

Planning & Sustainability • City of Northampton

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Disability Commission Minutes Tuesday September 13, 2022 4:00 PM

Zoom Meeting

Members

Jeremy Macomber-Dubs, Chair <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Councilor Marianne LaBarge <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nathan Chung, Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Emma Cornwell, Vice Chair <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vacant <input type="checkbox"/>	Kathy Murri <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Linda Kakos <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Marilyn Clare <input type="checkbox"/>	
Rodney Kunath <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michael Morton <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Public:

Amy Sugihara (Florence), Ben Kalish (Forbes Library), Carolyn Misch (Director of Planning and Sustainability), Claire Troiano (Interpreter for Rodney Kunath), Mary Jo Stanley, Meg Bandarra

1. Jeremy Macomber-Dubs, Chair, gave notice that the meeting was being recorded. Everyone in the Commission except for Marilyn Clare was present. Clare Troiano was Rodney Kunath's interpreter.
2. Amy Sugihara spoke and asked for support for the accessible unpaved trail at Rocky Hill Greenway which currently has no defined plans even though funds have been approved. Amy asked the Disability Commission (DC) to support the trail by asking the Planning Office to come up with plans.
3. Councilor Marianne LaBarge moved to approve the July 12th 2022 minutes and Jeremy seconded it. During the vote, Emma Cornwell pointed out that item #6 in the minutes omitted her recommendation to put accessible parking lots near the Roost cafe. Councilor Marianne LaBarge suggested an amendment. All voted yes with the amendment suggestion from Emma.
4. The Disability Commission was supposed to meet with the Building Commissioner, Jonathan Flagg, about the accessibility at business in the City. The Commission tabled this item because Jonathan Flagg was not at the meeting. Jeremy and Councilor LaBarge recommended putting it on the next month's agenda
5. Carolyn Misch, the Director of Planning & Sustainability, introduced herself.



Jeremy suggested starting with the agenda items. Carolyn started talking about the Massachusetts Office of Disability (MOD) grant due at the end of September.

- The City of Northampton ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan has items related to municipal building physical improvements. To utilize the grant for such improvements, design work needs to be done first. Carolyn wanted to ask the Disability Commission (DC) to authorize the use of Accessible Parking Fine (APF) fund for design costs. Current order allows using the fund for assisted listening and sidewalk accessibility, but it is not general enough to allow broader design use for the transition plan. Councilor LaBarge talked about the past lack of funds and her working with another councilor and the mayor to develop the APF account. Councilor LaBarge asked about the cost and purpose of the design work. Carolyn clarified that she is asking for a new order to allow for a broader scope of uses to include the design which involves hiring an architect. The design work will enable getting the MOD grant to update the door openers and services desks for the VA/retirement offices, City Clerk, the Municipal Office, which are in the transition plan. The estimated design cost is \$12,000 and the MOD grant can provide up to \$250,000 for implementation. The APF has about \$40,000.
- Councilor LaBarge voiced support for the project but wanted to know about the cost and backup plans if the grant does not come through. Jeremy expressed support for the project but felt that door openers are the bare minimum and costs should not come out of the DC. Carolyn clarified that the project is for interior door openers since exterior doors already have them. The request is to use about \$12,000 out of the \$40,000 in the APF. Commission members Jeremy, Councilor LaBarge, and Emma brought up the importance of sidewalk snow removal. They wanted to explore Amherst's equipment which clears up about 60% of the snow and working with Senior Center and students to clear up the sidewalks. They had cost concerns about the proposed project taking away from ASL interpreters and other needs. Carolyn answered that enforcing sidewalk snow clearing by the property owners and finding services is important because it is the owners' responsibility. The City got grant for downtown snow sidewalk removal equipment and is working to procure it. The City cannot use funds for clearing snow off private properties, which will expend the funds very rapidly.
- Carolyn emphasized the proposed MOD projects are directly taken from the Transition Plan that was approved by the Disability Commission. The DC can put design cost caps because the Design

Cost is a much bigger ask than the interpretation cost. Because of the grant deadline, the DC needed to vote during this meeting to vote in favor of the order to include design cost as an allowed use of the APF. The Planning Office did not get to this topic in the last meeting because it was not sure whether the MOD grant would fund design costs or not.

- Carolyn read the order that was displayed on the Zoom meeting screen as well. Commission members noted that the new order does not mention any specific costs. Carolyn clarified that the order is not about committing funds to a specific project but about giving the DC the authority to direct the funds and expand the allowed use of APF to include design. With the new order, the fund will be managed by the Planning Office under the direction of the DC. The DC can decide how the money will be spending. Councilor LaBarge asked the DC to give permission to the Planning Office to start working with the architect to get the exact design cost, so that the DC can figure out how much cap to place. The Commission discussed whether placing a cap now is necessary, and Carolyn did not think so. Councilor LaBarge and Jeremy added that placing a cap is not needed. Jeremy said that the DC should not be the only one paying for disability needs and cautioned about using funds. Ben Kalish from the Forbes Library commented about the value of checking into the balance of APF and past use history, which might not be available due to the newness of the fund.
- Councilor LaBarge made the motion to approve what Carolyn proposed so that the City Council can approve the order, which will allow the Planning Office to get the design cost estimate from an architect. Jeremy seconded the motion. All voted yes unanimously.
- Councilor LaBarge asked about how to get more funding for sidewalks that are in very poor shape. Carolyn answered that a consulting agency did a thorough categorizing of sidewalk conditions to help prioritize improvements. Chapter 90 money can be used for sidewalks even though they were frequently used for roads in the past. Many sidewalks during the summer were improved using traffic Mitigation funds and different grants. Since the sidewalks are under DPW, grant programs have to work with DPW. Councilor LaBarge described her site visit with Keith Benoit to sidewalks at Florence Road in Florence Heights that are in poor shape. She will meet with Donna the DPW director. Rodney had some audio issues prior to making a comment about it being a good thing to have a list to help decide which sidewalks are priorities. Ben Kalish shared the link to the list: <https://www.northamptonma.gov/1802/Pavement->

[Sidewalks](#). Carolyn departed.

6. According to the City ordinance, at least one member of the DC must be a family member of someone with a disability. Nathan requested people to email this information to him or Keith for privacy and legal reasons rather than speaking during the meeting.
7. Nathan Chung asked the DC if they would prefer to meeting at the normal meeting time next month, October 11th at 4:00 PM with alternate staff Nathan (himself) or meeting the following week on October 18th with regular staff Keith Benoit. The DC voted the meeting to be on 11th with Nathan. Michael motioned it and Emma seconded.
8. For Next Meeting
 - City Staff will check with Jonathan Flagg about being at the next Disability Commission meeting.
 - City Staff, will find out about the current balance of APF and expense history.
 - City Staff, will find out the time it would take to get the exact design cost estimate for the MOD project. Also find the time and cost estimate for actual design and implementation if possible.
 - City Staff will bring the map and list of sidewalk conditions.
9. Meeting was adjourned with a motion by Councilor LaBarge and seconded by Michael with a unanimous vote at 5:28 PM