

Watertown Commission on Disability

149 Main St. Watertown, MA. 02472

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 17th, 2021

The meeting was held by Zoom online and called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Kim Charlson, Chair.

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

Guest- Larry Field, Senior Planner for Community Development and Planning for Watertown.

GUEST SPEAKER- Larry Field spoke to us about the Watertown Housing Plan, which was initially approved in December. The council committees approved and endorsed the plan, which will be on the next council meeting's agenda. He primarily wanted to highlight for us the recommendations for people with disabilities and get our feedback. The plan is to create more affordable housing for people on limited income, seniors and disabled. Of the 25 recommendations, 3 are related to disabled. One goal is to make loans available to make homes accessible for lower income residents, 2nd is to encourage universal design and visitability standards in new development, and how to encourage large and small developers to comply. The third is to enter into partnerships with supportive service providers, to create housing and to help provide such services as homemaker and transportation.

In the discussion that followed, Naomi mentioned that she has seen contractors balk at participating in a state loan program due to the amount of paperwork involved. Carol M mentioned that all has to go through the ADA. Larry said that larger developer plans have to comply with ADA (a bare minimum requirement), and asked what can motivate them to do more. How can we get the best design? John suggested that it depends on town requirements. It needs public attention. The town can exert pressure on developers to meet higher standards. Larry commented that stricter standards need state approval.

Naomi asked how many units needed to be accessible in buildings, and Larry responded that it was 5% for buildings with 20+ units. Larry asked what things need to be made better, what are the primary issues? Naomi replied steps to the front door, narrow doors, such as for first floor bathrooms. Elan asked how do we incentivize accessibility? Tax incentives? Cash transfers? Larry wondered what if builders were offered free technical assist? Elan didn't think it would work, and that we should incentivize small developers. Naomi thought they would need to see a benefit in their bottom line.

CHAIR'S REPORT- Pedestrian issues were discussed. Lisa mentioned the lack or condition of curb cuts at Watertown square, especially at Charles River Rd, and put in a DPW request. Naomi agreed that most crosswalks around the Square were a mess. Kim asked Lisa to look into the town's response.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES- It was moved, seconded and VOTED unanimously 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 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-

Plans Review- John reviewed several projects: Arsenal Yards, Arsenal on the Charles (Athena Health), Coolidge Ave, are all developing life sciences buildings. He saw no issues with the plans. Lisa said that the large parking lot on Grove St used by Mt Auburn Hospital is being bought from the town by Buckingham, Brown and Nichols school. Plans are to put in 2 fields and a field house. Lisa said they promised it would be available to the public during off times.

Special Ed- Naomi said that the elementary schools would be back to full time on Apr 5th, the middle school on 4/16 and the high school on 4/25. There was some discussion about the plans for the new high school. If it is to be built on the present site, a temporary high school would be built on Moxley Field near the middle school. There will be a public forum next Wed.

Safety and Access- Kim reviewed the various sites. 1) Church and Summer- she hopes it is on the to-do list for the DPW. Gayle said that the new superintendent walked there with a contractor, and also looked at Lexington and Orchard. Naomi had sent us photos of Lexington and Orchard. 2) John is looking at an optimal place for a crosswalk across the eastern half of Charles River Rd to reach the river, perhaps at Paul St. Beechwood is more logical, but is less visible due to the rise in the road.

Lisa pointed out that there is a new curb at N. Beacon and Louise but no crosswalk.

3) Lexington and Main- no update.

4) Issue of coordinating of public concerns with community and planning development- John will go back and look at his notes.

5) Lisa said there was no report on How dog park. Gayle asked the DPW for an update next month. A subcommittee is looking at it (especially a concrete pad and bench without arms).

6) John said that the parking meters are gradually being fixed, adjusted to a max height of 48".

7) Lisa gave a Community Path update, citing concerns for accessibility and safety. People are parking where it is supposed to be pedestrians and bicycles. John agreed there were inconsistencies in accessibility.

NEW BUSINESS- None

It was moved, seconded and VOTED to end the Zoom meeting at 8:48 p.m.

The next meeting of WCOD will take place via Zoom at 7 p.m. on Wed, April 21st, 2021.