

Watertown Commission on Disability

June 17, 2026, 7 pm on Zoom

In attendance: Kim Charlson, John Hawes, Rachel Kay, Carol Menton, Lisa Feltner, Naomi Ridge, Cindy Wentz, Tyler Cote, Stefanie (CART), Michelle Moon (Watertown Senior Planner for Open Space in the Planning Department for the City)

Absent: George Donahue, Megan O'Halloran

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

2. Guest Speaker: Michelle Moon, Watertown Senior Planner for Open Space, Community Design Team, Department of Community Development and Planning.

Michelle has been here for a couple years. She previously worked in Boston. Michelle and Tyler have been working on getting more community involvement. Recently she has done a lot of engagement around Walker Pond to hear different visions for the space.

Kim asked about the redesign of Lt Paul Sullivan Prk and accessibility features. Michelle noted this is the next park to go under construction. There are certain standards to be met for playground with features for people with and without disabilities. She specifically talked about bucket swings. There are also movable tiles (example tic tac toe or counting features). There are binoculars at some of the parks. There are some spinning features that a wheelchair can go on. There are also different types of climbing structures, including ramps. Kim invited Michelle to visit the playground at Perkins.

Lisa asked Michelle when in the process is most helpful for accessibility feedback. Michelle mentioned community meetings. The first meeting is usually an open meeting where big ideas can be shared. The second meeting usually presents a couple options at which point feedback is used to amend them. These are the most important times. There are still opportunities to weigh in on Walker Pond, which will have an accessible path, but the playground is just being developed.

Kim discussed how the braille trail was developed.

Michelle also said that seating and tables are wheelchair accessible and have a variety for different types of needs at the same table.

Naomi asked about wheelchair accessible raised beds in community gardens. Michelle said there are some already developed at Arsenal Park and there will be some at Walker Ponds. Naomi noted there were some issues with the path to the community gardens at Arsenal. Naomi said raised beds are still tricky unless she can get her knees under them. Michelle encouraged us to send pictures of different park amenities that would be good to add. Or features that do not work so we don't repeat them.

Lisa mentioned that accessible parking is sometimes an issue that we need to think about.

3. Chair's Report – Kim

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

Tyler reached out to set up an informal meeting with him and John, but has not had success. They are closed during the day and open in evenings, generally. This week, Tyler got a different contact via our building inspector. If this does not work, Tyler will contact Dan Brothers who runs our skating rink, since he is in touch with them regularly about the parking lot.

John noted that the venue is private so is not required to abide by all regulations, but they rent the space, so should be accessible. John's wife is on the Watertown Community Foundation Board, and she will reach out to them as well, since they use the building for events. The banquet floor is above street level and there is no elevator.

Tyler and John will connect next week to strategize for next steps.

b. Update on Waverly-Belmont Street Intersection from Wayne Chouinard – Kim/Tyler

Tyler has spoken to Tom Brady at DPW. This involves the audible crossing signal. Belmont said they would "put it on their plan" but what does that mean? There is no timeline yet. Tyler can share the name of Wayne Chouinard in Belmont with Tom Brady.

c. Accessible Entrances & ADA Signage as Recommended by the KMA Report – Tyler

The signage to the powered accessible door needs updating. Tyler is making a map. DPW has a device that prints sign. Tyler will give instructions to Tom and then, they should be able to print those and hang them by the next meeting. He hopes this will be done before our next meeting.

Tyler found a braille label maker that they can use. Kim expressed concerns since it may or may not be correct, given wrong words, upside down, etc. The intention is good, but it needs to be done correctly.

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

Last month, we heard they were trimming back the trees. Tom is willing to call for a tree hearing. But where is this? Lisa was told there is a plan, but no one has seen it. There is another issue with a street tree blocking the driveway of a family trying to expand their driveway for accessibility, but then staff changed and they were told they had to have a tree hearing, despite having a permit. There is a gap between planning/zoning/DPW/tree warden. Lisa believes state law allows for tree removal when the tree is in the public way (like a sidewalk), without a tree hearing. But Tom Brady disagrees. No one wants to make the call. The council should make a policy about this with the staff. Why are we pruning trees that are blocking the sidewalk?

Naomi asked if the city attorney should weigh in on this. Mark Sideris is talking to the attorney, but it's unclear which committee it goes to (Public Works? Public Safety?). There would need to be a referral for new business. John noted that this area has already been "improved." The sidewalk on the other side of the street is perfectly level. Lisa noted there are inconsistent applications of accessible sidewalks throughout the city.

Lisa suggested that the Commission can make a request to the Council to create a policy about removing public shade trees for accessibility. Kim and Lisa will work on this. Tyler will also connect with DPW.

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

We are waiting on DPW to take action. We had hoped it would be done by spring. They have run into some sickness with limited staff. They hope to do it this summer.

f. MOD Grant Letter of Support & Process – Tyler

We submitted three grant projects totaling \$250,000. These were about improving all entryways to City Hall, stairwells, adding power doors. Braille for signage was also written into the proposal. This is a priority for future projects as well. We will not hear until December about awards. There are also ADA upgrades in this year's budget.

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

Steve Magoon is still working (post-retirement) and this is one of his projects. Steve had a call with Cambridge, but we have gotten no response since then. Steve will follow up this week. It seems like Cambridge is okay with this, but we need an official signature.

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

We need to figure out implementation. Matt Bacon from DPW will communicate with Republic drivers. Jenna and Stephanie will work on publicity about this. The Commission may want to weigh in on the educational materials around these stickers.

i. Mis-Positioned Poles & Automatic Doors at Watertown High School Update – Kim

Rachel brought the issue of the poles in the middle of sidewalks. The pole was planned to be removed, but had not happened yet. There were a few utility companies with things on that poles, and they are moving those wires. By the time the sidewalk is open to the public, it will be gone. Lisa confirmed that it has not yet been removed.

Tyler confirmed the automatic doors will be happening. Also all electrical closets have rubber-coated door handles to indicate they are utility closets.

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

This is still being worked on. Tyler is moving from Community Engagement Specialist to Director of Communication, so has not followed up. Stephanie will be joining us in July and will be engaging in between-meeting conversations. She will be more involved in August.

Jenna and Stephanie will be determining how to proceed with the tracking.

k. WCOD Outreach Activities & Funding Projects – Kim

July will have speakers from Watertown Recreation, Lauren Haggerty and All Out Adventures, Karen Foster. They are working on an accessible bicycling event for the city. This will include a funding request.

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

This is the signal in front of the library. Can someone take some photographs of this from both sides of the street for Kim to send to her accessibility person to make a recommendation? Right now there is no auditory signal. Naomi had concerns that people with disabilities will hear the signal and cross, but the traffic may not stop. John noted there are a lot of these fixtures around and they are standard. Lisa has heard that bicyclists want there not to be so long a stop.

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

This will probably have to wait for the new owners.

m. 311 Accessibility Sub-Categories for Tracking – Tyler

Tyler will invite Laura to our September meeting.

4. Acceptance of Minutes for the May Meeting - Discussion/Vote – Rachel

Cindy and Lisa and Kim will work on a list of where audible signals are needed to make priority recommendations. For example, the CVS light at Watertown Square.

Rachel will correct under New Business that audible signals and detectable warnings in Watertown Square.

John moves to accept with that correction, Cindy seconds. Motion passes 6-0 with 1 abstention.

5. Treasurer's Report – Tyler

There is an available balance of \$172,395.77 after encumbrances. Since our last meeting there have been about \$7000 worth of fines. We have paid for closed captioning, cart, and ASL interpreters.

Cindy motions to accept the minutes, Naomi seconds. Report is accepted 7-0.

6. Committee Reports – Ongoing Business

a. Plans Review – John

There are storage facilities on Clarendon Street near Solomon's Pond. It appears to be in compliance. It is a simple project.

b. Special Education Update – Rachel

Monday June 22 is a School Committee meeting where the Special Education Improvement Plan will be presented. She will share the agenda and the plan document.

c. Safety and Access – Kim

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

Naomi said we should also add Waverly and Main to this request since it is also Mass Highway.

7. Adjourn

Next meeting – July 15, 2026 at 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM – Via Zoom