

## **Minutes – DRAFT**

Brookline Commission on Disability  
Wednesday, June 9, 2021; 5:30 PM – 7:15 PM  
Held via Zoom due to COVID-19

**Members in Attendance (Virtually):** Saralynn Allaire, Chair; Jim Miczek, Deputy Chair; Jim Lee; Rob Heist; Henry Winkelman; Elaine Ober; Ann Kamensky; Miriam Aschkenasy, Select Board Member

**Members not in attendance:** Joan Mahon; Nancy Moore, Transportation Board Liaison

**Note taker:** Sarah Kaplan, ADA Coordinator – Ex. Officio

**Members of the public in attendance:** Abby Swaine, AJ, Karen Pearl, Jordan Chinai

Meeting commenced at 5:35 PM.

**Introduction/Public Comments:** Miriam Aschkenasy is the new Select Board Member working with the Commission on Disability. All members present introduced themselves. Miriam spoke about her children who go to the Public Schools of Brookline. She works in anti-racism. She was a physician working in global humanitarian response. She identifies as hard-of-hearing and has requested that all meetings she attends have captioning. Starting tonight and moving forward, all monthly BCOD meetings will have a link available with live captioning provided by Otter.ai. The ADA Coordinator asked that all members of the public use the chat to alert her that they want to speak, but not to make comments in the chat. That way the comments are on the recording and fully accessible to those that are using Otter.ai and persons who are blind or low vision, so that the ADA Coordinator does not have to read comments out loud. She also asked that speakers identify themselves because the recording does not have the ability to tell the person who is using them who made the comment.

AJ asked to speak and was promoted to panelist. AJ wanted to speak about the end of masking in Brookline. (A full copy of her comments is available upon request. What is below is a summary): AJ spoke about the vulnerability of transplant patients, cancer survivors, and children under 12 years old. These populations are not currently able to be vaccinated, and/or in the case of transplant and cancer survivors, may never be fully protected from vaccination. They said that the CDC provides guidelines, but they feel that Brookline should do better because of the number of residents in the area that may be vulnerable because the Town is within an hour's drive of six transplant centers and Dana Farber. So much about COVID-19 remains unknown and they feel we are conducted real-time experiments that put the most vulnerable at the greatest risk. AJ feels it is ironic and cruel that we have been in this together for so long and now the most vulnerable are being abandon by the larger community.

The Chair plans to discuss this topic under New Business.

**Review of the May 2021 Minutes:** The minutes from the May meeting were reviewed. The recording stopped at around the 18-minute mark, so the Chair provided assistance with the minutes from memory.

- **Vote:** Henry motioned that the minutes be accepted as written. Rob seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Miriam abstained since she wasn't at the last meeting. All other members present voted in favor of the motion. Motion carries.

**Review of the February 2021 Minutes:** The Chair checked previous minutes, but it seems the Commission never approved the minutes from the February 2021 Meeting. The Chair had small corrections of spelling and a question about content – hedges vs snow as the reason that the Sidewalk Obstruction By-Law needs to be updated.

- **Vote:** Henry made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Jim M seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Miriam abstained since she wasn't at the February meeting. All other members present voted in favor of the motion. Motion carries.

**Discussion about outdoor restaurant seating with Jersey barriers:** This led to a separate discussion about outdoor dining and the current status of the new by-law/policy regarding access. Jim and Abby spoke about issues with outdoor dining spaces that use the Jersey barriers in the parking lanes. The ADA Coordinator asked residents to inform her of any restaurants that don't appear accessible, so she can work with Meredith Mooney to address them. The ADA Coordinator spoke about why the temporary ramps cannot be permanently deployed out due to safety. Several Commission members suggested restaurants should have signage out about the availability of ramps upon request. The ADA Coordinator suggested that the Commission write a note to Meredith about this concern.

- **Action:** The Chair will write to Meredith about signage with restaurant phone numbers so residents can request ramps or other assistance. The Chair asked Jim M and Rob to check out some restaurants for access issues and report back.

**Variances:** None. No update has been received about the status of the Coolidge Corner Theater variance application.

## **Old Business**

**Access Brookline Column in The Tab:** Abby presented the column she worked on with Elaine. June's column covered the following topics: Outdoor Dining, The Trustees of Reservation accessibility page, The MBTA Green Line Transformation Project, The MBTA's Accessibility Tools; and there was a new section called Organization (Org) of the Month – this month highlighting the Disability Policy Consortium. Under News and Events is listed information about the Commission on Disability's monthly meeting. Fresh Perspective to personalize the experience of disability.

The Commission spoke about what to keep and delete. Different member had different perspectives. Jim M spoke about his using a hand bike at Spaulding Rehab's Adaptive Recreation Program. Abby suggested using that for a future column. The column needs to be under 500 words, so the Fresh Perspective provided by Abby was cut and will be used in the future. The name of the one section was changed from Org of the Month to Spotlight Org. Three Fresh Perspectives will be part of the column next month.

- **Vote:** Rob made the motion to approve the amended column and Henry seconded. A roll call vote was taken. All members present voted in favor of the motion. The motion carries.

**Changes to the BCOD Webpage:** Miriam spoke briefly about her work on Select Board to assist in a revamping of the Town's entire website. Henry shared his screen and showed the Commission the most up-to-date draft of the BCOD webpage. The Chair asked about font and font size and the ADA Coordinator suggested 12-point, Arial font with the ability to zoom-in if a resident needs it to be larger.

- **Vote:** Henry made a motion to approve the draft as is and send it to Ben Vivante and the ADA Coordinator so they can work on the requested changes and improvements. Elaine seconded. All members present voted in favor of the motion. The motion carries.

**Multi-Unit Housing with Limited or No Parking:** Continued discussion from previous meetings. Last month, the Chair planned to invite someone from the Planning and Community Development Office to attend a BCOD meeting to discuss parking and multi-residential unit buildings, but due to the length of Town Meeting, they were not able to join us this month. The Chair is a Town Meeting member and learned in Town Meeting that a Working Group to study parking options in Brookline has been formed. The Chair has requested to the head of Community Planning and Development and Polly Selkoe that the Commission be a part of that discussion. Miriam has recently been appointed the Chair of the Committee to Study the Babcock Street Parking Lot for other uses. The Chair spoke about the possibility of writing a Warrant Article that requires that the number of accessible (HP) spaces for a residential building be determined by the originally number of parking spaces the building is Zoned for. For example, if a building is Zoned for ten spots with two spots that are HP and then the ZBA works with the developer to reduce that number down to six spots, the number of accessible spots should not be cut to one, but remain at two, since finding accessible housing with accessible parking is already such a burden for people with disabilities.

- **Action:** The Chair will follow-up with Polly Selkoe. This topic will continue at a future meeting.

#### **ADA Update:**

- **Complaints:** The ADA Coordinator continues to work with DPW to address complaints about overgrown hedges as they come in. DPW seems to be responsive to said

complaints. According to Abby, the Pedestrian Advisory Committee is also tracking this issue and is seeing good progress.

- **Tech Buddies Program:** Along with the Council on Aging, the Library, and the Office of Emergency Preparedness, the ADA Coordinator is helping with PR of a program that will provide free internet for a year and a free tablet to seniors and adults with disabilities living alone.

**Report from Transportation Board Liaison:** None. The liaison was not able to attend the meeting.

## **New Business**

**Accommodation of People Cannot be Fully Vaccinated or are under 12 years old:** The Chair asked AJ if she had spoken to Public Health and specifically Dr. Jett, the head of the Public Health Department about the concern they raised. AJ said they had not; they came to the Commission first to see what if anything the Commission thought about these issues and potentially to find allies for their cause. The Chair asked for specifics about what AJ would like Brookline to do. AJ would like Brookline to not further loosen restrictions and if mandates return then the community needs to raise their concerns. The ADA Coordinator suggested speaking with the Public Health Board and offered assistance to AJ to reach out to Dr. Jett again. The Chair offered to help with some sort of education to the wider community. The ADA Coordinator suggested reaching out to the local news. Miriam spoke about the complex nature of this issue. The ADA Coordinator spoke about how some people can't wear masks or whom for other people wearing masks makes their experience more difficult and provided examples. AJ acknowledged the conflicting access needs for some but feels the majority of the population could still do more to protect those that are most vulnerable to COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

**Accessible Recreation:** Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Micah Barshay will be attending next month's Commission Meeting to discuss accessible recreation options in Town.

**Public Meetings via Zoom after June 15, 2021:** As of June 15, the State of Emergency will end, and with it, permission to meet virtually. It is currently unknown if Public Commissions, Committees, and Boards will need to meet with a quorum in person to hold Public Meetings. The ADA Coordinator is awaiting guidance from the State on this issue. AJ asked about hybrid meetings. The ADA Coordinator spoke about the need for an in-person quorum even with a reasonable accommodation request of appearing via phone or online. The Chair reached out to Jeff Dougan at the Massachusetts Office on Disability. There are a number of bills at the statehouse concerning this issue. Miriam said there is likely to be an extension through September but she would expect that we may need to change to in-person meetings after September.

- **Action:** The ADA Coordinator will inform the Chair and Deputy Chair of any new information about this issue she is provided.

**31<sup>st</sup> ADA Anniversary in July:** The Chair said that she does not want to do an event, but a SOOFA sign flyer was discussed as well as a mention in the Access Brookline column in July.

- **Action:** Jim L., Henry, and the Chair agreed to provide something to the ADA Coordinator to post. Elaine agreed to add a mention of the anniversary in July's column.

#### **Announcements:**

- Harry Weissman, of the Disability Policy Consortium is working on expanding power wheelchair warranties. Contact him if you are interested.
- Jini Fairly, Newton's ADA Coordinator is working on a law that would exempt the RIDE and HP parking plate/placard users from being exempt from fines for parking in biking lanes. The Chair will find out more in the next CODA call.
- MOD is hosting a webinar on Effective Communication on July 20, 2021 from 11 AM – 12:30 PM. A notice has been sent out to all members.
- Abby spoke about the MBTA's redesigning the bus network meeting yesterday. A survey for the public will go out over the summer and a draft of the new network should be available in the autumn.
- The RVM will put out information about HP placard abuse and how to report it.

**Next Meeting:** Scheduled for July 14, 2021 @ 5:30 PM via Zoom (tentatively).

Meeting adjourned at 7:19 PM