

Burlington Committee on Accessibility
January 14, 2013
6-8pm
Room 12, City Hall

Committee Members Present:

Ardelle Cabre, Ned Holt, Ralph Montefusco, Paul Sisson, Bradley Stephenson, Russ Scully, Shelley Waterman, Patrick Standen, Ron Redmond

Committee Members Absent:

Michael Watson

Others in Attendance:

Janet Datillio (ASL Interpreter), Margaret Paul (ASL Interpreter), Kate Stein, Shannon Wilson, Ellen Zeman, Miriam Stoll, Kim Brittenham, Carina Driscoll, Mike Sharon, Marcy Ryan, Bill Hudson

Mayor's Welcome

Mayor Miro Weinberger, thanked all for being present at the meeting. He assured his full support and that of his office for the committee. He hopes to be able to work hands on with the committee and offer any support needed to ensure forward movement.

After taking a question from non-committee member Miriam Stoll, the mayor stated that the goal for this committee is to bring about a strategy and plan to make the city more accessible to those with disabilities. The mayor admitted to the lull periods of past committees but hope that this new committee could bring about new change within the City of Burlington.

The Mayor noted that he was hopeful for the committee to create new ideas with could begin to implement policies and make capital improvement within Burlington. He also stated that he was in no position to promise dramatic changes but remained hopeful. Lastly, he wanted to ensure that the committee would look at the past to stray away from making past mistakes from previous committees.

After the mayor left, the committee began with introductions. At this period, committee members and then non-committee members introduced themselves and stated why they were present at the meeting. Many shared personal stories and reasons as to why they were present.

Announcements, Public Comment

Paul Sisson spoke on the lack of school representation within the committee. He stated that the committee should invite facility personnel to be a member or at least sit in on some meetings. Paul also commented on the idea of updating the website with the names of committee members and the schedule.

Ellen Zeman brought to attention the issue of locked doors, which deterred people from being able to enter City Hall.

Ralph Montefusco and Patrick Standen were selected as co-chairs of the committee.

Review Committee charge as outlined in the resolution

At this time, Kesha Ram led a review on the Memo from the Mayor and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd resolutions. The Memo from the Mayor was a submission of names for the committee. It also referenced the deadline of March 18th 2013 for a strategy and plan created by the committee.

The 1st resolution (12/03/12) was the actual proposition for the planning of the Burlington Committee on Accessibility. The 2nd resolution (10/15/12), paraphrased by Kesha, declared the further expansion of the committee with a proposition, from the mayor, for the filling of membership. The purpose of the committee was stated as coming up with a strategy and plan for the future of the city in terms of accessibility. The 3rd resolution (9/17/90) was the first resolution stating that the city is willing to continue with the council and committee. It stated the creation of a new advisory body within city government to consist of 5 members (later 2 were added) all of whom shall be persons with disabilities.

After the review of resolutions, the floor was open for discussions on thoughts and opinions of the resolutions just reviewed. Bradley started with the suggestions of changing the language and diction of the resolution, specifically the mission statement on the 3rd resolution, but to keep the mission the same. He referenced past research done on resolutions of other cities and using examples to revise the mission statement.

Miriam Stoll suggested the invitation of a human resource's personnel to join the committee. Patrick referenced a past committee in which it invited members of each city department to speak and say what they were currently doing to help accessibility around Burlington.

Miriam then asked Marcy about past documents from previous committees that Marcy said earlier that she had. Marcy then began explaining how she asked the department of Parks and Recreation this past summer if they kept track of people with disabilities who used their facilities, the department's answer was no.

Review of Titles I, II, and III

Co-chair Pat began to explain the Titles to the committee. He explained that the ADA passed these titles in 1990 and that they are seen as a "toothless legislation" meaning it has little to no power. Pat also explained that unlike civil rights legislation, these titles have to go through the department of justice of need be fought for. There are many loopholes to this legislation but they are still successful.

Pat clarified that Title I referenced employment and that any employer needs to fulfill accommodations to a disabled employee. Title II had to do with public services, which was described as pretty vague. Theoretically, it means any type of transportation. Title III indicated public accommodations specifically to private businesses and organizations. Title IV refers to telecommunications. Title V is miscellaneous.

Kesha then asked who exactly was included under these Titles. Pat answer by stating that the working and medical definition of disabled described to whom these Titles included. The medical definition being described as the “impairment of loss of function.” However, Pat continued to explain how this definition has been opened up for interpretation and additions been made (i.e. addiction, HIV/AIDS, other mental issues).

Outline topics for strategy, plan, and committee next steps

Kesha began with asking the question on what is to be covered in future meetings, starting with what people were interested in accordance to accessibility. Bradley began by suggesting further the idea of a public forum in which the public could express their grievances so that they may be considered in the creation of a plan and strategy.

Pat suggested for the committee to be more focused on the deadline and what is to be expected of the committee in the future. Carina advocated the idea of not looking too narrowly for specific topics but rather to create an outline for strategic planning and to stray away from explanations as to how exactly the committee functions.

Pat suggested that a public forum should be help soon, in one of the next few meetings. He also suggested bringing about awareness of the committee and the public forum to develop guidance. He called for any ideas as to how to do so.

Ralph suggested a simple press release, email listers, connecting with websites in which people could provide their grievances, and some way to connect with the media. Ralph also recommended sitting down with members of other city departments to begin creating an outline. Ralph stated that the public forum could not be held next week as to lack of time. He stated that the committee would become focused on running two parallel paths, referencing the media, public attention and city departments.

Carina offered the support of the Mayor’s office with press relations.

Ron had specific items to add to the plan: first, public accommodation aspect; to create an inventory on public and city facilities and what they are currently doing on accessibility. Second, the idea of private businesses by taking inventory of accessibility barriers; look into how to prioritize accessibility, address it and how to satisfy the needs of customers.

Marcy stated that public formats do not work on spreading the word on public forums (referencing to past ideas suggested earlier). Marcy suggested meeting with people on their own ground. She suggested contacting organizations to spread the work through their own organizations.

Ralph agreed with Marcy advocating the idea of actually attending meetings of these organizations and actually speaking to individuals.

Brad suggested for the committee meetings to actually serve as public forums. Ralph stated the idea of having one public forum soon and then afterwards keeping them perpetual. Pat added that the idea of having the committee meetings serve as public forums may bring too many grievances and the committee might end up being bogged down by too many suggestions. Paul reminded the committee that every agenda and every meeting must have a public forum at the beginning of meetings.

Kesha suggested the creation of a small group to handle the revision of the resolutions. Brad accepted the role of aiding the revision of the mission statement.

Shelley began mentioning that another important aspect to add to the strategy and planning of the committee is to receive an understanding of the exact role that the schools in Burlington play on accessibility. She added that as being a parent of a 10 year old with a disability, public places around Burlington such as the bike path and the beach must become accessible. She also continued by suggesting having a way to help the community understand what it means to be "accessible." The idea of bringing about a cultural change was also mentioned.

Ellen said the city needed to take a more holistic perception of responsibility for accessibility.

Ralph added that there needed to be more effort made into bringing awareness of these issues to the greater community.

Ron stated that another strategy that could be added to the plan was to work on the city's internal culture within the government. Marcy added that the city needed to bring more planning and setting up protocols on accessibility.

Brad suggested in contacting with a city attorney or an attorney with background on accessibility or disabilities. Carina said that she emailed a city attorney prior to the meeting on the prior comment.

Russ suggested that there should be no public forum but rather to focus on all the work that has already been done to make most of the time given.

Bill said that the media is a very good tool to use to bring about awareness to the community. He emphasized the importance of outreach. He also highlighted the importance of having money in the committee for outreach and recognition.

Pat suggested the idea of creating a Facebook page as a way to elicit response from the community and spread awareness. Also, a Facebook page could serve as a type of forum in which people could communicate their grievances.

Wrap up, Closing Comments

At this time, the committee began discussing future meeting times. Evenings were preferential and Kesha stated that she was going to set up a meeting wizard and email the committee sometime this week.

Meeting ended.