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BELMONT, MA**

DATE: March 14, 2024
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BELMONT DISABILITY ACCESS COMMISSION

Minutes, Meeting of January 10, 2024 (Held via Zoom)

There was a quorum. In attendance were: Andrew Poulsen, Karen Bauerle, Nan Donald, Macharia Waruingi, Michael McNamara, Aurora Sanfeliz.

We open the meeting at 7:07 pm on 12/13/2023

Andrew opened the Meeting, which was seconded.

We go over the last meeting minutes focusing on the last meeting Needs Tracker.

Motion to accept the minutes, by Andrew, Seconded by Nan, and unanimously approved.

Today's Needs Tracker: Macharia notes that the social worker contacted him and got everything approved, and they apologized to him for requiring him to fill in the forms in person which is incredibly difficult if you have visual impairment or blindness. But he notes, rightly, that this still doesn't solve the larger issue for other folks with a similar situation.

Andrew also notes that we have raised issues about the accessibility of Braille for town properties, and that we are still talking to them. Macharia noted that some comments from the Town suggested that the property managers or others are the folks who need to be contacted.

Wheelworks: Aurora Sanfeliz said she went by wheelworks multiple times but did not see the tent. However, when the weather was nice, she did see that the tent was put out. The owner was not there, Clint Page (Owner of Wheelworks), but she talked to someone there who gave Aurora his information to contact him. She will ask him if he has a permit for the tent (which is quite large). Andrew notes that the tent is quite large, and that this could pose an issue for pedestrians, whether blind or not. Michael notes that we should probably attempt to talk one on one with Clint, as he may simply not know, or never thought of who it could affect.

Karen Bauerle notes that they have talked to Town Meeting about making the Town Meeting more accessible and mentioned that there were people at the last town meeting couldn't hear as well. Notes subtitles are something that could be done. Notes that the town staff were very helpful, but a bit stressed due to the closeness of the town meeting and the Belmont Disability Access Commission request to help the hard of hearing. Andrew also notes he noticed issues with at least one town meeting member calling out for louder speakers (couldn't hear). Michael notes that the Town Meeting and the Town Clerk just notes that the special town meeting coming up will be Zoom/Online only.

Karen Bauerle brought up that we should look at other communities and other disability access commissions about the issues of visibility and proper acknowledgement of non-normative people with disabilities. Notes that the Town of Belmont also have had deeply concerning debates that have seemed to put disabled children as a budgetary target or acting or treating like they are a burden.

Karen also notes that if we only have disabled folks as an afterthought, then that is all we will ever be to town government or other folks. We need to make sure that the Town and the MBTA includes disabled voices when it comes to the MBTA housing building proposals, because this project like housing and town buildings will have major impacts on the disabled communities. Housing and access to town building and services are extremely important to disabled folks.

Michael notes that is extremely important, and that these projects will be around for 50+ years, so this is going to affected disabled folks for generations.

Nan notes there is a saying, that “if you are not at the table, you are on the menu”, so visibility and communication with state and local authorities are extremely important. We need to be included in these types of conversation on budgeting and planning.

Nan and Macharia notes that Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL): Could be included as a way to outreach to other communities and build a coalition. This group is also very good at benchmarking. Allowing us to compare and contrast with other towns. As well as the Massachusetts Disability Access Commission.

Karen and Nan note that Watertown recently had a pretty active Disability Access Commission. We should reach out to them. Also Arlington had a Disability Access Commission as well (included links below).

Events • Watertown, MA Meeting Agendas and Minutes • CivicClerk

Commission on Disability | Watertown, MA - Official Website (watertown-ma.gov)

Disability Commission | Town of Arlington (arlingtonma.gov)

Disability Commission Agendas & Minutes | Town of Arlington (arlingtonma.gov)

Nan wanted to acknowledge Paul Spooner: the Executive Director of the MetroWest Independent Living Center, had recently passed away in Dec. He was a real hero and a fearless advocate for Independent Living for people with disabilities. Below is a profile of this titan of advocacy for Independent Living for disabled people.

Disability community mourns the death of ‘fierce’ advocate Paul Spooner | GBH (wgbh.org)

Nan notes that the town of Belmont should have a Town Government representative on the Belmont Disability Access Commission. This should be addressed.

Andrew notes that there was an oversight or just a flaw in the library design. And while Lucia (of the Library building committee) did note they are trying to make one of the two paths around the library (one path has a grade that is too steep to properly build an accessibility path) accessible to all; they (the

Library building committee and the library trustee) did not realize that the library was responsible, not the Belmont Garden Club, for the garden area that *Should* be accessible to all Belmont residents.

Someone on the library building committee (according to Andrew and Macharia) said that this should be secondary to the library building, if there are funding issues or override money doesn't cover. But Macharia notes that the Garden is an integral part of the library and does not find it plausible that the library trustees did not know that on their deed of the land for the library that it included the garden. And saying "well, why did you only let us know now?" or saying the Garden Club should be responsible does not hold water, as the Garden club didn't have any idea that they would be responsible for that building cost to make the garden area accessible for all Belmont Residents. Pushing the Garden club to financially "find" or "figure out" how to make the library gardens accessible to all Belmont residents is not fair, and completely unreasonable for a group made up of volunteers.

Macharia, on his own volition, wrote a detailed and lengthy brief explaining why the library project needs to include the garden, which is part of the library, and if we are doing the library, we need to make sure the funds the taxpayers *paid* to build the library include the *whole* property that the library is responsible for. Macharia notes that the property plans included a focus on the upkeep for the building and the land it is on, so we need to consider the garden an equal part of the property.

Macharia notes that the claim that we need to seek grants separately, and separating the library project building from the surrounding property needs does not make sense. It will also make it almost impossible to find money for the gardens to be properly upgraded if we separate the gardens out from the library project, which the later has the large amount of funds to properly build the new building and make it accessible and the property upkeep as well.

Karen notes that we should reach out to the town to talk to them about this issue and push them to include the *full* library property when we are using funds for the library project, not just the new building.

Nan and Andrew note that we should talk to the Library Building Committee and push them on this.

Michael notes we could also talk to the Select Board, and mention this to them and to the Town Meeting Members letting them know this is a concern that the Belmont Disability Access Commission has, and also that this funding issue needs to be address and may end up coming up at Town Meeting.

Michael also notes that we should contact the Warrant Committee, which often holds the purse strings for projects.

Andrew and Nan also note that the Select Board is our sponsor and has a responsibility to interact and work with us on these types of matters.

Andrew motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 pm.

Seconded by Macharia and Michael, the meeting adjourned by unanimous support.

Michael McNamara