

Watertown Commission on Disability

May 20, 2026, 7 pm on Zoom

In attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, George Donahue, Rachel Kay, Carol Menton, Lisa Feltner, Cindy Wentz, Megan O'Halloran, Tyler Cote, Tracy(CART), Laurel Schwab (Watertown Sustainability Manager), Irene Pistoftzian (guest), Zachary Bourque (guest)

Absent: Naomi Ridge

1. Call to Order

2. Audience Issues (takes priority over regular business)

None

3. Guest Speaker: Skip the Stuff Training/Outreach Materials: Laurel Schwab, Watertown Sustainability Manager

Laurel and team are working on implementation for Skip the Stuff, the ordinance which passed in April. The ordinance requires restaurants to no longer automatically include single-use products in take out and delivery. There is a six-month education period (until October this year). After November, outreach materials will be given to new restaurants. The health department will also provide reminders/new materials during twice-annual reviews. In this six-month period, all restaurants will receive direct outreach from city staff. We are using the same branding as Newton. There will be specific instructions for communicating with low-vision/blind customers.

Megan asked about online ordering. Laurel explained there would be an option for getting or not getting different materials on the online ordering platform.

Materials can be translated into other languages as restaurants feel necessary.

Laurel shared some of the materials they have developed. Current materials are generic and will be edited to match the ordinance (for example, we allow giving napkins). They will also be shared with restaurant staff to see what they will find helpful. Some of the FAQs specifically address how restaurant staff can help customers with disabilities. Tyler will share the drafts with members of the Commission to review later.

Lisa asked if we have grants for restaurants to make their store more accessible. Kim suggested they could add that information to their FAQ.

4. Chair's Report -- Kim

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

Kim saw there are detectable warnings on the curb on the Belmont side, but not the Watertown side. Kim, Tyler, and Tom Brady will strategize. This is Belmont's responsibility.

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

Tyler has investigated grants and they may want to break the grants into smaller grants. Signage around City Hall should be do-able without grant funding. Tyler will continue to remind public buildings and DPW to get done. The priorities for proposals are the entryway and first floor of Watertown City Hall, including re-doing the front stairs, which are falling apart, improving the foyer/breezeway and adding electric doors (which are currently very heavy), and also improving the grand staircase. Tyler expects we can do more than this from the KMA report in the next year. Tyler would like to include a letter of recommendation from the CoD when we apply for grants.

C. Update on Arsenal Street Trees & Sidewalk Issue – Tyler & Lisa

They are currently trimming the trees, but that does not help with the sidewalks. No current updates beyond that.

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

Still waiting.

E. Accessible Entrances at City Hall – Tyler

Covered in B.

F. Sons of Italy ADA Accessibility Complaint – Tyler & John

They do not have a wheelchair accessible entrance. John and George visited the site. John thinks this came up before. Kim noted that they have publicly available events in their spaces. Kim would like the city attorneys to write a letter to the Sons of Italy with the issues. George noted that a flyer for a public event could make note that the entrance/restrooms are not handicapped accessible, but the event for this particular event said no such thing.

Zachary Bourque (Waltham) is the person who reported this issue, as he could not get his grandmother into an event since she had a wheelchair. The members of Sons of Italy offered to carry her, which was not comfortable, and then they mentioned the inaccessible bathrooms. Also they had to fight to get their tickets refunded (they have not yet received the funding). He expects that others have had this issue and not reported it. He also asked if there is funding to give to the Sons of Italy to make the building more accessible. Kim said that would be part of our research, given that building renovations are expensive.

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

This was related to the Cambridge aqueduct issue. Tyler walked this path with the city manager. Both the City Manager and Tom Brady want to pave it.

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

Tyler sent out the label/symbol. We did a final approval and now it will move on.

I. Automatic Doors for Watertown's New High School – Kim

This was in the plan. No additional details now. KMA was also doing a check-in with the high school. Tyler will get that confirmation. Lisa expects a public open house in late June.

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

This is DCR property and Tom was going to connect with them about the path connections. There will need to be pressure for them to raise this on their priority list. Kim and John will work on a letter from CoD to DCR.

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

Tyler has worked on this with Jenna/Human Services. Along with Stephanie Venizelos, they plan to build a tracking system that hides personal identifiable information while including necessary details. What would be most helpful for us and what frequency? Rachel suggested getting location data, issues whether or not they need to come to us, and maybe quarterly. John noted this is similar to 3-1-1 tracking (P). How is this different from our current tracking? Kim is tracking issues that come to the Commission that have not yet been resolved, so we don't lose them. Kim wanted to know types of issues, locations with repeated complaints. Kim noted that having tracking within the city government is important for historical record keeping. These are issues going directly to the ADA coordinator. John noted that this should be a two-way street where we give them information as well. Tyler noted that 3-1-1 are smaller issues as opposed to full building issues (eg Sons of Italy).

L. WCOD Outreach Activities & Funding Projects – Kim

Someone and Lauren Hagerty (recreation) will be speaking at our July meeting about accessible outdoor activities with a funding request.

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

We will postpone until the next meeting, especially around crossing in front of the library.

N. Lt. Paul Sullivan Playground Accessibility Features – Tyler

Tyler met with Michelle Moon, who will join a future meeting. They presented a design update to the city council. A lot of the features will be lower to allow access. There will be sides of picnic table that can be approachable with a wheelchair. Pathways should be crushed stone dust or paved so ADA accessible. The play features include specific heights required in ADA regulations.

O. Curb Cut on Sidewalk at Watertown Mall (550 Arsenal Street) – Tyler & John

We will discuss at the next meeting. John wondered if this is an area anyone wants to go to? Rachel noted she did that to cut through the mall to go to Arsenal Yards. Lisa noted this would be great for walkers and bikers who want to get to Target from the path. Lisa spoke to Hannah in Zoning who said it would be helpful to hear from the Commission on this since they are working with developers. They are also talk about adding sculptures. John noted that there is a considerable change in grade that makes it

not simple. We could go back to the plan from Alexandria, which would include a looping ramp. John, George, and Naomi can look and make a recommendation to submit to the Zoning Board.

P. 311 Accessibility Sub-Categories for Tracking - Tyler

Kim suggested Laura come back in June. Tyler also wants us to discuss the snow/ice ordinance and have a member join them to discuss.

5. Acceptance of Minutes for the April Meeting – Discussion/Vote – Rachel

Minutes will be corrected to include that Lisa attended. With that correction, John moved to accept and Megan seconded. Minutes accepted 8-0.

6. Treasurer’s Report – Tyler

Available balance: \$165,961. There have been fines coming in and some CART fees paid. \$2705.28 was paid for CART for the Unity Breakfast (it was delayed). John moved to accept treasurer’s report and George second. Report accepted 8-0.

7. Committee Reports – Ongoing Business

A. Plans Review – John

There will be updates next month.

B. Special Education Update – Rachel

Watertown has a “Needs Assistance” finding from the state for the second year in a row. Also Kathy Desmarais, Director of Student Services, is retiring June 2027. Kim wants to get her to a meeting in June or August to hear about the plans to improve.

C. Safety and Access – Kim

No updates.

8. New Business

Lisa noted that audible signals and detectable warnings at Watertown Square are out again.

Open House for Watertown Square was tonight. Erika and Tyler are working on accessible presentation of options. Kim, Cindy, and Tyler will discuss what would be most helpful.

Digital accessibility is still being examined by the city. Tyler will be working on this with the new website manager (hired, yet to start). Watertown is in okay shape, but we will still make improvements.

The City is hosting a Board and Commission celebration night on Thursday June 18 starting at 6 pm. RSVP if you would like to attend.

9. Adjourn Next meeting – June 17, 2026 at 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM – Via Zoom