

MAYOR'S COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES MINUTES

June 14, 2010 City Hall, Rm 209, 6:30 p.m.

1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Members Present:

Jane Brown
Jini Fairley
Lucie Chansky
Jeff Hutter
Rosemary Larking
Girard Plante

Staff Present:

Kathleen Cahill, Community Development Senior Planner

Public Present:

Nathalie Assens
Jeffrey Cohen
Donald Larking
John Ria
David Schwarz

G. Plante, Co-chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

1. Discussion: Anniversary of ADA

This item was moved to the July agenda due to lack of time and deadlines associated with other agenda items.

2. Discussion: Mayor's Committee's June 5, 2010 site visit to Angino Farm to see accessible cedar planting beds and accessible route funded with CDBG funds and review the Farm's proposed barn project.

A copy of the concept plans for the Angino Barn renovations was distributed to the Committee members. J. Fairley, L. Chansky and K. Cahill summarized their visit to the farm earlier in the month. Members and staff were able to see and experience the accessible improvements made to the Learning Garden. Members felt the Farm should be commended for their progress in creating an inclusive experience through the purchase of farming tools and program outreach. Farm volunteers requested suggestions from the Mayor's Committee on outreach for classes specifically targeted to people with disabilities. Several suggestions on agencies to contact had been made the day of the visit – NCDF, Newton Housing Authority, Newton Veterans Agent, and the Zola Center at Brigham House. Additional suggestions made by Mayor's Committee members during the meeting included: NWW, Barry Price, Charles River ARC, and the Newton School Department (specifically students at Newton North). K. Cahill will look in to whether or not the Farm currently has an

accessible portable restroom. The Mayor's Committee also discussed the lack of accessibility of the farmstand and potential solutions. This will be included in the Mayor's Committee letter to Newton Community Farm (NCF).

The Committee discussed the proposed renovations for the Angino Farm Barn. Discussion centered on the following items:

Permeable pavers. NCF proposes to use permeable pavers in order to enhance water filtration on site. Permeable pavers are considered stable, firm and slip resistant and therefore comply with accessibility regulations regarding accessible routes. However, the Committee is concerned about proper maintenance of the pavers to avoid an uneven surface developing over time.

Plowing and Maintenance of the Barn's Second Form of Egress. The Committee's interpretation of CMR 521.20.11 (which pertains to accessible routes) concludes that in order to maintain an accessible means of egress and continuous path of travel from the exit to the public way this path needs to be plowed and the stone dust needs to be maintained appropriately.

Accessible Bathrooms. Currently the plan calls for two accessible unisex bathrooms. The Mayor's Committee recommends that one accessible unisex bathroom is located on the basement level and one accessible unisex bathroom is located on the main floor. The accessible bathroom on the basement floor would provide service to the basement space as well as participants in the learning garden.

Lift. A lift connecting the basement and main floors should be installed. The alternative, using the outdoor accessible pathway from the main floor to the basement floor is not a practical solution, especially considering this creates a very long, unsheltered route.

Demonstration Kitchen. If a demonstration kitchen is installed as part of the renovations the kitchen should also be designed with accessible features.

Use of the Loft. If the loft is intended for public use or if the programmatic use of this space is unclear the lift should extend to this floor in order to fulfill accessibility requirements. If the space is intended for employee only use the extension of the lift is less of a priority.

Safety Alarms. It's essential that all new alarms (smoke and carbon monoxide) be accessible to individuals with both auditory and visual disabilities.

A letter will be written by K. Cahill on behalf of the Mayor's Committee to Newton Community Farm Inc. concerning the Committee's recommendations for the Barn renovations.

3. Working Session. Down Under Yoga requesting input from the Mayor's Committee on an accessible entry.

A copy of a letter from Justine Wiltshire of Down Under Yoga, as well as proposed plans for their new yoga studio, was provided to the Mayor's Committee (these documents were also emailed to the members prior to the meeting).

J.Wiltshire provided background on her yoga practice 'Down Under Yoga.' The practice is currently housed in a Newton Highlands church. The studio is out growing their space at their temporary location and has gone through the special permit process to relocate to 304 Walnut Street in Newtonville, next to CVS. A ramp is required to make the underground space accessible. The cost of the ramp is estimated at \$30,000 which accounts for 20 percent of the budget for the entire project. Due to the financial burden, Down Under Yoga is considering applying for a variance from the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board. J. Wiltshire explained that classes at the Walnut Street location are not adaptable for people in a wheelchair or individuals that are unable to climb/descend stairs easily. 'Down Under Yoga' offers free classes especially designed for people with disabilities or physical limitations at an alternative location. J. Wiltshire has also spoken with Jayne Colino at the Senior Center in Newtonville about offering modified classes to seniors that are interested in taking them for free or on a sliding scale.

Alderman Rice spoke in support of 'Down Under Yoga' and the classes for people with disabilities that they offer at the Hyde Community Center.

Committee members were concerned that people with a mobility disability would have a difficult time obtaining information about yoga classes if they could not get into the new studio at 304 Walnut Street. Representatives from the yoga studio stated that due to the fact that the doors are locked when class is in session most of the public learn about the studio via phone. The phone number of 'Down Under Yoga' will be clearly displayed on the door of the studio.

Members of the committee were wondering if more affordable access options could be investigated – portable ramps or a lift. While the studio is open to any suggestions they also believe they have thoroughly researched all the options.

Members discussed the application at length. Due to the fact that viewpoints were mixed the Mayor's Committee reached the consensus that while the Committee could not support an application for a waiver to the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board the Committee would not take a stand against 'Down Under Yoga's' application.

4. Discussion. CDBG Access Project Applicant Procedure.

A staff memorandum concerning recommendations about establishing a policy for incoming requests for CDBG access funds was distributed to Committee members (this memorandum was also emailed to the members prior to the meeting).

In FY11 a total of \$8,000 is currently set-aside for Project(s) to be Determined. These funds represent the difference in the FY11 funding that was recommended by the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities (which was based on an estimate) and the funds that the City received. Planning staff recently received an inquiry on the availability of funds for access projects. Together with Planning staff, the Committee was asked to establish a policy for handling incoming requests for CDBG access funds. A couple options were discussed:

1. A Committee review of projects that are scheduled to receive access funds in FY12-FY15, with the consideration of 'moving up' projects that fall within the \$8,000 range.
2. The opening of a new application period.
3. The consideration of applications on a 'rolling basis' or as they come in to the Committee.

Planning staff recommended that the Committee review access projects for FY12-FY15 and consider 'moving up' projects that fall within the \$8,000 range. This option would place a priority on the applications that were submitted as part of the five year Consolidated Plan and would delay the extensive process of application review and deliberation that the Committee spent the past winter working on. In FY12 a new application period could be opened up to City Departments and non-profits.

After an extended discussion, the Mayor's Committee decided to consider applications on a 'rolling basis.' G. Plante moved that requests for CDBG Access funds were considered on a rolling basis. J. Brown seconded the motion, and the Committee voted 5-0-0 to establish a 'rolling application' policy.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.