

Minutes

Brookline Commission on Disability
Wednesday, July 14, 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; Joan Mahon; Miriam Aschkenasy, Select Board Member; Nancy Moore, Transportation Board Liaison

Town Staff in Attendance: Micah Barshay, CTRS, Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Brookline Recreation

Members not in attendance: None

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

Members of the public in attendance: Abby Swaine

Meeting commenced at 5:40 PM.

Introduction/Public Comments: Micah introduced himself and the Commission welcomed him. Briefly discussed was the decision from the State to allow for virtual Public Meetings through April 2022. Miriam spoke about the possibility of Town Meeting going hybrid, but she is not sure if such a Warrant Article would pass or if such a thing could fall under “Home Rule.”

Presentation by Micah Barshay on Therapeutic Recreation in Brookline: Micah presented a slide presentation titled “Brookline Recreation Therapy at Brookline Recreation”. While waiting for Commission members to arrive, Saralynn told Micah that the Commission planned to promote recreation options for people with disabilities in July’s Access Brookline column in The TAB. The Chair asked if the Commission could add Micah’s name and information to the column and he said yes. Micah defined recreation therapy for the group as ‘purposeful and goal-oriented recreation for people with disabilities, injuries, and illnesses.’

The Recreation Therapy division was started in 2010. Current programs include: On the Town Series: By-weekly outings to areas of greater Boston for high school students and older; Forever Young Series: social groups for ages 22+ at local restaurants; Spectacular Summers: Week Long Summer Programs. Therapeutic Rec also offers inclusion support for other Brookline Rec programs, including summer camp, Recreation Activates for Teens (RAFT) Program; Rec’s after school program; Rec’s Environmental Education; sports; the pool; and Rec’s Early Childhood Center. The Rec Department tracks type of membership: 42 are listed under Therapeutic Recreation membership and 79 are listed as Special Olympics.

Brookline Rec also hosts one of the largest Special Olympics programs in Massachusetts with over 100 participants annually; offering the following programs: Flag Football; Cheerleading; Basketball; Snowshoeing; Track and Field; Aquatics; and Softball.

Starting on March 16, 2020, due to COVID-19, all programs were moved online twice a day. Rec offers Morning Meditation (Monday-Friday) and more recreation-oriented programs Monday-Thursday. Since March of 2020, Brookline Rec has offered over 500 programs for about 4000 participants via Zoom. In the Spring of 2021, Therapeutic Rec moved back to mostly in-person programming, including aquatics, track and field, walking and hiking programs, and the Forever Young Program. They also took on their first Therapeutic Recreation Specialist in training (intern) from Regis College and plan to have another intern in the Fall of 2021.

Future goals include expanding program offerings; continue to hire and train high quality staff, continue to work with local colleges and universities to take on more interns; and grow their participation numbers. Micah is the only Therapeutic Rec Specialist on Staff, but The Rec Department hopes to hire more Therapeutic Rec Specialists in the future.

Micah opened the floor to questions. Therapeutic Recreation Services are open to all, with or without disabilities, but currently the majority of participants have intellectual or cognitive disabilities. Miriam spoke briefly about how her son volunteered with Special Olympics and had a really good experience. Micah praised the volunteers he works with.

Nancy asked how programs get publicized and how Therapeutic Rec does outreach. Micah spoke about how marketing is tricky. Brookline Special Olympics has a Facebook page, in the larger Brookline Recreation Program guide, and word-of-mouth. He is looking for input on this issue.

Joan asked about programs for Seniors with Therapeutic Rec. Micah says Josh Cook oversees Rec's 55+ programs, so he doesn't often work with seniors, although they are welcome to join programs like the Walking Program.

The Chair asked about programs for wheelchair users. Rec doesn't have specific programs, but someone in a wheelchair could be accommodated upon request. If there was a group who had interest, a program could be developed.

Elaine asked Micah to expand on the concept of inclusion services. Micah spoke about providing support to campers whose parents disclose things like anxiety. None of the camps are specifically therapeutic camps, so they do not provide a 1:1.

Jim L. asked about how many people attend the Zoom classes offered twice a day. Numbers are small, but that way they know the needs of the participants. Some programs, Forever Young, is capped at 10 people; On the Town is 12-15 participants; if they have more staff they can support 16-20 people.

The Chair asked about funding for Special Olympics. The Town pays Micah's salary and for administration support. Donations pay equipment and uniforms for the athletes. Saralynn asked if programs are paid for by fees. Special Olympics has no fees due to the donations but other programs have fees. If a resident can't pay the fee they can submit a request for financial aid which will cover up to 35% of the fee for the program.

Jim asked about providing services for quadriplegic residents. Micah said that he would need to speak to the resident about their individual wants and needs. The department doesn't have a lot of storage space for equipment and does not currently have any adaptive sports equipment. Rec is currently trying to work with the schools to get access to more gym space.

Abby spoke about what was in the monthly Access Brookline column. While the Town does not currently have much adaptive sports equipment, each of the three pools does have an accessible lift for those that need assistance getting in and out of the pool and both locker rooms are fully accessible. Micah can advocate for if particular programs if residents contact him about what they are interested in. For example, Rec offered Adaptive Ice Skating this year and it was really successful. Joan asked about Adaptive Skiing; Micah said he would look into it.

The Chair talked about how the COD in Acton has bought accessible bikes. The Commission discussed accessible bikes and scooters. Abby advocated for allowing programs that had special equipment to come to Brookline and use Brookline Recreation space to provide programming. Saralynn offered the possibility of setting up a scholarship fund to pay for programming fees.

Micah offered to return in the future to provide updates to programs in the future.

- **Action:** The Commission will help with marketing and the ADA Coordinator will meet with Micah next week to teach him how make their Facebook more accessible by using Alt-Text. She has also agreed to cross post requested posted via the ODICR Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Review of the June 2021 Minutes: Saralynn and the ADA Coordinator noted some minor inconsistencies in pronouns that should be adjusted. No other changes were requested.

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

Variances:

- **Update on Coolidge Corner Theater application.** Regarding the ramp in the large auditorium. The Commission supported it being left as is because the architect argued that it was too difficult to change the uneven grading of the ramp. The Variance Subcommittee recommended some remediation, like a hand

rail and lighting, but it is not clear if the AAB supported that. The AAB approved no further changes to the ramp.

- **Update on the Park School application:** The Park School is adding an elevator and more classrooms. The school said they would move a classroom or an office if someone with a disability needs it to be moved. Other disability advocates disagreed, so a hearing was called for Monday. During said hearing certain things came to light: A) A classroom or office could only be moved at the beginning of the year, so this would be a problem if someone became disabled at any other time during the year. B) The school currently has a freight elevator (that does not go to the ground floor) and a lift that goes from the ground floor to the first floor– which was not explained in the application.

AAB decided to require signage so people that may need access know how to access the elevator and/or lift if needed. Other things are also required.

- **Action:** The Chair is awaiting a written response re the Park School from AAB and will re-announce the result in a future meeting.

Old Business

Access Brookline Column in The Tab for July 2021: Abby presented the column she worked on with Elaine. Abby read out the updated paragraph on Therapeutic Recreation programming with Micah's name and contact information.

The Commission spoke about what to keep and delete. It was decided to hold off on the announcement regarding curb cuts in Boston for August's column.

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

Changes to the BCOD Webpage: The ADA Coordinator got an email from Ben Vivante saying that he is working on it. The ADA Coordinator has asked to meet with him and hopes to be able to present to the Commission an updated BCOD webpage at the next meeting.

Multi-Unit Housing with Limited or No Parking:

209 Harvard St Parking Structure: The Chair has become aware of a 40B project to be built at 209 Harvard St – 44 units. It shares parking with a medical office building. The medical building provides parking for staff only, not patients. The plan is to add parking for residents to equal 56 spaces. They have four Accessible Parking Spaces, two on each level. On the upper floor the two parking spaces are between the medical office elevator and the residential elevator. On the

lower floor the Access Parking is near the residential elevator but pretty far from the medical office building elevator.

Nancy said that the Transportation Board was approving a letter to the Zoning Board (ZBA) re the parking at 209 Harvard St. Nancy was wondering if the Commission should ask the ZBA that the HP spaces on the lower floor be moved so they are similar to the upper floor spaces and thus closer to the medical office elevator. ZBA is required to consider the Transportation Board's recommendation. Nancy suggests the Commission write its own letter. Nancy has asked how the Commission on Disability can be notified earlier in the process about such projects. Todd suggested that the Commission ask the Planning Department to be notified of any project that needs the Town's approval and then the Commission can ask whoever is presenting the project to the ZBA to present to the Commission on Disability.

The Chair is concerned about bundling vs unbundling the parking spaces. Bundling the spaces means that spots can be used by both medical staff and residents. Unbundling means that some spots are designated only for the medical building while others are only for the residents. The Chair wants to make sure that 5% of the parking spaces under typical Zoning rules are available for residents (3 HP spaces). Bundling seems to provide more flexibility. The Chair suggested supporting the bundling of accessible spaces. It was also discussed where the HP spots should be on the lower floor. The ADA Coordinator said that it would be best if the spots were in the same place on both floors so people can find them.

- **Vote:** The Chair made a motion that the Commission recommends that the A) HP spots on both floors be placed equidistant between the both elevator banks (as the Transportation Board did) and B) the Commission recommends continuing to bundle the for HP spots to allow for the most flexibility in who gets to use them as long as they have an HP plate or placard. Jim Lee seconded. A roll call vote was taken. All members present voted in favor of the motion. Motion carries.

32 Marion St. BHA 40B proposal: Discussion tabled for a future meeting.

ADA Update:

Complaints:

- Recreation Department: A) Complaints regarding sidewalk access and B) a complaint about their webpage not being accessible via screen reader. The ADA Coordinator has asked for photos of the first complaint and that the resident submit the complaint re the webpage via email so the issue can be tracked and documented.
- HP spaces missing "No Bike Parking signs" at the Senior Center
- Call from Bernard Green: A resident with a disability who lives at a BHA property did not receive required assistance during a planned evacuation drill. The ADA Coordinator provided a 9-1-1 Disability Indicator form so the resident can inform

EMTs of her needs and also reached out to BHA regarding developing individual evacuation plans for residents with disabilities.

- **Virtual Town Hall for Local Business:** The Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations provided a virtual presentation with Planning & Community Development about the Diverse and Inclusive Business Directory. The ADA Coordinator spoke about her Access and Inclusion for Local Business Presentation. The ADA Coordinator is willing to present in person or virtually and will be doing some presentations to local groups with assistance from Planning & Community Development.
- **Action:** The Chair asked ADA Coordinator to send information about Boston's Outdoor Dining Program to Community Planning & Development. The Commission plans to highlight the Diverse and Inclusive Business Directory in August's column.

Report from Transportation Board Liaison: Nancy reported on the 40B project at 209 Harvard St – that discussion is above. The Transportation Board voted to extend the Automatic Pedestrian Recall (meaning the pedestrians don't have to push the button) of the traffic signals in North Brookline at the request of the Pedestrian Advisory Committee pending studies to be done in the Fall of 2021. The issue will be revisited in the future.

The Chair asked about Transportation and Mobility Planning, but Nancy has no more information about this issue as it has not been discussed at a Transportation Board Meeting.

New Business

Revision of the Sidewalk Obstruction By-Law: Erin Galantine, head of DPW, David Trevvett, Abby Swaine, the ADA Coordinator, and the Chair of the Commission are working to update the Sidewalk Obstruction By-Law for Fall's Town Meeting.

Announcements:

- The 31st anniversary of the ADA is in the Access Brookline column for July 2021 and was also put on the SOOFA signs.
- Joan announced that the Coolidge Corner Theater is showing a film called "CODA" (which stands for Children of Deaf Adults) during the week of August 13. It will be opened captioned the whole week. <https://coolidge.org/films/coda>

Next Meeting: Scheduled for August 11, 2021 @ 5:30 PM via Zoom (tentatively).

Meeting adjourned at 7:20 PM