

Watertown Commission on Disability

149 Main St. Watertown, MA. 02472

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, Jan. 20th, 2020

The meeting was held by Zoom online and called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Kim Charlson, Chair.

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

Guest- Kathleen Desmarais.

GUEST SPEAKER- Kathleen Desmarais is the Director of Student Services at WPS. She started out by saying that special education is the biggest part of what she does and that she is passionate about inclusion. She reported that there are 553 students on IEPs, which is 20% of the district. The largest categories are autism and specific learning disabilities, and the other categories are much smaller: sensory and hard of hearing, vision, deaf blind. Most of the children are in full inclusion programs (270) where they spend 80% of the day in the classroom; 70 are in partial inclusion, where they spend about 60% of their time in the class, 76 in a separate class for 60% or more of the day; 40 in separate day schools; and fewer than 10 in residential programs. They have programs for autism, developmental, intellectual and emotional disabilities. The staff includes general education teachers; special ed teachers; instructional assistants; OTs, PTs and assistants; speech therapists; social workers; behavioral analysts; a teacher of visually impaired; and a certified orientation and mobility specialist.

Kathleen said that Watertown has done well with getting students with special needs back into the classroom. They've done it cautiously and with the cooperation of the teachers. They have all the PPE they need for working with students who can't distance, and there is a testing program. Teachers and support staff will get vaccinated in Feb.

CHAIR'S REPORT- Kim invited Lisa to report on the Bike-Pedestrian project. She said that tomorrow the committee will have its 2nd meeting and will recommend to the full council to proceed. Lisa was concerned that Lissa was not listed, who has been attending the meetings and contributed to the report making sure there were accommodations for all users. Lissa said that the commission didn't seem to think that accommodations was their job. Kim said that everyone is responsible for universal design. More commissions need to think about disabilities and keep it on their agenda.

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

TREASURER'S REPORT- Gayle reported that the numbers for January have not changed from those of Dec, because of vacation time and nothing much going on. It was moved, seconded and VOTED

unanimously to accept the Treasurer's Report for Dec. Copies of the Treasurer's report may be requested from the town's ADA Coordinator in the Personnel Office.

COMMITTEE REPORTS-

- 1) Plans- John spoke about the project at 99 Coolidge Ave. The owner of the building is Alexandria who also owns Tufts and Athena. There will be a parking garage with a 2nd floor bridge to the main building, like Athena. There was discussion about how many handicapped parking places should be on each floor, or should most of them be on the 2nd floor? Naomi made the point that people shouldn't have to walk too far to get to the elevator, which favors several places on each floor. John will pass along our feedback.

The question was put forth if there was some way for the town to get complaints about sidewalks, street crossings and signals directly rather than through us, and how to prioritize. This will be discussed with DPW and planning. Lisa will bring this up at the Economic Development and Planning committee and DPW meeting tomorrow. Kim asked Gayle to extend an invitation to Greg St Louis, the new DPW superintendent, for our March meeting.

Kim had a question about planned modifications for her street in the spring/summer, specifically what kind of curbs and intersections. Lisa suggested she talk to Matt Shuman.

- 2) Special Ed- No further report
- 3) Safety and Access- Kim went over a number of ongoing issues: An audible signal is needed for Church and Summer Sts.; the pedestrian crossing at N. Beacon and Charles River Rd.; detectable warnings for Main and Lexington are needed. Kim will contact MA highway dept about this item. Lexington and Orchard intersection needs work (crumbling sidewalks). Naomi and John will assess, weather pending. Common St roundabout is fine.

How Park- John noted that a year has passed and someone should contact the Forte family. The park still needs work concerning w/c accessibility. Kim said we should write up our expectations and send them to DPW. John will do this.

Wrought iron gate by CVS. Elan said the problem was fixed. It is now more detectable for blind people.

NEW BUSINESS- Kim mentioned that she was involved with the presidential inauguration committee about the national coverage for the audio description for the inauguration. Two describers for NBC also worked on the coverage.

It was moved, seconded and VOTED to end the Zoom meeting at 8:38 p.m.

The next meeting of WCOD will take place via Zoom at 7 p.m. on Wed, March 17th, 2021. There will be no meeting in February.

