



Public Health
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CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

14 April 2020

Regular Monthly Meeting

Present: Bonnie Denis, Chair (remote)
Colin Killick, Commissioner (remote)
Finn Gardner, Commissioner (remote)
Brian Postlewaite, Secretary, Assist. Director of Engineering (remote)

Absent: none

Guests: Lian Guertin, Resident (remote)
Jewel Lin, Resident (remote)
Ali Kleyman, OSPCD Transportation Planner (remote)

Note: Due to COVID-19 Shutdown, all attendees were remote via GoTo Meeting.

General Business

- Meeting commenced on 14 April at 6:35pm.
- Introductions
- Meeting minutes approvals:
 - February 2020 – approved unanimously.
 - March 2020 – approved unanimously.

Guest Presentation

- Ali Kleyman is one of the City liaisons for the recently created PTAC (Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee). She wanted to introduce herself and PTAC. There may be some future possibilities for collaboration. The PTAC is particularly interested in sidewalks and how they impact the mobility of People with Disabilities.

Chair's Report

- None.

Director's Report

- None.

Old Business

- Grocery delivery systems not allowing SNAP payments have become substantially more complicated for People with Disabilities during the present COVID-19 Shutdown.
- People with Disabilities tend to have reduced mobility that limits their ability to access grocery stores, thus increasing the relative benefit of grocery delivery services. At the same time People with Disabilities tend to have reduced financial resources, increasing their reliance on the SNAP program. However, there are no grocery delivery services in Massachusetts that offers SNAP payments.
- The present COVID-19 Shutdown has further complicated grocery access for People with Disabilities:
 - The long outdoor lines exacerbate the mobility challenges for People with Disabilities attempting to grocery shop.
 - Many People with Disabilities do not have visually identified disabilities, and thus are not afforded more expedient access or access during times reserved for high-risk individuals.
 - Reduced grocery supplies further constrain the ability of those with dietary restrictions to feed themselves.
 - Available foods often require more cooking, which is often more challenging for People with Disabilities.
 - Reusable bags are often essential shopping aides for People with Disabilities, which limits access when grocery stores discourage or forbid reusable bags.

- Trader Joe's was observed to be a grocery store that is handling the situation well. While Star Market, in Porter Sq, is a grocery store that is handling the situation poorly.
- Shape-Up Somerville provides mobile farmers' markets that accept SNAP payments throughout the City. Could the City expand this service to include more general groceries to serve People with Disabilities?
- VOTE: The Commission unanimously voted to write and deliver a letter to the Mayor, copying Councilors, Health & Human Services and Shape-Up Somerville, before the May meeting. The Chair will edit, sign and deliver such letter to include the following key topics:
 - Request the City to coordinate with grocery retailers in the City to increase access to their stores for People with Disabilities, including reduced line waiting during regular hours, access to store during times for high-risk individuals, and/or curb-side grocery pickup.
 - Request the City to expand the City's Mobile Farmers' Market to include general grocery items to better serve People with Disabilities who use SNAP.
 - Request the City to develop a program to match People with Disabilities with shopping assistance, similar to the operation of the teen snow shoveling program.
- Discussion of action items, annual priorities and subcommittees tabled to next month.

New Business

- The COVID-19 Shutdown has created to additional challenges for People with Disabilities. The Commission made the following observations:
 - Transit frequency of busses and trains has reduced resulting in more crowded conditions and risk of infections, which People with Disabilities have more difficulty guarding against.
 - Taxis and ride hailing services are somewhat safer from potential infection, but are also more costly.
 - If permitted by the City, Street Closures to motor vehicles, to allow increased social distancing by pedestrians and cyclists, could decrease mobility for those reliant upon automobiles for transportation. The Commission would consider this acceptable if only side streets were considered, and then only to prioritize cyclists

- and pedestrians and allowing motor vehicle access to abutting properties.
- People with Disabilities have lost many of their formal services and help. These often include help with cleaning, cooking, trash-pickup, etc. Many do not have informal networks that can help them during these times.
 - The Commission is concerned that nursing homes in the City may not be communicating transparently to the City and relatives of residents about COVID-19 infections, deaths and testing at their facilities.
 - The Commission is interested in understanding how thoroughly the City's emergency response personnel are being tested for COVID-19.
- VOTE: The Commission unanimously voted to write and deliver a letter to the Mayor, copying Councilors, and Health & Human Services, before the May meeting. The Chair will edit, sign and deliver such letter to include the following key topics:
 - Request the City update the Commission on the nursing home conditions, as noted above.
 - Request the City update the Commission on COVID-19 testing of emergency personnel, as noted above.
 - The Engineering and Mobility Divisions are proposing a bus/bike lane on College Ave on the Davis Square bound side of the street adjacent to the West Branch Library. The bus/bike lane will displace the parking lane during morning rush hour. The project team wants to understand whether an accessible (HP) parking spot on the library side of the street that is impacted by the bus/bike lane, or a 24 hr exclusive accessible space on the opposite side of the street would be preferred; there is a crosswalk at this location. The Commission would prefer the 24 hr exclusive space.
 - Hall St will be reconstructed and requires an MAAB variance due to existing, mature trees on one side of the street. The opposite side of the street will be widened and include a fully accessible route. Would the committee support this variance? The Commission recommends a midblock crosswalk to facilitate added flexibility to avoid obstructions along the single accessible route.

Motion to Adjourn Meeting at 8:30pm; passed unanimously.