



Observer Report

Disabilities Commission 11/12/20 via Zoom LWVM Observer: Nancy Powell

Members present: Laurie Blaisdell (chair), Katie Farrell, Preston Ford, Sue Harris, Amy Hirschkron, Ed Lang, Samantha Marino, Andrea Mountain, Tim Shotmeyer

Waterfront Access

Meeting opened with discussion of the Mass. Office on Disability ADA 504 Transition Plan for Marblehead that outlines the areas in town where there are barriers to equal access for people with disabilities. The discussion first focused on improvements needed to make the waterfront/harbor/beaches more accessible for people with mobility impairments. Among the specific sites discussed were the Harbormaster's Office that lacks an accessible keypad on the rear door and the dock at Stramski Beach which cannot be accessed by a person using a wheelchair because the grade is too steep and, like other ramps and docks, is out of compliance with regulations. The Committee will contact the Harbormaster in hopes of spurring action on making some overall improvements.

Former Commission member, Susan Roper, is in the process of researching the feasibility of installing a lift on one of the public docks to enable people with physical challenges to have access to boats and kayaks. She will explore other cities and towns that have done this and will contact manufacturers to learn about lift types.

Transition Plan Funding

Laurie Blaisdell noted that the Town Planner has applied for an MOD grant to fund projects that help bring the Town into full ADA compliance. This includes not only the waterfront, but all town buildings that must be examined for needed upgrades every five years (last done in 2015).

Update in Fort Sewall Upgrade

Ed Lang reports that the newly paved accessible walkway that will encircle the park is set to be finished by the first week of December. He noted that all abutters have been cooperative and “good to work with”.

Comments from New Commission Members

Laurie asked new members to indicate any areas of concern they have. This led to a discussion about certain streets around town where people park their cars on sidewalks and thereby force pedestrians to use the street which is often difficult for wheelchair users or those with vision impairments. One member will follow-up with Marblehead Police Chief for advice.

Members also brought up the problems that arise during snow emergencies when sidewalks are impassable. Some wondered if the Town could take responsibility for clearing sidewalks in areas of high traffic (i.e., near schools) and not leave it up to homeowners who might not be physically able to shovel.