

**Watertown Commission on Disability
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 18, 2011
7:00PM - 9:15PM**

The meeting was called to order by Chair George Donahue. Present were: George Donahue, Kim Charlson, Ann Doughty, Alex Liazos, Judith Herzberg, Carol Wilson-Braun and Carol Menton. Stephen Corbett and Gayle Shattuck were at the Town Council meeting.

Guests included: Pete Centola, Watertown recreation department who made a presentation to the WCOD. He explained that Gayle Shattuck asked him if he would be interested in presenting to the WCOD, and he jumped at the opportunity. He is trying to reach out to all constituencies to determine their needs. He has been part-time for the recreation department since 1976, and he went full-time in December 2009.

Handouts were distributed. He outlined what is being done by Watertown now with the recreation department. Watertown does partner with Belmont sport, a cooperative specialized recreational program with the town of Belmont. Watertown and Belmont both support the program from the Recreation Department budget.

Belmont Sport offers programming for adults with special needs. It's been a terrific program. They do a variety of programming, bingo night, fundraisers, and socials. They're planning a golf tournament that we're going to get involved in this year, and hopefully we will change the name to Belmont Watertown Sport. Sue Weiner directs the Belmont sport program, and has done a terrific job.

The Recreation Department has been working to improve communication with citizens by using the website more effectively. What they have done was to identify 9 program areas where they could create email lists.

The Recreation Department is involved in some major facility improvement for the town. People are very excited about it, and some are still a little bit concerned. The primary project will be renovation of Victory Field, and it will be accessible. There's going to be a new entry way for access for emergency vehicles as well as the DPW. In the corner, the entry way is going to be redone. There's going to be some new accessible parking, and the entry way is going to be accessible. The visitors stand next to the cannon will be removed. There will be accessible elevated stands behind the back stop for about 380 people.

Pete Centola's number at the Recreation Department is 617-972-6495. Pete really wants this initiative to be a working collaborative relationship, and he needs WCOD assistance. He asks that we keep on pushing the buttons to make sure that we both do our part to have great programming for everybody.

George asked if the plan is to have accessible portable restrooms in town parks. Pete explained that it was being looked at, but they were priced out and to have the accessible bathroom, the weight capacity is less; the waste capacity is less; and the price is three times higher.

Website Update: George reported that he has done the updates for the dining guide online. There are still some restaurants to be checked out. The intern will take all the paperwork from all the surveys and update the text document, then send it back to Kim to determine where we want to go from there as far as printing print and Braille copies.

George will be working on running some system reports to find out how much spam or bad email is coming through the website. He will do some research and report further at the next meeting.

George has asked Partners for Youth with Disabilities to attend a future meeting and talk about some of the programs they have to offer young adults with disabilities in Watertown. They will be interested in funding but if WCOD considers funding we would want to earmark it for young adults or kids with disabilities in Watertown.

Minutes: The March minutes were tabled until the next meeting as Fred is still working on finalizing them with assistance from Carol, as he was chairing the meeting, he didn't take detailed minutes. Carol will check her transcript from the CART reporter to help finalize the minutes.

The April minutes were also tabled to allow members more time to read them.

Treasurer's Report: Gayle sent out the report earlier in the day. Not all members had a chance to read it, so George reviewed it. On March 31, WCOD received \$4,417.36 in fines and interest. Expenses were not clear, so George will ask Gayle to clarify with more detail at the next meeting.

Art Exhibit Update: Ann reported that she finished the invitation, saying, "I've sent it out to several people; BCIL, other major places that will be distributing it".

Judith indicated she has a friend that will do a press release for us. That's all she does is press releases. Ann indicated that she would like to learn how to do releases with someone's assistance. Ann and Judith will work together on the release with assistance from Judith's friend who does press releases professionally. They will all work with Gayle.

A break was taken at 8:00 PM for CART reporter and interpreters. The meeting resumed at 8:10 PM.

The next speaker was Representative Jonathan Hecht, who represents the 29th Middlesex district in the great and general court, Watertown and west Cambridge. Hecht was asked to come to talk about a bill that has been filed having to do with the use of the funds that commissions on disabilities receive from handicap parking violations. This is a bill that has been filed twice by the same representative, Bruce Ayers who represents Quincy.

Hecht felt judging from what happened last year with this bill and from the lack of energy behind this bill in the last session, it's probably not going to go anywhere in this session either. Bruce is the only sponsor of the bill. The bill number is H2883 and it has been assigned to the committee on municipalities and regional government but no hearing date has been set.

Carol expressed a personal "Thank You" to Representative Hecht for co-sponsoring the hearing aid bill. May 17 was hearing loss awareness day and it was standing room only at the State House. We appreciate Hecht co-sponsoring the legislation.

Hecht indicated he was at the hearing before the committee for children, families and persons with disabilities on the bill. The advocates for the bill did a fantastic job getting people to testify and attend. The legislation would mandate insurance coverage for hearing aids for children. And the people who were there to speak in favor of the bill made a very, very persuasive case that we have this wonderful program of newborn screening for hearing loss in Massachusetts, which identifies children who are born with some degree of hearing loss. But then we don't have a program to make the hearing aids available to children so that they don't encounter any developmental issues that are the result of their hearing loss. The bill would create a new mandate that would require that all the private insurers cover, not all of the costs, but \$2,000 within a three-year period. Every three years, there would be \$2,000 of coverage, which is not enough. Often times these hearing aids can cost up to \$3,000, and that's for one. If you've got a child who's got hearing loss in both ears, the family is potentially looking at \$5,000 or \$6,000 every few years, because as the kids grow and there's a need for different or larger hearing aids they have to get them replaced.

Hecht also asked if he could talk about a bill he filed relating to the availability of handicap parking in cities and towns. He received a call from a constituent in Cambridge who was having trouble finding accessible street parking when he went to Somerville.

In talking to Jeff Dougan about this problem, we started thinking about the issue somewhat more broadly. Jeff reported that at the MOD office, accessible parking issues are among the most common complaints that he receives. Hecht drafted and filed a bill with Jeff's input that would require that cities and towns make no less than 5% of their on-street parking accessible parking. The bill is assigned to

the municipalities committee, and Hecht hopes to hear from WCOD as to how this issue can be presented to garner support. The bill number is H2322.

Next, the WCOD heard from Terese Hammerle, a Watertown resident, who is a member of Watertown gardens. They are promoting the establishment of a community garden network. The first project they are working on is at Nichols Avenue. There's a plot of land on Nichols' Avenue owned by Watertown Housing Authority that is being turned into a community garden. The housing authority tenants will have hopefully a strong presence there in terms of taking the plots, and then the remaining plots will be opened up to the community.

They would like to install some raised beds that would accommodate the reach length of somebody in a wheelchair, and some paving. So the least expensive paving would be asphalt, although it's not as esthetically pleasing as pavers. Watertown Garden is hoping that their idea is something that the WCOD would be willing to support financially.

They have estimates that have come in at around \$6,000 for the pathway and one bed.

Consensus of the WCOD was that for funding for the project, Watertown Garden will have to be more specific as to what the money would be used for. Concern was expressed that the project is moving forward with a startup this summer. That doesn't give too much time to hear a budget and authorize any funding.

Kim stated that this is the kind of proposal that this commission would be very interested in, because it's absolutely a great community project, and it would be promoting accessibility as part of that project. The guidance to Watertown Garden is for them to go back and forward to WCOD a more specific proposal that we could reconsider next month.

In view of 9:00 PM arriving, reports were shortened with full updates to be provided at the June meeting.

Close Captioning: Carol will be giving quarterly reports moving forward.

Snow Update: The subcommittee met, and Judith sent out a first draft of a letter. She took into consideration all the things that the subcommittee came up with. The goal was to create a letter that supports our constituency and then work at educating other commissions and other public groups and officials about creating open letters that also support their constituencies and all of them then converging in one spot with the town council. That's the approach.

Judith clarified that the sub-committee is proposing or supporting an additional ordinance to cover sidewalks and streets. Currently there is an ordinance for removal of snow and ice by private persons in the business district that's public

law 96.26, but no such ordinance exists for residential districts. The Watertown commission on disabilities recommending an additional ordinance to be enacted, to be sure that snow is removed and cleared away from residential sidewalks by private persons.

If the sub-committee can work on the draft we can review it next month and possibly take a vote. The sub-committee will meet again before the next meeting and work on a final draft.

George reported that he has blue prints for a 220 unit apartment building going up between BJ's and Walker pond. These are preliminary plans but its three buildings, five stories tall—two of them—four stories, with a swimming pool. The buildings all face towards each other. They're going to re-grade around walker pond and clean up the walkways there. And there will be underground parking, plenty of parking on the grounds, and it's just preliminary at this point. If anybody wants to look at the plans, they will be in Gayle's office. George will invite them to come to present to this commission at a future meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Submitted by:
Kim Charlson