

Burlington Committee on Accessibility
Wednesday, February 20, 6-8 pm
Burlington Police Department Community Room

Committee Members Present:
Ned Holt, Ralph Montefusco, Bradley Stephenson, Russ Scully

Committee Members Not Present:
Ardelle Cabre, Ron Redmond, Paul Sisson, Patrick Standen, Shelley Waterman

Others Present:
Santina Leporati, Mark Irish, Bernie (from school board), Olivia Smithhamond,

1 - Announcements, public comment, approval of minutes (10 minutes)

Ralph acknowledged that there was no quorum and no official decisions could be made. Everyone in attendance introduced himself or herself.

Ralph announced that the Burlington Accessibility Group (BAG) was meeting tomorrow (February 21, 2013) from 10am to 12pm. He also announced that the MS society would be at the Statehouse on March 14.

Kesha brought up the Public Investment Action Process in which the City is trying to figure out which projects to fund. She suggested that an employee working on the process could come in and talk about the issue of accessibility in accordance with the projects that would be funded. That employee would most likely be Nate Wildfire.

Ralph agreed that it would be good to have an interaction with Nate. Especially with projects having to do with the waterfront. Kesha states that the construction of a universal playground would probably be one of the projects.

Kesha asked if there were any public comments. Santina started mentioning certain things she would like to be considered for the strategy and plan. She began to discuss the importance of having detours be accessible. She said that sidewalks needed to have enough space for someone with a disability to be able to pass by. She incorporated that awareness needs to be worked on as well so that residents know to not obstruct the sidewalks.

Ralph advised that we should continue to talk about adding different strategies when the committee began to discuss the strategy and plan.

2 - Debrief from Public Forum, review of email responses (20 minutes)

Ralph brought the email from K.K. Wilder. He understands her frustration and is glad that we know have her complaints and grievances on paper so that it can be documented. Her issues could be incorporated into the strategy and plan. Ralph was glad that people were encouraged to speak out.

Bradley stated that the committee was created to serve the residents who are experiencing problems.

Elaine Katz's email was discussed and the issue of inspecting all disabled spots in the City. Disabled spots should be ADA compliant. The issue of the difficulty of deploying ramps was brought up as well. The importance of having snow banks cleared was mentioned as well.

Brad mentioned the problem of accessing the water from the waterfront. Ralph said that facilities in general are not accessible in the waterfront.

Brad stated that the committee should be focused on the grievances of the disabled in the City so that we can fix the problems that are hindering people.

Ralph commented that it all depends on the priorities of the City and its departments.

Russ suggested a tool that could help track of issues. Also, to have it be interactive so that residents know that the City is paying attention to the issues.

Ned responded saying that there is a program like that. It is in the system and all a person needs to do is call. It is an internal system, not public yet. People just need to be aware of this system.

Kesha stated that "See, click, Fix" is used. However, the new program needs to be more sophisticated and that is being worked on now.

Ned added that one could either make a phone call or state their complaint on the website.

Ralph spoke about the importance of hearing from private business just as much as the people.

Russ agreed that it was a great system but it needs to be publicized more. Ned said that the program might be shown on Channel 17 tonight.

Ralph described that city government was basically a complaint system. He suggested that the committee could be the recipients of the complaints and it could be passed on relevant departments. The purpose is to be an interactive face.

Brad said it is important to publicize the committee meetings as well. Kesha reassured that everyone who emailed her received a response back.

3 - Discussion of DPW accessibility efforts led by Ned (20 minutes)

Ned began to discuss the “Vermont Access Rules” and explained that ADA standards for the City are more stringent than those of the State. There are exceptions to the rules.

Ralph asked what the process was for something to be ADA compliant.

Ned explained that the City has an internal program that deal with anything from potholes to dead animals and trees obstruction streets or yards. He referenced how K.K. Wilder’s complaints were put into the system today, as soon as he was aware of them. The process is that a complaint needs to be acted on by 30 days time. If nothing is done, then the complaint moves to the next person in power and so on.

Ralph asked how the priorities are determined.

Ned said that he could not really answer that question because there are many factors that determine priorities. He then went to read verbatim the section on traffic signs...He emphasized that Burlington is trying to improve and become as accessible as possible.

Ralph asked how the work on Cherry St. was being planned and who is the person that decides where things go.

Ned said that he was involved in making sure that everything built is ADA compliant. He is indirectly involved by over seeing the different projects.

Ralph stated that the committee needed to become more involved in different projects around the City to make sure they are accessible. The committee needs to weigh in and overlook on the designs as well.

Ned said that he would push the education piece to his department and also talk more about making the waterfront more accessible.

Ralph asked if Ned was going to be the committee’s contact person.

Ned agreed and also stated that there needed to be an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure)

Brad thanked Ned for his personal commitment for the various issues and asked if there was any way to make his job easier. Ned said that helping bring awareness so that people can directly call customer service is the biggest help the committee could give.

Kesha asked Ned how he prioritizes and if accessibility has its separate category or if it is a part of public safety. Ned answered that every issue is a matter of public safety. Everything is categorized but accessibility is right at the top.

Ralph brought to attention the issue of street signals and people with disabilities not having enough time to walk across the street. Ned said that there is a call for compromise with those situations and education. For example, educating people so that they do not start walking when the numbers start counting down.

Ralph also stated that changing traffic lights can cause an enormous amount of traffic in Burlington and it could lead to traffic in other cities as well.

Olivia said that another issue is that cars obstruct crosswalks, which makes it difficult for someone to walk by. Kesha replied and said that it is a matter of community climate culture and awareness.

Ralph said that grievances and public awareness seem to be the big topics that are brought up the most. He also thanked Ned for his continued hard work.

4 - Final approval of Mission Statement (10 minutes)

Ralph stated that it could be approved via email.

Brad discussed the last sentence. Kesha suggested the terminology “strong advocacy for.”

5 - Review of plan, possible break-out groups (40 minutes)

Santina reiterated her first point on construction detours. She talked about prioritizing accessibility near public transportation. She also pointed out the importance of having elevators in parking garages working. She noted the importance of having accessible housing around the City and preserve accessible housing. Also, to have emergency evacuation plans for people with disabilities.

There was also the issue of exchanging information with landlords (both public and private). Also, there was the issue of having information available in large print and other alternative forms. Lastly, there was the issue on community climate and awareness to the greater public.

Kesha spoke about partnering organizations as well.

Ralph stated that the committee should try to reach out to the population so that they can become aware of the issues and improvements made in Burlington.

Santina recommended marketing in public locations. Ralph suggested a kiosk at the mall.

Brad had for suggestions:

1. Establish SOP concerns of citizens can be communicated; needs to be in the plan

Kesha said that she was going to ask Brad to flesh out the idea more.

2. Importance of citizen participation.
3. Tourist and visitors to Burlington, for the committee to work with the chamber of commerce. To help disabled tourists visit Burlington and have a good experience. To bring awareness of adaptive sports opportunities. He suggested adding information on the website.
4. A statement to say that a person can go online and enter their complaints electronically.

Kesha asked if the could jointly work together to create a grievance procedure. Ralph suggested changing the word "grievance."

Brad said that he would draft something and send it to Kesha. Brad said that he suggested the committee reporting to the city council on a quarterly basis. Kesha also suggested that the committee could hand in written statements without actually meeting with the city council.

Santina asked about disability awareness day in Burlington. Ralph agreed that there should be a day designated in Burlington.

Kesha also mentioned the lacking of a mental focus. Mike Watson was supposed to be a guide for mental illnesses; an area that could use more information.

The conversation led to the selection of new committee members after the meeting with the city council. Kesha added that she started a list of various organizations that could have someone in the committee. Pathways and Howards were recommended. Ralph suggested someone from AARP.

However, Kesha added that the committee should not be too large because it can be difficult to meet. She also suggested the creation of subcommittees.

On March 18th, Kesha explained that the co-chairs would report to the city council and discuss the revised mission statement, how frequently to report to the city council and the process and procedures.

Kesha reassured that the committee was well prepared to present to the city council.

6 - Next steps (20 minutes)

Ralph began discussing possible dates for the next meeting.

Kesha said that she would send a Meeting Wizard. The focus was on either March 13th or the 14th.

Ned brought up a project that was completed in the summer. There was a boardwalk built with a ramp to the waterfront.

Kesha suggested that people needed to know that this is already in place.

Ned asked if the bathrooms were accessible. Ralph said that people have complained about them before. Brad added that he has used them before and had no problems.

Ned reminded that codes are minimal unless they need to be maximized. 20% of the value needs to be for accessibility. It is an ongoing battle.

Ralph added that these things needed to be made know to the general public.

Meeting adjourned.