

Commission on Disability Meeting

Minutes from Tuesday, October 15, 2013

Worcester City Hall, Levi Lincoln Room, 3rd Floor

Attendance:

Members Present: Rachel Brown, Herbert Cremer, Charles Hiamah, Paul Keister, Elizabeth Myska, Stephen Stolberg, Susan Swanson

Members Absent: John Nah, Lynne Towler

Staff: Pam Callahan, Dawn Clark

Guests: Robert Antonelli Jr., Assistant Commissioner of Parks & Recreation

1. Call to Order: 4:25 PM. The Chair welcomed guests and commission members; each member introduced themselves.

2. Minutes: The vote to accept minutes of the July meeting was tabled for November's meeting.

3. Parks-Site Improvement Plans: Mr. Antonelli reviewed current work and future plans for Elm Park, Elm Park Sidewalks, Greenwood Park, Institute Park New Support Building, Institute Park Walkway, and other Park items and improvements. Mr. Antonelli reviewed a master plan that is working to eliminate barriers and provide more accessibility. Comments were positive and commission members applauded Mr. Antonelli for plans were going in the right direction; there was not a plan for an entire park with handicap accessible play equipment, but there were pieces of accessible equipment being placed at various locations. Accessible routes to the pavilion in Institute Park connecting to the restrooms were still a long trek up the hill, but would be a paved route. The pavilion in Greenwood Park would provide shelter in rain, or allow the public to bring tables for picnicking and was not raised off the ground for accessibility.

4. WRTA Hub: After the tour of the new WRTA Hub before last month's meeting several areas of concern were identified:

- The TV in the lobby was too loud and interfered with announcements.
- There were no announcements on Columbus Day.
- The idling of buses interfered with announcements.
- Automated announcements are not available.
- There is no clear sign or announcement to know which bus is where. People have a difficult time finding which bay their bus is in. People with disabilities reported having to

walk up and down to see if the bus idling is their bus and by the time they find the correct bay, the bus is gone as they only stop for 3 minutes.

- Platform signs are reportedly hard to read.
- Persons assigned to the platform to monitor activities do not always know which bays buses are going to be in. There is no way for people with disabilities to know where to wait and many have missed their bus several times.
- The tackle strip is reportedly inadequate; not all people are able to feel it with their feet.
- The lobby will not be large enough to accommodate people when the cold sets in. QCC will soon begin classes in the T & G building and members feel that will add to the number of people trying to stay in shelter while waiting for the bus. Even though there is room in the Union station, getting there will present a challenge for people with disabilities and members expressed it may take too long, and people will miss their bus.
- The HUB is closed all day Sunday and closes at 8:00 or 9:00 PM weekdays. The Peter Pan station closed at 7:45 PM. There is concern that there is no place to get shelter from cold or elements and there is nowhere to go for emergencies.
- Two anecdotal stories were relayed to the Commission: (1) regarding a resident who is hard of hearing who missed the bus because he couldn't see when the bus was coming due to inadequate signage; (2) is in regards to the difficulty of a gentleman with an extra-large wheelchair who was not able to turn around near the office area next to the elevator. It was recognized that the doorways are in compliance with ADA width regulations but if this area was used as overflow in inclement weather, extra-large wheelchairs may experience difficulties.

The Commission respectfully requests that the following recommendations for the WRTA be presented to the City Manager for consideration: To ensure accessibility for all people whether audio, sight or physically impaired by:

- Eliminating barriers to hearing announcement by reducing the idling of buses and either removing the lobby TV or keeping the volume down.
- Providing automated announcements for travelers.
- Ensuring that the automated announcements are available when buses are running including Holidays.
- Increasing the size of the platform signs including the font size.
- Providing digital signs for the bus bays so that people will know which bus is in which bay without physically traveling to each one.
- Add additional space to the lobby for cold days; maybe utilize driver lounge space as overflow space or designating space reserved for disabled persons.
- Keeping the HUB open as long as busses are running for security and emergency purposes.
- Adjusting the tackle strip to ensure it meets ADA requirements.

The Commission respectfully requests that the Director of the Disabilities Office, Ms. Turchek, research the requirement for the Tackle Strip and truncated edges to reference as a footnote in the memo to the City Manager.

5. Brochure input: The newly created brochure for restaurants was reviewed. The brochure gives many tips to restaurateurs for making their facilities attractive to patrons with disabilities. The brochure was well received and recommendations from the Commission include:

- Replace the phrase “handicap bathroom” with “accessible restroom”.
- Encourage the addition of a sink in the toilet area in accessible restrooms.
- Regarding the tip on offering to cut up food for patrons with a physical disability such as only one hand, add “shaky hands” as an additional example.
- Under General Tips, add, “Not all disabilities are obvious; don’t assume all disabilities are visible.”
- Add language about high tables currently used in many lounges. These high tables make lounge/bar areas inaccessible to some persons with disabilities who may wish to sit in these areas. Each room should have 5% percent of the tables be of accessible height.

6. Future meeting times: Commission discussed changing meeting times. A motion was made and seconded to move the 4:15pm start time to 4:30pm and was so moved by a vote of 5 yes, 0 no and 0 abstentions.

7. Commission input for future meeting agendas:

- Discussion regarding having COD representatives sit with Emergency Planning personnel to investigate issues regarding transportation to emergency shelters and the number of shelters with generators.
- Discussion regarding having COD representatives meet with DPW for snow removal planning.
- Discussion regarding the bullying of disabled persons including all ages.
- Discussion regarding Neighborhood Crime Watch meetings and what input the disabled community has to contribute to these meetings.
- Chairperson Herbert Cremer introduced to the board an idea for member Paul Keister to represent the Commission and work with the general manager of MassDOT to update current work on a DOT database with street and park names that may not be on a GPS. The chair asked for the commission to give Mr. Keister authority to act as a representative of the board. The acting staff liaison said she would research the item with Ms. Turchek to see if it was in the purview of the board and what the process would be.

Announcements:

- The screening premiere of the newly developed video on etiquette for communicating with persons with disabilities will be screened on Wednesday, October 16, 2013 at

2:30pm at the Worcester Senior Center. Vice-Chair Steve Stolberg will act as Emcee for the event that will showcase other commission members who illustrate proper etiquette and courtesy when interacting with persons with disabilities. The video will also air on the City's government access channel.

- The public is encouraged to attend WRTA meetings which occur on the third Thursday of the month at 8:30 am at WRTA headquarters. The next meeting will occur on Thursday October 17, 2013.

8. Public Comment Period:

- Mike Kennedy, CLW, discussed the renovations going on at the DCU center. He stated that the work on sidewalks surrounding the facility itself was not accessible for drop-offs and took major advocacy to gain accessibility. He expressed concerns that now interior work was being completed on the inside without any input from the disabilities community. Mr. Kennedy requested the board recommend to the City Manager that the CLW be allowed to complete a 'walk through'.
- Scott Ricker referenced an item he had on the City Council (Item 7 G) regarding DCU construction violations. He reported that the boxes were not accessible and restrooms had no coat hooks. He also reported no railings on stairs but said that because construction is still ongoing, there could be plans that have just not yet been completed. Mr. Ricker recommended that the City Manager authorize a walk-through to assess ADA accessibility.
- This topic of the DCU construction and walk-throughs will be considered for a future agenda topic.

7:11pm – Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Pamela Callahan