

Burlington Committee on Accessibility
June 18th, 4-6pm
City Hall, Room 12

Introductions:

Committee Members Present: Elaine Zimmerman, Ned Holt, Bob Rusten, Ralph Montefusco, Shelley Waterman, Michael Watson, Brad Stephenson, Patrick Standen, Ardelle Cabre, Jen Francis

Committee Members Absent: Ron Redmond, Sheryl Bellman, Mark Irish, Russ Scully

Others present: Miriam Stoll, Eva Stoll, Ellen Zeman, Kelly, Kesha Ram, Claire Chevrier

BHS Accessibility Tour Update

Planning continues for this July 5 tour of the BHS facilities. The Mayor's intention is for this to be relatively low-key and small, so a few representatives from the committee will represent. It was suggested that the alumni returning to help with the tour be given some press attention for his role as an outstanding athlete.

Additional Updates

Facebook page: Corina set up a Facebook page in order to share announcements and it has been continued. If you are a Facebook user please join. Any suggestions about other pieces of information that you would like to see on our page can go to Ellen or Kesha. Interested in feedback.

Jen Francis discussed the preliminary plans for the first universally accessible playground in Vermont and prospects for its placement at Oakledge Park.

Kelly discussed available AARP small grants for intergenerational and multigenerational livability projects.

Review of Strategic Plan

Kesha introduced the topic of the Strategic Plan by stating that we had laid out some process ideas and actions items. She discussed that a lot of people came to this committee wanting action. She suggested that the way in which the Strategic Plan is split into three parts could be conducive for splitting up into ad hoc groups.

Patrick Standen asked all present and especially new members if they had any questions about what the strategic plan included.

One thing that was discussed and brought up from the following meeting is the lack of mental health support. It was noted that it is tricky to work with the mental health topic because the

biggest problem is accessibility. The argument was made that this is the accessibility committee so maybe it should more specifically be added to our charge.

Patrick Standen explained that the Strategic Plan being discussed is the heavily edited version of what had previously been worked on. It is not an agenda for the committee. There are plenty of things we can work on that are not specifically laid out here. The strategic plan is developed because we are charged with the reaffirmation of the committee. We are not sworn to uphold what is here. It is possible, however, that discussing it may open up new areas in which we can explore.

Kesha furthered this idea by stating that there are a lot of great things happening around us, like the new ramp at North Beach, so we should remember how much there is for us to do and celebrate even if it is not specifically outlined in the Strategic Plan.

There was mention of state cuts to funding which has made it difficult for people who require caregivers so it is important to remember that if you can't get a caregiver you may not be able to utilize a lot of the things we are working on. This prompted discussions of what kind of advocacy roles we can play when the problem is greater than just Burlington.

Shelley stated that there is an upcoming meeting on Monday morning to discuss children's personal care and this information can get sent out.

There was extensive discussion regarding what each ad hoc committee would be tackling. For instance, Shelley made the point that her work advocating with schools could easily fall under infrastructure, programmatic inclusion and community awareness committee. In response, it was stated that the working groups may also change from meeting to meeting and may not be divided by the three headings under the strategic plan. It could be more mobile.

Possible Creation of Ad Hoc Committees

Due to the substantial conversations related to the ad hoc committees, it was determined that it was time to move this discussion under the Ad Hoc Committees agenda item.

Patrick Standen suggested that in addition to the three subgroups from the Strategic Plan, there be an additional advocacy group.

The conversation continued about the extent to which the three subgroups from the Strategic Plan (Infrastructure, Programmatic Inclusion, Community Awareness and the added Advocacy committee) could still be working on a number of different things that could fall under the purview of a different subgroup.

It was suggested that each of the groups have sub groups within them so it is clearer what each group would be doing. These groups could also report back to the committee.

The point was made that these groups are not strict and people can fluidly move between them.

There were then questions about the charge of the programmatic inclusion subgroup. With regard to programming what exactly are we discussing? Where would the school piece fall into this? Should we also have an education piece related to our schools? The point was made that if we are talking about programming as a city event situation that that seems different from what our current education system supports. Infrastructure is like physical infrastructure but there is also programmatic accessibility. Maybe programmatic can be separated in to two different sections. Really all of these groups could be working on education or infrastructure so it is just important for every group to pinpoint what it is that they are doing. We also don't have to follow this rubric, we can always just have an ad hoc committee for education.

Kesha then read over and summarized the three sections from the Strategic Plan which lay the framework for the three groups.

Bradley noted that from a legal perspective it is also important to remember that we are supposed to work with the city council but we shouldn't be bringing to them information that they have no jurisdiction over like matters of state funding for accessibility.

Patrick noted that there are many issues that need addressing, and following the strategic plan framework made sense. They are, however, fluid. They are not demarcated lines that can't be changed. But possibly, for the sake of everyone's time, it will be better to break up into smaller areas and then report back to the whole group.

Bradley raised the question about which subgroup his work would fall under. He discussed his work trying to get businesses to add ramps but that sometimes happens by working with Public Works and other times by communicating with business owners. It was then agreed that that would fall under infrastructure.

Patrick brought up that there is also a little known amendment that denies businesses the right to add ramps to the back entrance as their only form of accessible entrance. But you can always butt up against private and public interest. You can encourage businesses to make these changes without working politically. For instance you can demonstrate how many people require an accessible entrance that would be interested in using their business.

Shelley stated that she didn't know if these working groups are the working groups. She suggested they could be frameworks for the working groups. For instance, if you are working with parks and rec and coming up with programmatic inclusion efforts that is one issue and then there are also school district initiatives. She stated she didn't know where she would place herself because what she does can't be placed into just one of these groups.

Kesha suggested that everyone try not to button hole everything into categories and that maybe some groups will be working on a three month project versus another group working on an infinite project.

Patrick explained why he was in favor of the smaller groups by saying that if someone comes in and is frustrated with the lack of parking in front of their apartment, they can come into the whole group which may just be a sound board. If we have really broken down into groups, then

maybe they could be sent to someone specific who already has a relationship with someone who can enact change.

There was then discussion about how we don't need to force the groups. The school group has already been working so there is no reason to alter it.

Elaine mentioned that she was happy to be a part of the committee because after the last meeting she fell into a hole. She was crossing battery and fell into a construction hole that was around the button you press to indicate that you want to cross the street. She was, however, very pleased with how easily it was fixed, the extent to which someone followed up with her and is now happy to say that she now has some experience with this. There was talk of having Elaine added to the infrastructure group as a result.

Kesha also brought up that there had been previous talk about bringing different people in to talk with the group and that those guests may charge the group with additional endeavors.

Ralph suggested that the groups can also just be the strictly ad hoc. We can meet every month and every month readdress what needs to be tackled and who will do it.

Kelly mentioned that the AARP's next meeting is not until September but that they will be working over the summer with community members and encouraging engagement.

This then brought up the discussion of actively involving nonmembers in the ad hoc groups. Shelley mentioned that there are a lot of parents who would be interested in certain aspects of what the ad hoc groups will be doing.

Patrick said that he doesn't think there is anything that would not allow a non-committee member to sit on an ad hoc committee.

It was also suggested that if the committee knew they were going to be discussing one specific thing they can invite a community member to come talk and participate.

Ralph pointed out that all meetings should start with a public forum or a time to open up to non-committee members. This was agreed upon and it was noted that it was supposed to be on the agenda.

Patrick suggested that in the interest of time the committee should think about time limits for public forum or speakers.

The ad hoc groups were formalized and their members are as follows:

School group: Shelley, Michael, Miriam, Mark

Infrastructure: Ardelle, Bradley, Eilleen, Ned, Patrick

Programmatic Inclusion: Kesha, Shelley, Michael, Ron, Jen, Elaine

Community Awareness: Ralph, Bob, Bradley

Kesha stated that one thing she is working on is a toolkit for events which will include guidelines for how to make events accessible to everyone. She said that she is very interested in having people work with her.

Shelley loved this idea and shared her frustration regarding the inaccessibility of many summer camps and the heart break she has experienced because she is unable to send both of her girls to the same camp because many are not accessible. She said she visited many camps and her first question was always if there was a mechanism in place to support children who need extra support and many said no.

Ralph discussed the Disability Awareness Day on June 26th 6-9pm through VCIL. They don't have all the details hammered out. It is the week Miro is on vacation. He stated that he assumes the committee will want some sort of presence there but it has yet to be determined what kind that will be. Tom Sullivan will be the lead speaker and he is a national advocate for people with vision problems, he is also a musician. It is supposed to be in the Black Box Theater. It is also the anniversary of the ADA. It was suggested that a proclamation be read on behalf of the city.

Staggered Term Discussion

Ralph initiated the discussion by suggesting that some people volunteer for one year and others volunteer for two and if there are people who don't care either way they can just accept what is left.

Kesha explained that eventually everyone should have two years but initially some people need to be given one year terms because it needs to get staggered, but there are no term limits. If someone takes a one year term, they should be able to continue serving after their year commences assuming they get reappointed.

Patrick asked about the limit for the number of members on the committee. It was assumed that the number is 14 but this was not known for sure. A question was raised about needing two seats to be filled by someone outside of Burlington because there was previous discussion about this and a lot of people use Burlington who do not live in Burlington. It was pointed out that all term discussions would have to be addressed in the bylaws or by going through City Council.

Everyone was then expected to state the term length (in years) that they desire and the responses are as follows:

Patrick: 1

Bradley: 1

Michael: 1

Shelley: 2

Bob: 2

Ned: 2

Elaine: 2
Ardelle: 1

It was jokingly suggested that members who were not present be subjected to two year terms, but it worked out that the term lengths currently had an equal number of backers and that was not necessary.

Kesha thanked the committee for so easily working this out.

Consistent Meeting Time

Ralph asked if all were okay with meetings being the third Tuesday at the same time?

Kesha pointed out that the room was reserved for every third Tuesday from 4-6 until December.

It was pointed out that the schedule was fine for the summer but that the school year becomes a little bit more tricky.

Kesha suggested that it is easy to keep the current room reservations and change it when need be.

Ralph added that maybe Kesha could extend the time frame in which the room is reserved every third Tuesday which would allow them some leeway and Kesha agreed to look into that.

Next meetings: July 16th, August 20th.

Next Steps

We have our next steps laid out above.

Elaine stated that her friend is now director of First Night and she is happy to have and share that connection. She agreed to be added to the programmatic inclusion group which has been reflected above.

Ralph pointed out that ever since Eva introduced herself, he had been thinking about wanting to add a youth member to the council.

Kesha agreed that she had been feeling the same way and that she is currently working on revamping the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council, which will hopefully be charged with appointing youths to committees.

Patrick pointed out that to ensure this happens, they should either change the bylaws to reflect that there is a youth spot or actively target a young person for the next available spot.

It was pointed out that a young person could be part of the committee but less formally and therefore not have the ability to break a tie vote.

Kesha stated that “youth” is normally defined as high school age and cleared up that they would not be limited to a term of only one year.

Ralph pointed out that it is great to include young people because they have ties into different networks of individuals.

It was then mentioned that the subgroups that were previously discussed would need to be formally ad hoc committees because public meeting laws potentially forbid meetings that do not afford the public the opportunity to involve themselves.

Brad pointed out that these subgroups are very ad hoc in nature and that it is likely most of the correspondences will occur solely through e-mail until it is necessary to meet in which case maybe a few minutes at the beginning of the committee meetings could be reserved to the ad hoc groups meeting.

Elaine mentioned that if communication is done through e-mail it is important that there not be attachments because the program she uses does weird things to attachments which makes her unable to view them. She noted that she has come to fear her computer.

Kesha said that she is going to Turkey for two weeks and will not be in Burlington next week or the week of July 4th. She reviewed that her to-do list includes working on the accessibility tour, checking bylaws, room 12 scheduling, making sure agenda reflects the existence of public forum, roster of names and contacts and looking into the addition of a youth member.

Wrap up, Closing Comments

Brad wanted to update everyone with what he has been doing with private businesses. He said that he has been doing some outreach and talking to businesses about how they can improve their accessibility. He met with Sam Palmer of VT Legal Aid who provided legal assistance and he met with Patrick Standen to discuss actions. He agreed that because Burlington is small it is better to create a carrot scenario in which businesses are enticed to make their venues more accessible. He is mostly working with the Main Street/Church Street areas. He is targeting Big Fatty's BBQ, JPs, Mk and the Daily Planet. He is taking a friendly approach and just wants to promote accessibility awareness. He spoke with an artist downtown who opened up a place where Silver Maple used to be. It turned out that the venue is accessible, it just does not look like it is so he suggested that she put up an accessible sticker in order to alert people. He also talked to 71 Main Street and there is another entrance he was not initially aware of. He did, however, make a formal complaint against the Lake Monsters parking lot because they don't have marked accessible parking. He spoke with the attorney and filed a formal complaint and was surprised by how quickly they started moving dirt and creating designated spots. He isn't sure if the action was taken so quickly because they had construction plans in the works or because it is such a big venue but the outcome was very pleasing. Shelley noted that she was very pleased that Brad filed the formal complaint because she has participated in events there and noticed the problem with the lack of designated spots.

Ralph pointed out that venues that don't look accessible but are is the sort of thing that needs to be advertised and Kesha suggested that it go on the group's Facebook page.

There was some discussion about having a symbolic problem with ramps being in the back or on the side of venues.

Michael Watson told a story about going to cheese traders for a garage sale and seeing that they had parked a delivery truck in one of the handicapped spots. He took a photo and put it on Facebook. He got a note from Cheese Traders that said they knew they messed up and wouldn't do it again.

Patrick noted that there has been a 30% increase in placards being handed out

Elaine posed a question about whether there is any method through which the state checks up on old handicapped passes because people use dead people's passes.

Shelley asked if there has been any response to the increase in placards because it makes sense that with an increase of placards there would be an increase in spots. It was pointed out that the federal law states that there needs to be one handicapped spot for every 25 spots and that that hasn't been increased.

Claire mentioned that, while on the topic of parking, she had gotten a startling suggestion from both UVM parking services and Parking Enforcement in response to her complaints about being continually ticketed for failing to pay the meter when weather conditions exist that make it hard for parking enforcers to see her handicapped pass. They suggested that she simply always park in handicapped spots because the enforcers check those less frequently. This raised questions of people with placards who do not require a ramp taking spots away from those who do require a ramp. She suggested some sort of education surrounding this issue.

Patrick stated that every DMV in the state is run by a separate municipality and that would be difficult. He discussed that the system through which states hand out and check on placards varies. There was discussion about orange temporary and blue permanent placards and that some states have your picture on the placard.

Meeting ended.