for the food pantries can include Meals on Wheels since that is also being cut.

George had a question about elections and accessible booths. Kim noted this should be happening. Tyler will check in with Noelle (City Clerk). There will be more accessible polling stations at the Warren Street location. Also the accessible online voting process is available through a5 website and Watertown participates.

## **10. Adjourn**

Next meeting – November 19, 2025 at 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM – Via Zoom