

**Watertown Commission on Disability
September 21, 2011**

Commission: George Donahue, Chair; Councilor Steve Corbett; Ann Doughty; Judy Herzberg; Fred Isaacs; Alex Liazos; Carol Menton; Gayle Shattuck, Town Personnel Director and ADA Coordinator; Carol Wilson-Braun; Walter Batchelder, Intern.

Guests

**State Representative Jonathan Hecht; Jeff Dougan of the Massachusetts Commission on Disability; Jeff Loughlin; Jeanette Rimsa.
Meeting called to order at 7:10 pm by Chair George Donahue.**

Roll Call.

Jeff Loughlin and Jeanette Rimsa both said that they were attending the meeting because they wanted to get more involved in town government and did not have any matters to bring before us at this meeting.

Representative Jonathan Hecht

Representative Hecht gave us a brief update of events since he last met with us in May.

The budget for FY 12 was approved in July. There was a pretty good outcome for special education under the very bad circumstances. There was increased funding for the circuit breaker which helps towns pay for out of district placements to \$210 million versus last year's \$150 million; otherwise the special education budget is more or less the same. This is pretty good given the circumstances but it is down from four or five years ago.

The Legislature has tried hard to keep funding services for those with disabilities. Advocacy helps.

Representative Hecht filed a handicapped on street parking bill, House 2322.

There's been a hearing on the bill. It would require that a percentage of on street parking spaces be designated as handicapped parking spaces. He would like letters in support of this bill from various town commissions on disability. Letters should be sent to both the committee chair and representative Hecht.

A bill funding hearing aids for children was reported out of committee in July. We have a great newborn screening program which detects hearing problems early. the bill adds support for actually getting hearing aids for children who need them.

There has been a lot of recent discussion of aversive treatment. The judge Rotenberg Center uses portable packs attached to the students to provide them with electric shocks when they misbehave. Representative Hecht went to the school and tried wearing a shock pack and having himself shocked. It is painful. The aversive shock is used to treat severely disturbed patients. Some families do believe that the therapy has saved their children's lives.

Moving the bus stop. The MBTA has been persuaded to put the idea of moving the bus stop out for public comment. The experiments that they conducted with signal timing were inconclusive. The proposal to move the bus stop has been put in the

new draft service plan; if the proposal survives there will be work that the town will be required to perform on the delta. There is a possibility that a community block development grant might be available for this. The delta changes will need to go to the town planning committee.

Representative Hecht is putting together an advisory group on bus service. He would like to have someone representing people with disabilities who use the MBTA, particularly the 71 bus. There have been reports that the buses are frequently overcrowded. There will be a public hearing on October 5. The MBTA wants to consolidate some stops. There is a new person in charge of accessibility at the MBTA.

We need to spread the word about our closed captioning Town Council meetings on local cable TV. Perhaps we should have a meeting at the Statehouse. The Massachusetts Municipal Association has their annual meeting in January; we could present there. We could also contact the Kennedy Center or the Collins Center. We need to find out how we can get recognized for innovation in local government.

Massachusetts Commission On Disability - Jeff Dougan

We discussed state regulations for commissions on disability. If a commission has too many members who do not themselves have disabilities then nondisabled members get bumped if someone with a disability wants to serve. A commission can temporarily fill a disabled slot with someone who's not disabled but who would bring something to the commission. However a majority of the commission must consist of people who themselves have disabilities. The chairperson does not themselves have to be disabled. We should check the 2010 definition of disability. We also need to check with the town clerk for 1993 or 1994 town ordinances to see if the ordinance creating the commission on disability had any requirements peculiar to Watertown.

Titles two and three of the ADA were updated in 2010; we need to be aware of changes that will go into effect on March 15, 2012.

The Department of Justice also has Project Civic Access. There are five requirements to this.

Representative Hecht's bill 2322 would require that 5% of on street parking spaces must be reserved for handicapped parking. However there are federal directives in the works which will specify the percentage of on street parking spaces which must be reserved for handicapped access. This will probably become law in a year or so; the regulations are now out for comments.

Chair's Report - George Donahue

George has to step down as chair in November . We have not had a formal position of vice chair in the past; the previous chairman has remained a member of the commission and has performed the duties of the vice chair. We need to check the town ordinances and bylaws for clarification on whether the commission chair must be themselves disabled.

George has been working on the website. Walter, our intern, will be posting

disability related articles on the site. Walter will do the draft and George will review it.

Minutes.

It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to accept the minutes of the March 16 meeting and the minutes of the April 20 meeting. Copies of our minutes may be requested from the Town Clerk's office.

Treasurers Report - Gayle Shattuck.

The town's accounting system is being upgraded so there is no report.

Art Exhibit - Anne Doughty

We have eight exhibitors. We need to send a press release to Boston Globe calendar section

George will ask Carl for set up help.

Artwork should be sent to Gayle Shattuck's office in the Town Hall at 149 Main St. Set up may be Saturday, October 1, or might be moved to Sunday, Oct 2, 12:00 to 1:00 PM

The exhibit starts on Sunday.

We need to confirm the setup and start times.

Special Ed Report—Fred Isaacs

Elisabeth Schaefer, our Director of Student Services, reported that she had set up a new program and hired and trained personnel at a cost of \$300,000. This replaced an out-of-district program for which we had been spending \$800,000 for Watertown students. We saved \$500,000 and we have additional resources available in our own system. We are trying to do more of this.

We have had Melmark train some of our teachers in ABA. We will be placing more reliance on our own trained staff and phasing out Melmark.

The State Department of Education downgraded the Watertown schools special education program from being in compliance to needs improvement. This appears to be based on a change so that individual MCAS scores are examined to see if the students scores have increased enough over time.

The SPEDPAC calendar for 2011 - 2012 is complete and published.

We presented an evening with Elisabeth Schaefer in September.

We will have a workshop on Art Therapy in October.

Basic rights will be November's topic.

We will have a presentation on MassHealth in December.

Audible Walk Signals and Locator Tones - Judy Herzberg.

Judy and Walter are mapping signals. They are evaluating and logging each signal's audible walk signals and locator tones. They are also tracking the location and condition of nearby curb cuts and tactile strips. There are a LOT of signals in Watertown. This is a work in progress.

Snow Ordinance.

Tabled; we hope to discuss it at our next meeting.

New business

We admired the spiffy new commission tote bags.

The hearing on the MBTA 71 bus is coming up.

The Faire on the Square is September 24. We need to staff our table from 10 to 4.

It was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to adjourn at 9:12 PM.

These minutes are respectfully submitted by Fred P. Isaacs.