

Watertown Commission on Disability

April 15, 2026

In attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, George Donahue, Naomi Ridge, Rachel Kay, Carol Menton, Cindy Wentz, Megan O'Halloran, Lisa Feltner, Tyler Cote, Stefanie (CART), Will Twombly (Community Fridge), Nancy Dutton (Community Fridge)

1. Nancy Dutton & Will Twombly, Watertown Community Fridge

Started Community Fridge from the pandemic. Moved to the parking lot behind Watertown Free Public Library in fall 2025, which is a great location. It includes a fridge that was donated and a shed that was built for a pantry (non-perishable foods). Start up money was from First Parish, and Watertown Community Foundation has been a good supporter. They also get money from individuals via Venmo. CoD has donated. They got \$60,000 from ARPA funding that needs to be used by the end of the year. Money is used for food that shoppers get and repairs for the fridge. The group coordinates via Signal, which is helpful for last-minute pick ups of food.

There is a great need for the fridge due to a lot of food insecurity in the area. The motto is "Give what you can, take what you need." There is a lot of community support, with people bringing food as they can. Monetary donations are turned into gift cards for local grocery stores. Volunteers use the gift cards to buy food and bring to the fridge. Our fridge connects with rescued food organizations in Cambridge to get food from stores that is edible but past its prime. A lot of fresh food arrives this way, often about twice a week. Will had about 500 pounds of food in the fridge recently and 90% of it was gone within an hour. They also buy food from CSAs. Farmer Tim from the Watertown Farmers Market reserves food for the fridge and for the food pantry. They also get food from FoodLinks once a week. They also get food from the schools that was coordinated by a third grader at the Lowell School to collect and deliver uneaten food. Despite all the food, the fridge and pantry are often empty.

Will and Nancy want ideas of how to make the fridge more accessible. Right now it is difficult to access all the food offered for a person in a wheelchair. Naomi has visited. The sliding door was great and easy to use. The floor is up six or eight inches up, so Naomi could only reach things on the door and not in the fridge itself, but she also has this problem with her fridge. She recommended a grabber stick. Naomi cannot see or reach anything in a freezer. She was able to see with her power chair with lift, but this would not be possible for the average wheelchair user. That 6-8 inch step is a barrier, but probably needed to avoid water damage etc. George agreed with Naomi. He also noted it was hard to get to the food on the shelves since it is hard to get in. Maybe more space before the shelves could work, but a grabber would help a lot. Naomi noted that someone was parked in the accessible parking spots to put food in the fridge. A sign on the fridge telling people not to park there may be helpful.

Kim asked if someone who is blind/low vision needed the pantry and fridge, they could get in, but could not see what is there. Could you add an accessibility statement on your website? You could provide a phone or email to schedule a volunteer to help people with accessibility. We could share that statement with the disability community. Naomi noted this is hard since people are queuing up for food, so there may or may not be food for that time. Nancy noted since there are certain delivery times so they could arrange around that. People in the community know these times. Cindy asked if a person with a

disability could create a shopping list and a volunteer could gather and possibly deliver. Kim offered to connect Nancy and the director of food service at Perkins, which could be another food source.

Will loves the grabber idea, but was afraid it would disappear quickly. People perceive it as being offered for free. Will also said they were thinking of building a lower addition to the shed with lower doors and sliding shelves.

Nancy confirmed they are staying at the library.

Kim asked about the non-perishables. Nancy said personal items are very much in demand since those are not covered by SNAP. Will added that diapers are also a need.

2. Chair's Report -- Kim

A. Update on Waverly-Belmont Street Intersection from Wayne Chouinard – Kim

There is still no audible signal. Tyler will send this information to Belmont since it is owned by Belmont, but on the Watertown side.. Watertown and Belmont need to figure out who is responsible.

B. ADA Signage as Recommended by the KMA Report Update – Tyler Cote

We are now able to apply for a lot of funding. Also the CIP in next year's budget has \$200K for ADA improvements as recommended by KMA. The decision of which projects to put forward for grants will be decided at the beginning of May. Kim noted that having people know which is the accessible side of the building of City Hall is somewhat urgent, even if just a laminated sign for now.

C. Update on Skip the Stuff Ordinance Amendment – Lisa

Chair and staff will come to the CoD to share training materials and signs. Ideally they would like to come in May. It will become effective six months from yesterday. Sustainability planner Laurel Schwab would be the person to invite.

D. Update on Arsenal Street Trees & Sidewalk Issue – Lisa

No update. Lisa is monitoring.

E. Arsenal Park Amphitheater Path Surface (on hold for spring) – Tyler

On hold for spring. John noted there was a dumpster there. Tyler said that Tom Brady went to a Conservation Commission Meeting and they gave clearance for removing the stone and replacing with crushed stone. Tom does not have a timeline. Tyler will report out. We all hope it will be done by the August 8 Arts Market.

F. Walker Pond Accessibility Recommendations – John

Emily Izzo (District D councilor) is monitoring the project. Tyler has worked on this project. Three community meetings on the design and received 700 survey responses. They also spoke to the JCDS students about the project. There is a conceptual design. Tyler will stay involved or encourage the next ADA coordinator to be involved. Tyler suggested inviting Michelle Moon to a meeting.

H. Follow-up Path Issue Behind Halfway Café (waiting for feedback from Tom Brady) –Tyler

Still waiting on Tom Brady given the Cambridge Aqueduct business. There is going to be historical plaque put there on Sunday April 19. But it won't be paved by then. Even crushed gravel would be an improvement. Naomi noted there are big divets from water damage so crushed gravel might not be sufficient.

Side note: Tyler is making a list of historical markers in Watertown. Then we can think about how to make them more accessible. Lisa noted that there is a list from the Historical Society at the library. Shepherd Ferguson has been working with them.

<https://www.watertownlib.org/503/Historical-Markers>

I. DPW Trash/Recycling Disability Sticker (waiting for feedback from Tom Brady) – Tyler

Tyler spoke with Matthew (recycling in DPW). Matthew is happy with the addition and will communicate with Republic. Matthew was also concern with how to place the bins. There are issues if something is placed too close to the bins. Thus, there may be some education for those receiving the stickers. Kim and Brian would be happy to review any guidance.

K. Connalunga Park & River Path (waiting for feedback from Tom Brady) – Tyler

DCR issue.

L. Discussion on Official ADA Accommodation Requests Received: Process for Tracking, Reporting Out to WCOD – Tyler

Tyler will connect with Laura (3-1-1) and Jenna (Human Services Director) to develop a clear tracking system to turn into a report.

M. WCOD Outreach Activities & Funding Projects – Kim

We will likely have a presentation from Watertown Recreation in June, which could become a partnership.

N. Accessible Pedestrian Signals: RRFB (rectangular rapid flashing beacons) and PHBs (pedestrian hybrid beacons) – Kim

The signal across from the library (in front of what used to be the post office). Is it possible to have an audible signal? Naomi noted that parents have asked for a similar signal at Lexington and Bemis since they no longer have a crossing guard. Kim will do some research on this.

3. Acceptance of Minutes for the March Meeting – Discussion/Vote – Rachel

Motion to accept by Cindy, second by John. Vote passes 9-0.

4. Treasurer's Report – Tyler

We have \$163,088.09. There have been some fines coming in. There are few encumbrances. We should have discussions on what to do with this money. Recreation will have a proposal. Report is accepted 9-0.

5. Committee Reports – Ongoing Business

A. Plans Review – John

None

B. Special Education Update – Rachel

None. Report was sent. We would like to have the SPED director here in the fall.

C. Safety and Access – Kim

Detectable Warnings at Lexington & Main Streets (On hold until spring for Mass Highway – Kim

Kim will get an update.

Whites Avenue Pavement Cracks

Bike path behind the mall

We had talked about this, but the mall was being re-done, but now it is not, so we should raise this again, since it is impossible to get from the path to Target and the stores.

6. New Business

Lisa formally asked for a plan on digital accessibility. This came from the Visitors Guide. Tyler will talk with Jenna about this. He will reach out to some of us with questions. Kim mentioned she can't read the monthly newsletters from the senior center (but she can read the weekly ones). Tyler will be responding to Lisa's request.

7. Adjourn

Next meeting – May 20, 2026 at 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM – Via Zoom