



Commission on Disabilities

Minutes

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

10 am

Virtual Meeting

The meeting was virtual, at
<https://actonma.zoom.us/j/94313570425>

Attendees:

Members: Lisa Franklin, Co-Chair; Franny Osman; Leslie Johnson; Melissa Wingfield.

Visitors: Julie Pierce-Onos, Economic Development; Wanjiku Gachugi, Diversity Equity and Inclusion. Sam Gould, Open Door Theater and Ben Liebowitz, Open Door Theater.

Select Board Liaison: Jim Snyder-Grant.

Public Concerns:

Lisa had trouble finding a new doctor who would take her on at Acton Medical. She suspects discrimination and that doctors at Acton Medical are uncomfortable working with people with disabilities

Announcements:

Tom Moburg, the Building Commissioner, is leaving.

Franny reported that Emerson Hospital has launched its "FindHelp" app that lists resources by town.

Liaison Reports:

Report by Lisa F. on CODA: Some towns use the **fines** from handicapped parking violations for disability-related work. We could access our fines and we could raise the fine, if we chose to, though it would require a Town Meeting vote.

Also from CODA, they ask if our town has a **written policy on field trips** making sure transportation is accessible, with all students on the same vehicle, and that the trip is accessible in all ways.

Report by Leslie on Adaptive Bikes at NARA Park: We must get the word out before spring about the three adaptive bikes for rent at NARA. The new recumbent bike that was bought with funds from COD, which is a trike with a higher seat; a side-by-side bike, donated; another recumbent trike that is lower to the ground. It was suggested to let senior centers in the area know about these bikes.

Select Board Liaison report (Jim Snyder-Grant): The Community Preservation Committee's decisionmaking is underway. One of the applications is for accessibility for the Woodlawn Cemetery Chapel. The Select Board is working on a draft warrant for the May 1 Town Meeting. Applications for 2023 voting by mail have been sent to residents.

Minutes of December meeting: Lisa moves, Melissa seconds, COD votes 3-0 to accept the minutes.

New Business:

We had a discussion with Economic Development Director Julie Pierce Onos and Diversity Equity and Inclusion Director Wanjiku Gachugi about how we can encourage and support businesses in town in general, and especially around inclusion and accessibility. Julie liked the idea of our Dining Guide, and is hoping to create some sort of business resource guide virtually. She can help us contact restaurants to submit updated factual descriptions and can partner somewhat to help us create a new dining guide online. **Maybe post on town website?** Leslie says there are a lot of sites already in existence that people can use to find out info about businesses. Julie says many there are restaurants in town that have "purple seating" places where a dining area is set aside for people who need a less stimulating environment. We will continue this discussion and choose a project next month. Wanjiku is reaching out to find some disability resources to help her department make sure needs of people with disabilities is covered. Mention was made of a state government application that can run through town websites to make sure it is electronically accessible. Again people commented that finding the CoD on Acton's town website is laborious and confusing.

Two representatives from **Open Door Theater**, Sam Gould and Ben Liebowitz, made a presentation describing all the ways that theater group make sure ALL who want to participate in productions onstage or behind the curtain are able to do so. Performances are also accessible in several different ways for audience

members. They discussed appropriate language for when talking to or about people with various disabilities.

Update on how people get home from Emerson Hospital at off hours, following a meeting a couple of years ago with Concord COD about this need. Franny shared an email she got from Kelsey Magnuson, the Community Benefits Manager at Emerson Hospital who has convened a Transportation Work Group for a couple of years. There isn't a big program that we can advertise widely, but it appears that Emerson has found ways to help people who are stuck in off hours and cannot afford an Uber or Lyft. This is that email:

"Here is a message we would like to send to the group who was discussing rides home from the ED, could you please send this to them and CC me?

Emerson Health is committed to improving the health of our community, to enhancing the quality of life for residents in the region and supporting future social and economic well-being. We know transportation to and from medical appointments including leaving the emergency department is a major health issue in our communities. As stated in our 2021 Strategic Implementation Plan it is our goal to collaborate with community partners to expand accessible, affordable and flexible transportation to essential services. At this time, Emerson does have a very small amount of funding to provide emergency rides home. This is reserved for those who don't have any other options and can't afford to pay for rides. We are not able to openly advertise these funds for rides home from the Emergency Department or from in-patient units at the hospital. We continue to explore options for future funding to address these needs.

In our commitment to addressing health needs, Emerson does not want community members delaying care due to transportation. Our team is committed to supporting patients' transportation needs by staying aware of community transportation options and being connected to various micro-transit options (Uber, Lyft and Taxi services).

In collaboration with community partners, Emerson has created a transportation resource website, which we hope will provide education and support to our communities. Please check it out at www.EmersonHealth.org/Transportation

Thank you,

Kelsey Magnuson
Community Benefits and Events Manager, Emerson Health"

We reviewed how the COD responds to incoming emails, with the chair responding and letting the others know they have. On certain topics, other members of the Commission will step in and respond, with communication with the chair.

Presentation by Sam Gould, President of the Board of Directors of Open Door Theater, and a member of Open Door Theater, Ben Liebowitz. They discussed ways of teaching about, relating to, and communicating about people with disabilities, and the ways Open Door Theater has made its productions, on and off stage and in the audience, accessible to a variety of disabilities.

We adjourned at 12:01 pm.

Acronyms:

CODA Commission on Disabilities Association (Mass.)

COA Acton Council on Aging

TAC Acton Transportation Advisory Committee

SB Select Board

SMOC Southern Middlesex Opportunity Council, Inc.

VCC Volunteer Coordinating Council

The listed agenda items are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair. *Not all items may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. Please allow advance notice. Send an e-mail to manager@actonma.gov or call the Town Manager's Office, or contact the Chair Lisa Franklin, by emailing lisafranklin58@gmail.com.*