

Watertown Commission on Disability

149 Main St. Watertown, MA. 02472

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 16th, 2023

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, City Councilor; Patrick George, ADA Coordinator; John Hawes; Rachel Kay; Carol Menton; Megan O'Halloran; Naomi Ridge; and Carol Wilson-Braun.

As the meeting was starting, our CART Captioner, Stephanie Farrell gave us some news she thought we should know. Apparently, Zoom is making available all content for the purposes of training AI, without the ability to opt out. [She sent an email Thursday morning giving more info, including the statement that as of Aug 11th, the "terms of service have been updated to further confirm that we will not use audio, video, or chat customer content to train our artificial intelligence models without your consent."] She said that Court Reporters and CART Captioners were concerned and staying on top of this, out of concern that real people will be replaced, and the safety of confidential information.

CHAIR'S REPORT-

- 1) DPW and trash toters- Kim said no update.
- 2) Captions on TVs in Public Places- Lisa said that the topic will be on Sept City Council agenda.
- 3) Overnight Parking Notifications in Arsenal Yards- Patrick reported that the state said that there is equal enforcement of all spaces, even handicapped spaces. No violations in terms of ADA.
- 4) Follow-up Discussion re Respectful Treatment of Disabled Resident by City Hall Employees. We had discussed Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HOH) awareness training. Patrick spoke with Zoe, and Jonathan O'Dell from the MA Commission for Deaf and HOH. They provide several hours of training. A question was: can it be on demand? How can we schedule? Carol M said that her agency just started recording trainings. Kim suggested live training with city hall employees, then follow up with videos. Naomi reminded us that there are monthly webinars from the MA Office on Disability. Patrick will follow up with the Commission for Deaf and HOH, the MOD, and 1st responders. Lisa said that it was a good idea to use videos for training/awareness/education, and that the City Manager is supportive. Kim said recorded resources were good- both in-depth training and more general.
- 5) Coolidge Square construction- John said that there should be blinking pedestrian lights at the East PO (there are plans), and that there is a transition strip on only one side of the crosswalk. Signage needs improvement. He said that the Adams Street crosswalk doesn't have transition strips, and one end leads to a telephone pole. Lisa expressed concern about loading areas. Kim asked Patrick to talk to DPW and MA DOT about our recommendations, and will report back.

John also commented that the crossings at Charles River Road need to have better signage. Lisa said that the DCR is going to fix the crosswalk lines. She wondered about signage to have bikers dismount on the smaller paths, and will talk with Will Brownsberger.

John brought up a couple more topics. He asked Patrick if there had been progress with the railings at Ryan Rink. Patrick replied that work is ongoing and he would follow up. John spoke of 150

Arsenal St., and the problem with the elevator from the lower level of the garage. Patrick said that the elevator was being fixed, based on our intervention.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES- It was moved, seconded and VOTED unanimously by roll call to accept the minutes from the June meeting. Copies of the minutes may be requested from the city's ADA Coordinator in the Personnel Office or viewed on the Watertown website document center.

TREASURER'S REPORT- It was moved, seconded and VOTED unanimously by roll call to accept the Treasurer's Report for June. Copies of the Treasurer's report may be requested from the town's ADA Coordinator in the Personnel Office.

COMMITTEE REPORTS-

- 1) Plans Review- John spoke about the Watertown Mall. Target has a long-term lease. The parking in the front and the bank will stay. Everything else will go. There was a question about the RMV. There will be office/lab space and garages, and some retail. He said that the plans are basically good, but there is not enough detail. Kim said she wanted to hear from the key developer about accessibility in Sept or Oct.

The conversation turned to the Arsenal yards and automatic doors. Naomi mentioned difficulty with the door on the first floor of the garage above Roche Bros, and that the movie theater doesn't have automatic doors, and that the double doors are too close together. John said that accessibility is a problem and will continue to look into it. He suggested we have an Arsenal yard rep come to a meeting. Kim suggested November, and that we could work on a list of issues and concerns next meeting. Kim wondered if we could have it incorporated into an ordinance when auto door openers are needed.

- 2) Special Ed- Naomi said that there were decreased staffing levels at the Cunniff and in general. That affects mandated services. Rachel said that 20 people attended a meeting this month. The issues included staffing, especially instructional aides and special ed teachers. They will communicate this info to parents and have a follow-up meeting in Oct.
- 3) Safety and Access- Kim asked Naomi to visit the Lexington and Belmont Streets intersection and give us a report next month. Kim and Naomi will draft a statement on sidewalks and curbing. Kim said she would report on the detectable warnings at Lexington and Main Streets next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS-

- 1) Kim said that Rachel can be on the school board and continue to be on the COD.
- 2) Carol M. brought up the Faire on the Square. She can help coordinate the sign-up, even though she will be missing the Sept meeting. She will be at the Faire, however. Kim said that Patrick was on top of the materials that we use. Kim also said that sighted guides for the event will be provided. Lisa warned that the stage in Saltonstall Park is difficult to navigate around, and wondered if signs would help.

- 3) Lisa brought up the Comprehensive Plan update. The COD is now an official partner. We will conduct ADA assessments and transition plans. The planning board and full council will meet in Sept. Kim said that we should apply for funding to hire a consultant to help with the Comprehensive Plan. She will work with Patrick and Community Planning in requesting funding for a consultant. Lisa suggested that the COD partner with the Human Rights Commission.
- 4) Kim brought up a cultural district, and asked Lisa to invite someone to a meeting. Lisa stated that no one new has come to the City Council yet.
- 5) Kim stated that July 26th was the ADA's 50th anniversary. One of the issues discussed at the gathering in Boston was digital accessibility. Kim represented digital communication for signing by the governor. She discussed federal government milestones: 1. Website accessibility. Advocation for 11 years. 2. Pedestrian accessibility guidelines. Worked on for 10 years.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

The next meeting of WCOD will take place via Zoom at 7 p.m. on Wed, September 20th, 2023.