

Watertown Commission on Disability
Meeting Minutes
December 17, 2025

In Attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, George Donahue, Lisa Feltner, Rachel Kay Naomi Ridge, Carol Menton, Cindy, Wentz, Jay Terminiello, Tom Brady (Superintendent, Watertown Department of Public Works), Stephanie (CART)

Absent: Megan O'Halloran

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

Kim attended a meeting for Board Chairs with Jay.

- 3. Guest Speaker: Tom Brady, Superintendent, Watertown Department of Public Works**

Tom was the first tree warden for Watertown, many years ago. He worked after that in Brookline with trees and parks and conservation for 24 years. Tom worked as an auditor for the American Public Works Association across the country. He brings this experience back with him this year.

The Watertown Department is 65 people in total, including 40 people to service the entire community (outside of admin, financial, etc). Programmatically, he has been doing road and sidewalk work. They have updated accessible ramps on Beacon Street. Everything we do with construction or restoration needs to meet the applicable codes, including ramps, detectable domes, and so on.

There has not been significant construction on roadways in the past three years. Mt Auburn Street is mostly a state project, and it will continue to impact us. DPW is hoping to catch up on the past few years of expenditures for roadway improvements, over \$9 million of work. We are aiming to adjust the audibles in Watertown Square. The signals south of the river need urgent attention so we will evaluate the entire infrastructure when we address that. This will be an iterative process where things need to get repeatedly updated to get right. This tries with pavement as well. He has learned thinking about communities where work is being done by working in the Perkins area. He is also dealing with sewer and water line issues every day. Kim pulled out issues from the Chair's Report to discuss with Tom:

E. Arsenal Park Amphitheater Path Surface – Lisa & John

John noted that the bottom of the amphitheater has trees with gravel around them, but the gravel is too big for wheelchairs to move through. Steve Magoon heard the issue, but we do not know if DPW has been involved. It would be great to have gravel like that in front of the Mosesian Center. George and Naomi noted it is crushed stone or stone dust, rather than gravel. Lisa asked why this was not done correctly the first time. Tom noted that the gravel was leftover

from elsewhere so they added it. Good intent, bad execution. There are limitations due to stormwater and conservation issues. Now the Conservation Commission is delaying this as this is part of their purview. Rachel asked if we should go to their meeting. Tom said it may be better for him to do it since he speaks their language. Lisa asked about stormwater draining onto the paved paths. Tom said that the gravel will seat over time and there will be less of a problem. Kim expressed appreciation for explaining the issues to us.

H. Re-Visit Path Issue Behind Halfway Café – Naomi & John

That path is located on top of a pipe owned by the City of Cambridge Water Department, so we need a legal agreement to pave on top of it. Cambridge's lawyers have said no. Tom will reconnect on this issue with the City Manager. Tom thinks it is better for Cambridge to pave, but this has to be dealt with at the manager letter. Naomi asked if it could be stone dust. Tom said that would be difficult given the pitch.

I. DPW Trash/Recycling Disability Sticker – Kim & Jay

We have been working with Matt Bacon on this issue and have sent him a design. We may invite Matt to speak to use next year, as to how to determine who gets a sticker and how Republic feels about this. Tom noted that part of the reason for automated trash collection is a liability and safety issue when people get out of the trucks, so there is some reluctance. Post-trash strike we have some new people working in our community and that may lead to opportunities.

J. Update on Arsenal Street Sidewalk Issue – Lisa & John & George

George shared a report on this today. To remove the trees, we have to have a hearing (Mass Law Chapter 87). Tom agrees with George's report for slope and width, but it is not in line for reconstruction. ADA is not an exception to a tree hearing. An imminent threat can be an exception, but that only applies to roadways, not sidewalks. Lisa noted that in addition to the tree, there are also trip hazards. Tom said repairs can be done, but not a total rebuild. Lisa noted that the bus stop is not accessible. Anyone can put in for a tree hearing.

L. Connalunga Park & River Path – John

This is near the ice rink and it is a DCR property. John described the issue and is unsure who is involved. DPW may be an interface for the city. There is a gap that has not been filled in that we believe is on DCR property. Tom will reach out to his connections at DCR to get more information.

Kim suggested a collaborative Zoom meeting with DPW and people at Perkins to talk about audible signals for Watertown Square. Kim will send Tom the locations that Cindy and Kim are most concerned about.

4. Chairs Report

G. Amended Vote on Watertown Free Public Library Disability ASL Interpreter Expense Kim & Jay

The library has said there were interpreters both nights, so we need to officially amend our amount. Our vote last time was sufficient.

K. Automatic Doors for Watertown's New High School – Kim & Jay

Automatic doors are not code, this is a new state-of-the-art building, why can't we have automatic doors? Rachel will reach out to Christy Murphy to ask and get more details.

5. Acceptance of Minutes: November 19, 2025 – Discussion/Vote – Rachel & Jay

John motions to accept, Naomi seconds. Minutes accepted, 8-0.

6. Committee Reports

B. Special Education Update – Rachel

Rachel reported the evaluation of Student Services has still yet to be completed and we are hopeful to have it in January. In the meantime, Kathy Desmarais, Director of Students Services, shared a couple findings from the state. We had a "needs improvement" designation from the state, as well as some other weak areas. Some of the issues are meeting timelines. Some are about amount of time students with disabilities spend in inclusion settings (should be higher). Another finding is about providing materials to parents in the language that they speak. Also our findings of fault from the state Problem Resolution Service has been high this year. It was especially interesting to see that we have a very high number of students who are placed out of district and a low student-staff ratio in district. Rachel concluded that we are spending money and not meeting standards, so it is likely not a problem that can be solved by money. There will be a Special Education Strategy Commission meeting in the beginning of January 2026, and Rachel will be serving on this commission.

Kim suggested we have Kathy Desmarais come speak to us at some point in the spring.

C. Safety and Access – Kim

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

This project will happen in the springtime.

9. New Business

Cindy said it is time to talk about residential snow removal. Last winter was supposed to be a "practice" winter. Jay said that an exemption process has been created and an announcement will be coming soon. This year, properties will be given a warning before being fined. 3-1-1 will keep track of all exempted property.

10. Adjourn

11. Next meeting – January 21, 2026 at 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM – Via Zoom

Kim will not be here for medical reasons. John will run the meeting. At the point, we can decide if we are meeting in February.

