

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY'S RECORD

November 2, 2023

Approved 12/5/23

ATTENDANCE AND CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Rania Kelly at 1:12 p.m. via Zoom webinar. The following Commission members were present: MaryAnne Carty, Stephanie Finegold, Missy O'Regan, Elizabeth Polin, and Mary Sethna. Also attending: Ellen Rollings, Westwood Planning Board member (86 Greenhill Road). Absent: Michelle Fiola Reidy, Marianne LeBlanc Cummings, Select Board Liaison, Frances MacQueen, Connie Rizoli, and Trish Tucke - COA Operations Manager. Staff Liaison Janice Donovan recorded the minutes.

Chair R. Kelly read the Commission on Disability's Mission Statement:

The mission of the Commission on Disability is to provide information, referral, guidance, and technical assistance to residents and Town departments on matters of disability.

MEETING MINUTES

Accept Meeting Minutes of October 5, 2023

Upon a motion by M. Sethna and seconded by M. O'Regan, Commission members voted unanimously in favor to approve the minutes as written via a roll call vote: M. Carty (aye), S. Finegold, (aye) M. O'Regan (aye), E. Polin (aye), M. Sethna (aye), R. Kelly (aye).

NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

OLD BUSINESS

- Continued Discussion: Sensory-Friendly Hours at Westwood Events
R. Kelly informed members that Town Administrator/ADA Coordinator Chris Coleman and Human Services Director Danielle Sutton will attend the December meeting to discuss this and the status of the ADA Access Study. (Since the schedule for December has changed, Janice will check in with C. Coleman and D. Sutton on their availability.)

S. Finegold informed the members that she spoke with Micah Barshay, Therapeutic Recreation Specialist this morning regarding inclusive ideas for both middle school and high school-age children, youngsters and those over 21. R. Kelly asked Janice to invite M. Barshay to attend a meeting.
- Inclusive Playground – 22 Everett St. Redevelopment
R. Kelly informed members that the hearing for 22 Everett Street has been immediately continued to the Dec. 5th Planning Board Meeting. E. Rollings (Planning Board member) said that she asked Town Planner Elijah Romulus to reach out to the Commission so that members can review updated plans and provide feedback on the inclusive playground. E. Rollings said she will seek more information on the plans and be sure that the inclusive playground is in the best interest of the community. She said that she would get in touch with Janice with new information as it becomes available.
- Recruiting Future Commission Members with Individuals with Disabilities (IWD) as required by the Bylaws

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R. Kelly shared the following information that Janice received from the MA Office on Disability. The following wording was suggested when recruiting new CoD members to fill expiring appointments.

This should be explained to all applicants.

The criteria for the composition of the Commission on Disability is required by MGL Chapter 40 Section 8J to consist of more than 50% of the membership being people with disabilities. Therefore, in choosing the membership we look to seat on that Commission, we are asking for people to identify as a person with a disability voluntarily, so we ensure that we meet that mandate. Please be advised we are not looking for a specific disability; a simple "Yes, I am a person with a disability" or "No, I am not a person with a disability" will be sufficient. The applicants with disabilities will be seated first, while applicants without disabilities will be seated after all applicants with disabilities are seated if membership allows.

Commission members raised the following questions:

- *Can parents or guardians of individuals with disabilities be considered for an appointment to the Commission?*
- *What exactly is recognized as a disability?
(From the MA Commission on Disability: The most widely used definition of disability is specified by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities". Major life activities are those functions that are important to most people's daily lives. Examples of major life activities are breathing, walking, talking, hearing, seeing, sleeping, caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, and working. Major life activities also include major bodily functions such as immune system functions, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.)*
- *Does an applicant have to publicly disclose their disability and would the application for the Commission become a public record? (The applicant can simply check a box on an application to say "yes" or "no" to a question of whether they have a disability. No details are required. According to Town Counsel, submitted applications are often redacted for telephone numbers and email addresses if a record becomes subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) the disability answer could be redacted as well.)*
- *M. Carty suggested that we could ask the Council on Aging to make an announcement about the Commission on Disability's recruitment of IWD.*
- *M. Sethna said that a younger population should be encouraged to seek appointment to the Commission and that she would ask her son if he or any of his cohorts might be interested.*
- *R. Kelly and others agreed that reaching out to residents is a better idea for recruitment, as opposed to just advertising the opening online.*

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- *Janice suggested contacting Lifeworks to see if any Westwood residents may be interested.*

REPORTS & FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- SEPAC Update – *S. Finegold reported that the Treasurer's position was eliminated because the account funds are not part of the schools. The members of SEPAC have been discussing the changes in its bylaws, and membership, and creating a "Friends of SEPAC". L. Polin said that the SEPAC webpage has its upcoming events listed.*
- Legislative Update – *S. Finegold said she is focused on reaching out to other districts to pass along info from the last session they attended.*

R. Kelly mentioned the work of the [Massachusetts Alliance for 21st Century Disability Policy \(MA21\) Alliance](#), which is a partnership of self-advocates, family members, other stakeholders, and disability advocacy organizations.

S. Finegold also mentioned that she heard from a friend that a bill has been introduced to remove the requirement for all children to pass the MCAS.

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION, NOT PREVIOUSLY ANTICIPATED BY THE CHAIR

- Discuss Dates for 2024 Commission Meetings –
R. Kelly informed the Commission members that due to personal reasons she needs to change the meeting day and time for meetings, beginning in December. She also announced that she will be leaving the Commission when her appointment expires in June 2024. Another member should consider stepping up to volunteer to be the chair.
- FYI - Baby Sign Language is being offered at the Library beginning on Nov. 20th

NEXT MEETING AND ADJOURNMENT

- The next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, December 5, 2023, at 7:30 p.m.** via Zoom Webinar
- Upon a motion by S. Finegold and seconded by M. Sethna the Commission voted unanimously in favor of adjourning the meeting at 1:50 p.m., via a roll call vote: S. Finegold (aye) M. Sethna (aye), R. Kelly (aye), M. O'Regan (aye), E. Polin (aye), and M. Carty (aye).