

Watertown Commission on Disability

149 Main St. Watertown, MA. 02472

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 19th, 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; Megan O'Halloran; Naomi Ridge; Elan Rohde; Gayle Shattuck, Town Personnel Director and ADA Coordinator; and Carol Wilson-Braun.

Guests- Christopher McClure, Chief Information Officer for Watertown; Judy Fallows for Arsenal Garden Project; and Brooke Moncrieff, resident.

AUDIENCE ISSUES- Brooke Moncrieff started out expressing a desire to learn more about WCOD. She came before us today to speak of concerns about sidewalk conditions. She is a long time resident and home owner, and lives off of Galen St. She has been a part time PCA for years, and is concerned about the deteriorating and unsafe condition of many sidewalks. She highlighted and showed us photos of 3 locations: 99 Galen St, the west side of the Galen St bridge over the Charles, and 109 Union at the corner of Morse. She spoke of how difficult it is for w/c users and their helpers to navigate uneven and crumbling sidewalks. She asked why requests on SeeClickFix for the DPW were not being addressed, sometimes for a year or more.

John said that we had the head of DPW to our last meeting, and the issue of prioritizing requests was discussed (SeeClickFix doesn't prioritize), and said that it is hard to keep up with small requests. Lissa mentioned that she has been trying since early March to get a pothole addressed, and just found out it was under the domain of the DCR.

Brooke asked how to let DPW know of priorities, how to get things into their work plans. How to have more transparency on other projects, and to help people understand those priorities. Lisa said that the council was trying to get the DPW to prioritize sidewalks as well as roads, and that a 5 year capital campaign is being done and a survey. Brooke's requests will be passed along to the DPW.

GUEST SPEAKERS- 1) Chris McClure was invited to speak about the town's website and AudioEyes, which increases the accessibility of the website. A web and media coordinator has been hired and things are starting to improve. It is a big project and the website should be rebuilt by the fall. He also mentioned to Brooke that SeeClickFix is going to be updated. AudioEyes will help the functionality of the town website, and provide tools that adjust the visual elements, including a Player that reads the page. Training will be through social media and WACTV. Kim said she was initially wary that AudioEye was just an overlay, giving a false sense of accessibility and protection, but when learning about it, found that it goes beyond that and can be built into a website. She related someone's difficulty accessing the Senior Center newsletter with a screen reader. Chris asked her to send him the details, and said that customer service was a good feature, but people could also call him with questions.

2) Judy Fallows is on the board of Watertown Community Gardens and is also the coordinator of the school gardens. She spoke of the plans for accessible gardens at the Hosmer and Cuniff Schools and future plans for a garden at Lowell, which will include vegetables, herbs and butterfly gardens. A number of the garden beds and paths will be w/c accessible. She also told us of plans for accessible gardens in Arsenal Park, behind the Arsenal Mall.

CHAIR'S REPORT-

- 1) Gayle gave an update on the Stop and Shop HP parking complaint. AAB is involved and will address.
- 2) How Park- was addressed with DPW at our last meeting. They are in agreement with an accessible bench and concrete slab. Matt Shuman said a contractor is lined up.
- 3) Kim said she was asked to serve on Resilient Watertown, which is trying to make Watertown a better place to live by addressing climate change, energy efficiency including solar energy and carbon footprint.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES- It was moved, seconded and VOTED unanimously to accept the minutes from the April 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 April. Copies of the Treasurer's report may be requested from the town's ADA Coordinator in the Personnel Office.

COMMITTEE REPORTS-

Plans Review- John spoke of the old Sasaki building, which has been sold to a developer. He didn't think the parking lot had enough handicapped spaces. He also addressed the location of the one elevator and handicapped bathrooms with the committee.

Special Ed- Naomi said that there is a new mandate that all K-1 students be tested for reading disabilities. She will be following this. Kim said this has good implications for reading disabled students at Perkins.

Safety and Access- 1) Kim said that there was progress on the audible signal at Church and Summer. The DPW is working on eventually installing iron detectable warnings to replace the deteriorating rubber ones throughout the town 2) Pedestrian crossings at N. Beacon and Charles River Rd- Lisa said that utility work is going to be done there. And said the DCR will add pedestrian crossings on Charles River Rd., and more signage to discourage trucks and decrease the speed. Acknowledged the sidewalks on Riverside are bad. 3) Lexington and Orchard- Naomi said there is a new audible signal but no improvement on the curbs. Naomi also mentioned the bad condition of the tactile strips on the new bike/pedestrian path behind the library. They are tripping hazards. Lisa said the Commission should write a letter about the community path. More care should be taken. Kim asked Naomi to write something up about the community path and send it to Gayle, and asked Lisa to keep track of the best time to send a letter about her issues. End of June?

NEW BUSINESS-

- 1) Lisa spoke of “bumping out” plans for Arsenal St and said we have to be on top of what is planned.
- 2) Kim said that the Home Depot issue was resolved. Gayle said that an inspector went out.
- 3) Discussion about Little Greenough Blvd road closure by the DCR. There was pushback from the community about access. Lisa said the town council requested that a study be done first, but it wasn’t. The road is being used by people on foot and wheels. John said this was one of 3 “easy fixes” by the DCR during the pandemic to create space for distancing, but now there are more cars around, which complicates things. Lisa said that the adaptive bike program from Brighton may use Greenough.
- 4) Lisa wondered if Watertown could celebrate White Cane Day on Oct 15th. Kim thought that was a good idea.
- 5) Lisa mentioned that parking on Irving St was a problem, near the construction project. She also gave an update on the pathway and pocket park at Athena. The property is now owned by Alexandria which is making changes, including gravel, which is not acceptable.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

The next meeting of WCOD will take place via Zoom at 7 p.m. on Wed, June 16th, 2021.