

Watertown Commission on Disability

149 Main St. Watertown, MA. 02472

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 16th, 2022

The meeting was held by Zoom online and called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Kim Charlson, Chair.

ROLL CALL- Kim Charlson, Chair; Lisa Feltner, Town Councilor; John Hawes; Carol Menton; Megan O'Halloran; Naomi Ridge; Gayle Shattuck, Town Personnel Director and ADA Coordinator; and Carol Wilson-Braun. Absent- Elan Rohde.

Guests- Carey Conkey from the library; Elizabeth Helfer from Planning; Rachel Kay, resident; and Michael Lara, Executive Director of Watertown Housing Authority.

GUEST SPEAKERS-

- 1) Carey Conkey, of WPL spoke of a planned Pride Extravaganza on June 4th, celebrating diversity, equity and community. Planned by the library and the city, it will run from 11-4 at Saltonstall Park and include a mini-parade, arts and crafts and entertainment. It has the support of diversity committees in the elementary schools, gay/straight alliances, and Public Arts and Culture. Carey is requesting help funding 2 ASL interpreters for the 5-hour event. They would also like to hand out Braille programs for 50 people. Because of this addition, they are requesting more than \$600. Kim told her that the Commission would formally vote next month, but, in anticipation of that money, she should book the ASL interpreters now. Carol M will help her through that process. Kim will assist in procuring the Braille programs.
- 2) Liz Helfer is the Public Arts and Culture Planner for Watertown Planning since November. She gave a presentation about her proposed project of installing or updating 102 signs at City Hall to improve accessibility. Her aim is to bring the signage into ADA compliance, but also to make City Hall more welcoming for non-native English speakers and other newcomers. She is looking at Braille, handicapped accessible, audio, even digital interactive signs, and also locations, materials (metal/plastic). The price range could be from \$20-40 thousand, but hopefully about \$25 thousand. Input from Commission members included: Carol M suggested an ASL video in a kiosk and offered to connect Liz with the ADA coordinator. Kim suggested she talk to Vispero, a business involved with assistive technology for speech. Lisa spoke of her concern for language consistency (i.e. chamber vs room). Liz said she would make sure signs matched what places are called. Kim recommended breaking the project into yearly phases for funding. She said that the ADA cannot be expected to cover all costs, because only part of the project concerns ADA compliance. She said we would be able to help a little. John recommended hiring a graphic firm with design expertise, and suggested involving the Council and City Manager for support, for some funding, publicity and announcements. Maybe private money is available in Watertown. He also suggested checking with the elementary schools, which were recently totally renovated. They all had the same architect. Liz said she has talked with Chris at IT. Carol and Kim will give Liz more resources.

- 3) Michael Lara spoke about the Watertown Housing Authority project at 103 Nichols Ave. The WHA is independent of the city. They finally got the OK to build on the land, which the city has had since 1982 for this purpose (special needs housing). The 2 story house will be for low-income disabled people and will be 2 separate units, with kitchens, bathrooms and common areas on both floors, and the downstairs would be accessible with 3 bedrooms, and 4 bedrooms on the 2nd floor with stairs access. There would be 24/7 staffing for both floors. The area is zoned for one-family houses, but they are talking to the Planning Dept about getting a variance under the Dover Amendment (covers educational component of group homes). The project will cost \$2 million. They are working for funding from state. Public non-profits have payments in lieu of taxes. They are working with Beaverbrook, DDW and CPC, and hope to start construction in the fall of '23. He is looking for backing from WCOD. John expressed concern about the lack of accessibility for the 2nd floor, and Michael cited cost constraints. Kim said it was important to have subsidized housing for disabled people in urban areas, and asked Michael to keep us posted. We can write a letter of support.

CHAIR'S REPORT-

- 1) The Delta at Watertown Square- Naomi said there are no improvements yet. Kim asked Gayle to resend photos and get an update from DPW.
- 2) How Dog Park- no updates.
- 3) Bike path behind the Library- No progress yet. Kim said the priority was the bike path, then the Delta and then the dog park. John said that the parking lot behind the library needs work, and will speak with Planning.
- 4) Motion to give donation to Bookmobile Fund- Following up on discussion in January, it was moved, seconded and VOTED unanimously by roll call to donate \$500 to the library bookmobile fund in honor of the retired head of the library. Gayle will contact library.
- 5) Kim announced that Carol M and Megan have been successfully reappointed to new terms.
- 6) Kim said that the Commission would be able to meet via Zoom at least through July, by decree of the governor.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES- It was moved, seconded and VOTED unanimously by roll call to accept the minutes from the January meeting. Copies of the minutes may be requested from the Town Clerk's Office.

TREASURER'S REPORT- It was moved, seconded and VOTED unanimously by roll call to accept the Treasurer's Report for January. Copies of the Treasurer's report may be requested from the town's ADA Coordinator in the Personnel Office.

COMMITTEE REPORTS-

- 1) Planning- John reviewed a life science building plan at 103 Manley Way, which was fine. Kim mentioned she had gotten an inquiry about a variance for a child care center, but no info yet.
- 2) Special Ed- Naomi announced an annual conference for the Federation for Children with Special Needs (see link). She also reported that the week of March 28th the Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education was going to be conducting a routine assessment of the special education

programs, with observations and interviews with families. It's called the "Tiered Focused Monitoring" and is done by DESE every 3 years. The links are as follows:

Federation for Children with Special Needs conference: <https://fcsn.org/visions-of-community-conference/>

Tiered Focused Monitoring Info: <https://www.smores.com/g9vc4-tiered-focused-monitoring>

- 3) Safety and Access- Kim said there was nothing new. Lisa mentioned complaints about the conditions of the sidewalks on Riverside, near Perkins. She is looking into state funding for infrastructure improvements for roads and sidewalks.

NEW BUSINESS-

John looked at accessible parking at Arsenal Yards, which could be improved. He wrote a follow-up memo, which Gayle sent to Steve Magoon. Steve said if it involves code requirements, then it should be shared with the property owner, and said Gideon would follow up. John will check with Gideon. John also expressed concern about the lack of a sidewalk of the south side of Arsenal St. at the east end where there is construction going on.

Lisa mentioned questions about follow up concerning Watertown Mall. There is a landscape architect involved, which is good. She was wondering about accessible parking. On a different topic, she also mentioned improving technology and accessibility for council meetings, and has been talking with Chris McClure.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

The next meeting of WCOD will take place via Zoom at 7 p.m. on Wed, April 20th, 2022.