

Minutes

Brookline Commission on Disability
Wednesday, July 12, 2023; 5 PM – 6:45 PM
Meeting held via Zoom

Members in Attendance: Jim Lee, Chair; Henry Winkelman; Miriam Aschkenasy, Select Board Member; Elaine Ober; Saralynn Allaire; Joan Mahon; Nancy Moore (Transportation Board Liaison)

Members not in Attendance: Shawn O’Neal; Jim Miczek; Rob Heist,

Members of the Public in Attendance: Carolyn Thall, TMM Precinct 16; Judith Leichtner, TMM Precinct 16

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

Jim Lee commenced the meeting at 5:02 PM.

Public Comment: Carolyn Thall, TMM Precinct 16 – she spoke about an issue with the Baker School Tennis Courts. DPW manages the maintenance of the property. She says she is speaking on behalf of herself and other concerned residents in Precinct 16. The tennis courts are currently going through a maintenance project – but there is not currently in the plan a plan for an access ramp from the school to the tennis courts. In order to access the tennis courts from the school, a person would use a set of outdoor stairs. Carolyn believes that this project is a ‘reconstruction,’ and that building code requires the construction of an access ramp between the school and the tennis courts. It is her understanding that the Town’s position is that the public can access the tennis courts through Hancock Village (a private housing development that abuts the courts directly). The concerned citizens maintain that this is neither acceptable nor reasonable.

Judith Leichtner, TMM Precinct 16 – Judith finds the Town’s position and response on this issue incredibly disappointing. She asked for the Commission’s support on this issue stating she believes that even if there is some legal exception to why the Town does not have to build the ramp, that morally, it should be done.

June 2023 Meeting Minutes: Jim Lee made some minor changes to the minutes, and the ADA Coordinator agreed to make those changes. Miriam made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Elaine seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Saralynn abstained due to her absence from the June meeting. All other members present voted in favor of the motion. Joan was not present at the time of this vote. **4-0-1.**

New Variances: None

2024 Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan Process to start in September 2023: The ADA Coordinator explained her plan to conduct the process beginning in September. She will be hiring an intern and is also seeking support from the Commission, as a member of the Commission needs to attend the meetings with each Town department. The intern will be doing research in September to ensure whatever tools and processes we use are the most modern and forward-thinking currently available. The ADA Coordinator estimated that each conversational meeting would take about an hour, but this could vary based on the size and needs of each department. The tentative schedule the ADA Coordinator has developed is as follows:

- Schedule meetings with each Department (September 2023)
- Meet with Departments to discuss previous goals and progress/completion; set new goals for the 2024 Transition Plan (October 2023 – March 2024)
- Evaluate the accessibility of certain physical locations in Town in cooperation with departments, as necessary (April 2024 – August 2024)
- Draft each Department's section of the Transition Plan's Self-Evaluation; seek feedback and edits from each Department (October 2023-August 2024)
- Seek community feedback in two community-wide meetings: One via Zoom and one in-person meeting (August 2024-September 2024)
- Finalize 2024 Transition Plan (October 2024)
- Seek approval of the 2024 Transition Plan from Brookline Commission on Disability (BCOD) and Select Board (November 2024)
- Publish the final version of the 2024 Transition Plan (in a screen reader accessible format) (December 2024)
- Meet annually with departments to log progress toward goals and report findings to the Commission on Disability (2025-2028)

Henry asked about the intern process (likely one intern per semester), and Jim and Henry both expressed interest in being involved with the meetings with Departments.

FY 2024 MOD Grant – due September 15: The grant application opens on August 1 and closes on September 15 at 5 PM. The ADA Coordinator will conduct outreach to departments to make them aware of the funding opportunity and hopes to have at least one grant to vote on in the September 2023 meeting.

Select Board Liaison Update: Miriam checked with Joe and Dan about whether we could create a warrant article to require push-button doors to be added to all new businesses. Miriam was advised against it by the head of the Building Department and Town Counsel because 521 CMR are state requirements and to add Town specific requirements would be too difficult. The ADA Coordinator also spoke with Town Counsel who advised against it, but the ADA Coordinator thought that the Commission might want to lobby for this change at the state level. Jim said that the State agency that deals with amendments to the State building code is the Board of Building Regulations and Standards. Jim believes it would be very hard to lobby for this. Saralynn talked about how the larger disability community would like to modify 521 CMR in two ways – it currently does not apply to employment spaces or old mill buildings that are converted into housing.

Transportation Liaison Board Update: The Transportation Board had an open-ended discussion about the roles of the Board's Advisory Committees. Nancy advised that the Commission may want to think about changes they might want to see in the relationship between the Commission and the Transportation Board. Nancy acknowledged the ongoing concern some members have expressed about when the Commission gets involved with some development projects.

- **Action:** The Chair will invite Amy Ingles, Transportation Administrator at a future meeting.

ADA Coordinator Update: Tabled discussion on purchasing new ramps until she has more information on the amount of money that is in the HP Fine Fund. Hopefully, that information will be available by the next meeting.

Variance Updates:

- **21 Longwood:** Jim Lee sent in a letter saying that the Commission did not object to the variance request, provided certain criteria were met, all of which the Architectural Access Board (AAB) agreed with. The AAB approved the variance, provided that the first floor is completely accessible, all the services provided on the first floor match the exact same services on the second floor, and they must put in push button doors, as proposed by the Commission during their review and vote in the last meeting. After submitting the letter, Jim Lee received an email stating that Michael Muehe who reviews variance requests for the Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) was strongly opposed to the variance. Mr. Muehe asked to see the email the Chair sent in, which he was given.

This discussion expanded into a discussion about how compliance with variances is monitored by the Town.

- **Action:** The Chair will invite Dan Bennet, Director of the Building Department to a future meeting
- **Coolidge Corner Theater:** The new construction on the CCT triggered 521 CMR accessibility requirements. CCT asked for 5 variances from the AAB. They were granted two. They were denied three:
 - Stair handrail(s) with a newel post(s)
 - The need for a unisex-accessible bathroom on the second floor
 - The need for a new lift that met 521 CMR requirements

Saralynn has checked on this with the building department and is concerned about if these things have been addressed.

Library Display for Disability Pride Month: Joan told the group that the Library Display went up on June 30 with the help of the Perkins Library, who lent us a number of items for the display. Lily communicated with the ADA Coordinator saying that they have nothing planned for that display case in August.

- The ADA Coordinator email the Librarian at Perkins and request to keep the display items through August, and she will finalize the display breakdown with Saralynn and Joan.

Announcements/date for next meeting: September 13, 2023 @ 5:30 PM via Zoom

- After a discussion, it was determined that the Commission will be going back to 5:30 PM for their meeting time.
- The Chair thanked the ADA Coordinator again for her efforts to keep Town Meeting accessible through providing reasonable accommodations request, including remote access for those who qualified. Future Town Meetings, starting with Fall 2023's Town Meeting, will be hybrid.

The Chair made a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:08 PM.