



OBSERVER CORPS REPORT

MARBLEHEAD DISABILITIES COMMISSION

July 10, 2024 Abbot Hall

LWVM Observer: Nancy Powell

Members Present: Laurie Blaisdell (Chair), Amy Hirschcron (remote),

Gail Mack (remote), Andrea Mountain (remote)

Members Absent: Cheryl LaLonde, Samantha Marino

Guests Present: Gary Amberik

1. Mass Office of Disabilities Grant

A MOD grant to fund \$250k accessibility improvements at Devereaux Beach and Chandler Hovey Park has been submitted, and has a good chance of being funded due to the fact that the Town prioritized these sites in its 2023 ADA Audit and Transition Plan.

2. Abbot Public Library

The newly renovated Abbot Library had been due to open in the first week of July but an occupancy permit was denied by the MA Architectural Access Board when, just days before the planned opening, Ms. Blaisdell was offered her first opportunity to do a walk through, and found several areas were out of compliance with ADA guidelines. The most egregious issue involved the ramp leading to the main entrance which lacked required landings and had handrails installed on only one side. Commission members expressed dismay at having been left out of the process until it was too late to make changes that would have avoided a last-minute need to apply for a temporary variance that allowed a July 6th opening.

And while commissioners had no quarrel with the decision of the AAB to grant a variance, they take issue with the application process which was rushed through and excluded their input. Ms. Blaisdell noted that AAB guidelines set forth a strict 14-day period during which copies of the application for a variance must be shared with the commission on disability for the city or town where the project is located (not just the architect and building commissioner) to allow them to comment if they so choose. As it stands, the variance requires that needed adjustments be completed by December 1st. The Commission faults the AAB for leaving them out of the process entirely and for seemingly not complying with their own regulations. They plan to invite Jeff Dougan of the AAB to their next meeting to further discuss this oversight.

3. Closed Captioning at Public Meetings

Ms. Mack, who has a hearing impairment, would like to see closed captioning enabled at public meetings so that remote attendees who are deaf or hard of hearing can more easily follow the conversation. She recently attended a School Committee meeting via Zoom and was unable to hear much of the discussion. Ms. Blaisdell suggested she write a letter to the Select Board to alert them about the issue and get their guidance.