

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT of RACIAL and SOCIAL JUSTICE
KATJANA BALLANTYNE, MAYOR**

COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

September 10, 2024

Regularly Monthly Meeting

Present:

Staff Liaison:

Adrienne Pomeroy, ADA Coordinator

Commissioners:

Holly Simone, Chair

Harriotte Ranvig, Vice Chair

Sheila Tracy, Treasurer

Brian C. Postlewaite, Director of Engineering

Pauline Downing

Helen Corrigan

Laurie Brandt

M. Michael Shaps

Nick Altschuller

Ingrid Schneider

Deborah Haber

Associate Commissioners:

Frank Lee

Guests: Kristen Strezo, City Councilor at Large, William Burnley, City Councilor at Large, Jesse Clingan, Ward 4 City Councilor, Silvia Bravo, Tufts Student, Parker Garlough, Somerville Times

CART Provider: Saavy Alhambra, Partners Interpreting

Not Present:

Commissioners:

Murshid Buwembo

Associated Commissioners:

Ginny Alverson

Meeting Called to Order at 7:09 P.M.

Meeting Notes were taken by M. Michael Shaps

- Holly went over introductions, roll call, and agenda. Harriotte went over meeting norms- say names before speaking, not talk over anyone, leave space, and pay attention. Michael Shaps will do minutes today which is legal validation of the work we do.
- Holly- Project groups- Create **Legislative Matters**- someone with a pulse on City Hall. Helen would like to talk about being on it. Council meetings, Finance committee. Anything that impacts Persons with Disabilities. **Mental Health**- Harriotte will lead that group. Michael wondered why Harriotte was

asked and Michael would be heading the group. Anyone interested let Michael know. Laurie is interested. **Education-** Deborah will be the Head of Education. Ingrid will join her.

- Holly proposed to change meetings from Tuesday at 7:00 to Wednesday at 6:00. Michael seconded it. Pauline has to have dinner ready and it will be difficult for her. Harriette mentioned that some committee meetings happen at that time. Ingrid loves it. Adrienne needs to check with Tufts about the room. Laurie has a meeting at that time weekly. Thursdays are out because that is when council meetings. Holly wonders if we should do 6:30. Helen suggested that the 1st and 3rd Thursdays are free b/c they meet on the 2nd and 4th. Laurie teaches a class on Thursday. Monday was suggested. Ingrid has difficulties with Mondays and Tuesdays due to childcare. Holly rescinded the motion due to difficulties. Adrienne will check other evenings with Tufts for room use.

- Disability Pride month- Holly showed and described pictures of the events we did. Someone from another city came to the Library Family Day because they heard of it online. Murshid read from a book. Michael read from two children's books and had his own authored middle-grade book as well. A young girl who spoke Spanish was there. She got books written in Spanish. The Flag raising was incredible. Michael lent his Disability flag for it. The PSAs were done with the city. Art Fest was shown with the booth. Deborah painted hearts on people's faces. We were well received. People had access to a braille embosser on cups that changed color.

- We did not have an owl and people online had difficulty hearing since the volume came from people's computers.

- Accessible Swings—They hired a new designer, and we will send them some updates. In October, Holly will have good news to share with us.

- Student Scholarships- we sent out 9 or 10 checks out. We are waiting for 2 students to send in their information.

- Harriotte Ranvig- We will have a training hopefully soon to use the new braille embosser. It is here at RSJ.

- Holly and Helen met with Suzanne at Traffic and Parking. Helen noted that there will not be any way for T and P can ticket parking spaces on private land. T and P don't make decisions about where parking spaces will be. Brian Postlewaite- locations for the parking spaces is a multi-agency decision. Public accessible spaces are not usually done unless there is work being done in that area and then the decision will be made if it is needed. When we make them accessible, we need to make sure they meet all the requirements or they aren't built. Holly stated that there should be at least 5% in all areas. Harriotte asked Brian- (Harriette is better after COVID and pneumonia) There were a couple of spots in front of Harvard Vanguard but the bike path is now there and it is not clear if people can stop there. Is it acceptable for a car to stop and unload someone in the bike lane? Brian- He doesn't have the plans and regulations in front of him. He recollects that that area is a bus lane and not a bike lane even though bikes can use it. He doesn't know if there is a time limit. Service rides can stop there to pick up and drop off people. Brian- if they are there for more than 5 minutes, they will get a ticket. Holly talked about statistics from 2022 on the number of parking spots vs ones that are accessible. 25,000 spots and 207 are accessible. Michael thought that was awful. Holly agreed that we all feel that way. Holly suggested another group on **Parking-** Sheila and Helen said yes to being on the group.

- Councilor Willy Burnley, Jr.- He put forward an order from the council to the staff to look at the zoning across the city and how to make things more accessible. He thinks that not having housing and aging in place, and housing that can meet the needs of their resident is counter-productive. (He's being diplomatic with that word.)

- Crystal H (citizen). They have been working with an architect on their two-family home to have an elevator and in two years they have been trying to get a permit. The shaft can only be in one place and the house needs to be higher to account for it. They have spoken with their neighbors. They have gotten some pushback from the abutters who have spoken to them through their lawyers. The price is increasing... They have spent \$60,000 and in that \$12,000 in the past month. They need help. They feel that people in their own houses should have access to an elevator for accessibility. It is very upsetting to what they are going through. Holly also had to get an elevator for her house. Sheila- did the abutters object because of the height change? Crystal- The original proposal was to increase the house to eight feet but that was changed to a four-foot change which is still unacceptable to their neighbors. They are asking for a variance from the city to do this. Nick- is the objection aesthetics or something else? Crystal has no idea what their Objection is because it keeps changing. Jesse- This conversation needs some education on zoning. The zoning laws were changed a few years ago. It deals with everything that needs to change. Any variants need to go to the zoning board. The neighbors can't stop the zoning board from approving it. Zoning is a beast. Crystal is aware of only one house that has an elevator added in the past decade. They have talked to people about two possible solutions. An item that can be added to a building- not a lot of mention in the zoning that can be clarified. Also, ½ stories is not a specific situation to one house. How can the city incentivize people to do this? Not everyone in the household wants to publicly identify their disability. Harriotte has been in Somerville since 1983. She told us a story of how hard it was to get an elevator at Harvard Vanguard in Davis Square. Nick wanted to know if he could go talk to the neighbors. Holly said that he would be going as a citizen. Jesse suggested he not do it since they are dealing with lawyers. Jesse also responded to Harriotte's question saying that the zoning board considers everything, even the neighbors' opinions. Harriotte said that she had gone to that zoning board meeting and only 5 people abstained and all the others were very positive. Crystal said that only one person on the board was going to vote for it due to the neighbor's disagreement. Somerville would do well to figure out how to address this kind of problem for future situations. Ingrid- "I'm so so so so sorry that this whole experience has caused you to do that Somerville should try better and it always comes down to the engineers and this should not be happening. Thank you to sharing, I know this is so hard, and Thank you." Laurie- I was going to say the same thing. This is exhausting and maddening and you are only looking for equality of life." Deborah- Will it be helpful for the city council to make a resolution that Somerville wants equity for all its citizens when it deals with ADA compliance and resident needs?
- Sheila has compared 2 years of fiscal expenses. Refer to the report and transcript for full details. Holly noted that since the amount of accessible parking spaces may be lessened we might lose some income, so we should be careful with our spending. Holly will send out some events that she will send out to see who can go to them. Harriette motioned that we end the meeting. Pauline seconded.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:02 P.M.