

Watertown Commission on Disability Minutes for October 19, 2011

Commission: George Donahue, Chair; Kim Charlson; Councilor Steve Corbett; Fred Isaacs; Alex Liazos; Carol Menton; Gayle Shattuck, Town Personnel Director and ADA Coordinator; Carol Wilson-Braun.

Guests - Terese Hammerle from Watertown Community Gardens; Larry Hale from the MBTA's accessibility office; Jerry Mendelson from the MBTA's office of service planning

Meeting called to order at 7:10 pm by Chair George Donahue.

Roll Call.

Watertown Community Gardens. - Terese Hammerle; The group worked with the Watertown Housing Authority to create a garden at 103 Nichols Ave. It is right near the Housing Authority building and they work with the Willow Park Learning Center. Kids come into the garden. The Housing authority tenants work in the garden. And neighbors work in the garden. And so far it has been about 95% lovely and about 5% needs improvement.

They have received a Watertown Community Foundation grant for this coming year that will almost pay for a garden that they are going to build on Grove Street. And that will be more of a traditional community garden and it won't have as many kids. People will come and take care of their own plots. They do want to have plots for the food pantry as well as learning gardens, demonstration gardens. They want to have expert gardeners come in and show novice gardeners how it is done, and raise even more food for the food pantry.

This year there were maybe a dozen people raising food for the food pantry, and it was very successful. Everyone really liked it. Last winter we discussed having an ADA accessible pathway in this garden on Nichols Avenue. The Commission seemed to be willing to provide some funding to complete that pathway. The Community Gardens group wanted the accessible path to lead to several parts of the garden including a community area where gardeners could meet and chat, the shed, and the water. They also hoped to make one or two raised beds for gardeners in wheelchairs. However, they are still trying to get the community space to work and that's necessary before they can make a path to or through it. So they are not really able to present us with a plan yet.

We told them that we would like to hear from them before Spring and that we would also like to know if they had any inquiries from gardeners with disabilities. Their web site is watertowngardens.org and their e-mail address is info@watertowngardens.org. We suggested that they talk to Beaverbrook Step who is also doing some gardening.

MBTA route 71 bus transit planning - Jerry Mendelson

They collect data through the fare machines on the number of people getting on and off at different stops. The buses can be tracked by GPS so they know how closely schedules actually get followed and how much buses cluster together.

They do not have data on how many riders are left waiting at a bus stop when a bus comes that is already completely full. If you are one of these stranded people or if overcrowding prevents you from using the bus, please call the MBTA support line 617 222 3200.

They have a grant to improve service on their 10 busiest routes. These include the 71, 73, and 77. The 70 did not make the cut but it is on the list if they get more funding.

They are trying to consolidate stops; some of them are 200 feet apart. They are identifying heavily used stops; they will try to add benches, shelters, and better signage for those. They are trying to make sure that all stops are accessible and have landing pads for wheelchair lifts.

They are also making real-time bus position and passenger load information feeds available for app developers so that there can be apps that can tell your smartphone when the next bus or train will really be there and whether or not there will be room for you on it.

People with concerns about accessibility if the MBTA remove bus stops can e mail the MBTA at keybusroutes@mbta.com. The project website is mbta.com/keybusroutes.

MBTA Accessibility - Larry Hale

There have been many accessibility improvements that help people actually use our system. They have changed from high floor buses to a predominantly low floor fleet of buses; these make it easier for people who use mobility devices to use a manually or electrically deployed ramp to board and exit the buses quickly. They now use LED signs; people with low vision can now see what route number and destination the bus is going to. Automated announcements announce every stop that the bus makes; in other parts of the country some trains and agencies only announce the major intersections despite the fact that they have automated stop announcements. These are some of the ways in which the MBTA has worked to try to improve access for people with disabilities.

Their drivers receive special training now. There is an ADA curriculum that is built into both the recertification training and the new hire training for bus operators. The drivers are tested to make sure that they actually deploy the ramps and lifts appropriately. People with disabilities attend some of the trainings so that they can talk about things that they have seen happening on buses; the operators hear firsthand what they can do to make sure that they provide quality customer service for people with disabilities.

There was a Bus Stop Bill that was passed at least a year ago which raised the fine for parking in a bus stop to \$100. This was done to keep the stops clear so that the drivers can pull their buses to the curb to safely board and off load passengers. The T looks for ways to improve access for people with disabilities. This might

include the addition of new elevators. In fact, the new station opening at Science Park West End will include elevators for people who use movability devices. It will also have tactile signage for visually impaired passengers, which will be a first for the MBTA.

There is going to be a new elevator opening up at Harvard station. It will also serve as a backup for the main elevator.

They are working on different ways to improve the travel experience for people with disabilities.

If you have comments or concerns, please call the MBTA customer service support center at 617 222 3200. You will hear a menu which will lead you to the appropriate place to file your comment or complaint. They encourage people to do that. They don't know that there is a problem until people tell the MBTA that there is a problem. So it is important that you call the customer service support center if you see that things that are not working right. When you call, a copy of that complaint actually goes to the department of system rider accessibility where they monitor the complaint process to make sure that it goes to the appropriate person.

The MBTA web site's accessibility information has been overhauled and updated. If you go to mbta.com, click on the accessibility at the T link, and finally just click on the department of system wide accessibility and there is a new link that lists MBTA bus stops and says whether the MBTA or the city or town is responsible for clearing snow from the stop.

The Chair's report turned into a discussion of who our officers would be next year and that led to a vote. It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to elect Kim Charlson Chair, Fred Isaacs Vice-chair, and Carol Wilson-Braun Secretary.

The Commission then thanked George for his service as Chair.

George then presented Alex Liazos with an award for his service. Alex is stepping down after having been a member of the Commission since its beginning and of its predecessor for 3 years before that, for a total of 20 years. The Watertown Commission on Disability outstanding service award was presented to Alex Liazos in recognition of his 17 years of commitment, dedication, and determination to providing accessibility and equal opportunity to all the residents of Watertown with disabilities. Watertown, Massachusetts, November 1. And on the back it says that in Braille. We hope that Alex will continue to show up at our meetings and share his insights with us.

Alex then addressed the Commission. He said that he had been impressed by how much hard work it takes to do anything, and that there had been disappointments, things we had not been able to do. But as a whole he feels incredibly thankful and blessed to have served with the people, who have come and gone on this Commission. He particularly remembered and missed Al Gayzagian. Alex used to

drive him home after meetings; on the way they had their own separate discussion.

Gayle expressed her thanks to Marcia and the Town Manager's office for finding Alex's original letter of appointment.

Minutes

It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to accept the minutes of the September 21 meeting. Copies of our minutes may be requested from the Town Clerk's office.

Treasurers Report - Gayle Shattuck

It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to accept the Treasurer's report. Copies of the treasurer's report may be requested from the town's ADA Coordinator in the Personnel Office.

Art Exhibit

Ann, George, and Carl, the president of the the Watertown Art Association, helped transport all the artwork from the Town Hall to the library. They met the Saturday before the exhibit started and set everything up. The reception was well attended. Several of the artists came, and several of the Commission members were there. The following week George met someone from the cable station and did a three minute video of the art exhibit which was on the Watertown weekly news last week.

The exhibit was a success and Ann is really excited about it. We lucked into good timing since it coincided with the national employ people with disabilities month as well as the open art studios in Watertown. And now that we have a track record, we should have more artists next year.

A friend of the Isaacs who runs art shows for large science fiction conventions (700 to 1500 attendees) saw the show and liked it.

Closed Captioning - Carol Menton

Carol spoke to the council on aging last month and Stefanie assisted by doing a CART demo. We should work up a short and sweet panel discussion on bringing closed captioning to your town government for the Massachusetts Municipal Association meeting in January.

We are having technical issues which are not getting solved. We need to either cultivate a technically knowledgeable contact at Watertown Cable Access or somehow introduce a technically knowledgeable consultant into the mix.

Snow Ordinance.

We discussed the draft letter. There was a minor wording change. It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to approve the letter and to send it to the Town Council subcommittee on public works. We expressed our thanks to our snow removal subcommittee (Judith Herzberg, Alex Liazos, and Carol Wilson-Braun) for drafting this.

Special Ed Report—Fred Isaacs

The SpedPac calendar has been mailed to all members and will be posted on our web site.

Elizabeth Schaefer verified that, in fact, the needs improvement score that the Watertown schools got from DOE was because of the way that MCAS scores are now followed by individual Special Ed student. They didn't improve as much as DOE would like.

New business

We have a prospective new member, John Hawes. He is an architect and we believe that he will be a great asset. He has a Master's Degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania. He recently retired from MIT where he was a Senior Project Manager. He was very much involved in ADA compliance for buildings. He is an ADA specialist surveying facilities for compliance; he also reviewed construction projects for MAAB and state building code compliance. Before that he was a planner and project manager for Holy Cross where he also did ADA planning and implementation. He worked at Sasaki across the street. And before that he worked at Keyes Associates as a project manager at Northeastern. He did a dormitory for 400 students and the renovation of Mill building into offices, and before that he worked for Harvard University's planning office. He is currently on the Planning Board.

It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to elect John Hawes to be a member of the Watertown Commission on Disability,

It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to adjourn at 9:10 PM.

These minutes are respectfully submitted by Fred P. Isaacs.