

Westwood Disability Commission
December 8, 2022 12:00 PM
via zoom

Minutes

Attendees:

Commission Members: Anne Berry Goodfellow, MaryAnne Carty, Michelle Fiola Reidy, Rania Kelly, Fran MacQueen, Missy O'Regan, Connie Rizoli
Selectboard Liason: Marianne LeBlanc

Guest: Stephanie Finegold and Liz Polin (appointments recommended)

Agenda item: Approval of Minutes

The Minutes from the meeting on November 3, 2022 were approved.

Agenda item: New Business – Disability Access at new development on Washington St in Islington

Anne mentioned that she had concerns about disability access at the Muffin House Cafe in Islington. She visited the cafe recently and noticed that individuals with disabilities as well as mothers with children in strollers had to travel quite a distance from the parking lot to the accessible entrance to the cafe. Anne noted that there was parking and an elevator at the rear entrance to Neroli Mercato and Deli, but that someone going to the Muffin House Cafe would not be aware of that access. Other members had the same concerns and noted that there used to be a handicapped parking space on Washington Street that had provided closer access to the accessible entrance.

Marianne Leblanc offered to contact Nora Loughnane (Director of Community and Economic Development) to obtain information on decisions about disability access and parking at the new development.

Agenda item: New Business - appointment of new members

Rania said that she and Chris Coleman interviewed Stephanie Finegold and Liz Polin for two vacancies on the Commission. Hopefully the recommended appointments will be made by the Selectboard at their December meeting.

Agenda item: New Business –

Agenda item: Old Business – Voting Access

MaryAnne Carty went to the High School before the November election to participate in a walk through. Evidently there were mixed signals as the Election staff expected her, yet MaryAnne found the doors locked and was not able to complete the walk through. MaryAnne reported that access was improved with the addition of a temporary hand rail at the voting entrance. This railing was not available to an exiting voter although the individual who

accompanied MaryAnne was able to walk further down the sidewalk to safely exit the High School voting location.

MaryAnne said that she went to the voting location around 10:30 AM and there were quite a few people driving in at that time. She thought that safety would be improved if a police detail could be assigned to help with traffic flow.

Improved voting access is a work in progress, but has improved. MaryAnne said that once a voter entered the voting location, everything went very smoothly.

Agenda item: Old Business – Recreation Programs

Rania and Liz discussed new issues with the Recreation programs. Registration begins 12/9/22 and families are concerned because the age for participation in the inclusive sports program has been lowered from ages 7-10 to ages 2-7 effectively precluding participation by several children who participated in the Fall. Reportedly the decision was attributed to the school gymnasiums being unavailable which was perplexing since the programs had taken place in Wentworth Hall (and not the gyms) in the Fall. The conversation became emotional because the program had been very successful for the participating children and because this change in the age leaves the children who participated without any program options at all.

Members expressed the desire that there be more, not fewer, recreational opportunities that include children with disabilities as valued members of the community. Members expressed dismay at the lack of options for children as they grow older and pointed out that it becomes harder for children to participate in programs with their age peers as individual skill levels diverge. Members whose children are older empathized about the situation and shared that they, too, had experienced frustration and disappointment at the lack of recreational socialization for their children

The Commission views this as an important challenge for our community and wants to see our community do a better job of including children with disabilities in recreational programs. The Commission will meet with the Recreation Director to discuss the issues and seek improvement.

Agenda item: For your information - Legislation

Rania spoke of a new Commission to report on the history of institutionalization in the State. The Commission wants to review historical records, some of which are still sealed from examination. A bill is pending in the Legislature to open records after a period of 90 years. Rania recommended that Members contact their legislators to support the bill.

Steph discussed a proposal for a bill to provide guidelines on disability awareness of neurodiversity. Steph expressed that it is crucial that our students learn about human differences to foster greater acceptance of differences. Rep. McMurtry's staff is currently drafting a bill to establish a Legislative Commission to recommend legislation or regulations. Steph will provide members with additional detail on the key provisions.

Agenda item: Adjournment and Next Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 1:37 PM
Rania will send an email poll to establish the best time for the next meeting.