

**Minutes**  
**Town of Acton**  
**Commission on Disabilities**  
**February 16, 2016**  
**9:30 am, Town Hall, Room 126**

**Members Present:** Madeleine Harvey, Cindy Patton, Lisa Franklin and Nancy Corcoran (left at 11:40 am)

**Member Absent:** Danny Factor

**Associate Members Present:** Leslie Johnson and Joan Burrows

**Guests:** Kevin Antonelli and Justin Brown

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**Call to Order:** 9:40 am

**Citizens' Concerns:** None

**Announcements:**

- Franny Osman will continue to be our liaison to the Board of Selectmen.
- CAT (Cross Acton Transit) bus's ribbon cutting was January 29<sup>th</sup>.
- The South Acton train station's ribbon cutting was January 30<sup>th</sup>.
- We may have a variance at the next meeting
- Mady participated in the DPC (Disability Policy Consortium) monthly conference call. One of the points made was for information on APS (Accessible Pedestrian Signals) from towns.
- Lisa talked to Frank Ramsbottom (Head of Building Department). She wants a meeting with Frank and Andrea Ristine (Head of Municipal Property) to talk about Acton's transition plan.
- The CAT bus will have an accessible lift by July 2016.
- Frank introduced us to Kim Bricker the new secretary in the building department.

**Board of Selectmen's (BOS) report:** None

**Review of January 19<sup>th</sup> minutes:** Mady made a motion to accept the January 19 minutes with corrections, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Nancy, unanimous.

**COD's column in The Beacon.** Joan submitted her first COD column to The Beacon. It was very good, but, unfortunately, it contained some incorrect information. In the future, Cindy and Mady will both review the column before it is published.

**Updates:** Danny sent detailed notes via Mady.

- **Acton-Boxborough Schools (ABS):** Lisa said that all schools need to have a transition plan. Now that we are looking at schools we should be finding out where their transition plans are. Does the regional school system need their own transition plan? The school consultants have presented a report about conditions at the schools to the AB School Committee. Accessibility is mentioned as one of seven areas to be considered in capital improvements to the buildings. Renovations to the Douglas School (to bring it up to code) would approach the cost of a new building. Danny said that it is clear that the COD has played an important role in highlighting the access issues in the schools. JD Head (Director of Facilities for ABS) has not contacted Danny about site visits for the other schools.  
**Town Meeting Accessibility:** There have been no response to Danny's letter and he is concerned. Nancy said that we should write Peter Ashton, who is running for Town Moderator, to bring him up-to-date on access issues at Town Meeting. Lisa made a motion that we should write to Peter Ashton to update him on access issues at Town Meeting, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mady, unanimous. Danny requested that he be given permission to right a short letter to the original committee to ask for a response. If there is no response, he stated that our only recourse would be to take the issue to the BOS.
- **33 Nagog Park:** Danny and Cindy made a site visit. Present at the site visit were applicant Ken Roberts, Kristen Alexander, Matthew Selby and Frank Ramsbottom from the town. The same problems were confirmed: an 11% grade making access to the only entrance inaccessible, one inaccessible bathroom and improvements needed in the parking lot. Danny added this information to an e-mail already approved by the COD. The e-mail will be reviewed by Frank and then will be sent to town officials, advising that the lease should not be renewed unless all the deficiencies are corrected.
- **Teamworks:** The AAB (Architectural Access Board) has not responded to Frank as to whether there is a need for a time variance. Teamworks needs a time variance in order to extend their installation of the new ramp until April. Danny will contact the AAB directly if he does not receive a response.
- **Municipal properties/veteran's affairs building accessibility:** Cindy, Danny and Frank Ramsbottom conducted a site visit where they found that signage needs to be changed to make the lift fully accessible. Danny is following up with Frank in getting these changes made and will report back next month.
- **Additional handicapped parking at Junior High for March elections:** Kevin spoke to the town clerk about additional parking for the election. She said that the schools were in charge of that and he should call JD Head (Director of Facilities).
- **CAT bus:** Joan attended the meeting of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and is pleased to report that a wheelchair lift will be installed on the CAT bus in July.
- **Report on meeting with The Beacon editor et al, about writing about persons with disabilities:** Lisa sent an e-mail outlining information from the meeting. There were reporters and the editor at the meeting. If the person wants to use terms like suffering or victim you can quote the person directly.

- **Kids on the Block (KOB):** Cindy has an appointment with Mr. Shen on February 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- **Update on Welcome Packet/Resource Guide:** Leslie showed us a mock-up of the new guide. Leslie wants to keep it simple so we can update it easily. Cindy needs to update the progress chart for this project.
- **Update on By-laws retyping:** Kevin asked questions pertaining to his re-typing of the COD bylaws. Do we go with the 1973 504 Rehab Act? Yes, Lisa said that that is where most of the legislation comes from. Kevin asked other questions and was informed on what to do.

**Justin Brown from Recovery Learning Community, Independent Living Center:**

Justin came to speak with us about mental illness. He lives with a diagnosis of bipolar illness. There are six Recovery Learning Communities across the state. It is also part of Northeast Independent Living Center, which provides access for people with physical disabilities and to people with mental illness. They want everyone to have access to mental health services and to be a valued member of society. The COD should approach employers in Acton about people coming in to the workforce after handling their mental illness. Leslie's experience with the Club Houses and Elm Brook Place was discussed. She went through MRC (Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission) to get employment, but does not recommend this. Leslie started her own business. She needed to be her own advocate. We asked Justin about resources and the help people know how to handle PCA's (Personal Care Attendants). Justin wanted us to hear that we are starting to turn the corner for people with mental illnesses from both sides. He suggested that we pick some issue that is important to the Acton community and have a two way conversation with stakeholders. NAMI's (National Alliance on Mental Illnesses) CEO's (Corporate Executive Officer) Against Stigma work to support their employees and reduce the stigma that can accompany people with mental illness and reduce presentism (people at work but not working to capacity because of dealing with their mental illness). Some employers refer employees for counseling. CEO's have to step forward and start a positive culture in their work place. A recent Police Forum in Acton dealt with mental health. The police chiefs felt overwhelmed and untrained when dealing with people with mental illness. The police and fire departments said that they need more training. There needs to be two kinds of conversations. One that is public and one that is private with stakeholders. Advertising something that resonates with people with mental illness may get them to contact the COD. Karen Orr is the forensic mental health worker from the Department of Mental Health. A large number of people with mental illness do not have contact with the police. They are afraid to talk to doctors about this. Seniors with mental illness are underserved. Justin said that turn out for a forum can be a problem. Lisa would like to talk with stakeholders privately to find out what are the concerns of the mentally ill in the Acton community. Justin will send us a list of resources. Leslie would like to have an informational meeting starting off with facts and myths. Jason can help us set up an informational meeting (who to invite, panels, etc.). A local filmmaker produced a movie about her bipolar disorder. The film cost about \$250. Ted Talk documentaries have been done around mental illness. Perhaps we want to do four small events. There is an Opioid epidemic, mostly in the Eastern part of the state. It is an urgent issue. We should focus on people with mental health challenges. Eighty percent of people with

mental health illness also have substance abuse issues. We should focus on mental health issues. Lisa said we should work with NAMI and Elliott Mental Health Clinic to get the word out about events.

Nancy had to leave at 11:40.

**Further discussions relating to Justin Brown's comments:** We need to wait until Danny is with us to list projects.

**Set Agenda for March:**

Updates on: AB schools, Town Meeting, Teamworks, Parking at Junior High for elections, Resource Guide, 33 Nagog, By-laws retyping,

KOB

Mental health

Variance

Elections and Town Meeting

Letter to the Beacon about accommodations for Town Meeting

New housing

DocuShare

Debrief MOD meeting

**Set dates for self-education topic (mental illness):** Our self-education meeting will be held on May 18 from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. Leslie will lead part of the discussion.

**Adjourn:** 12:15 pm

Respectfully submitted, Cindy Patton (Secretary)