

Salem Commission on Disabilities Meeting Minutes
June 21, 2022; Meeting held via zoom platform.

Commissioners present (noted by last name in minutes):

Darren Black
Rebecca Christie
Zeke Holt
Debra Lobsitz, Chair
Maureen McKinnon
David Moisan
Kerry Neenan
Mandee Spittle
Kate Zuraw

Also present (noted by last name in minutes):

Julie Barry, Planner, Arts and Culture
Lisa Cammarata, ADA Coordinator
Jeff Cohen, Councillor, Ward 5
Alan Hanscom, SATv
Stephen Kapantais, 23 Wisteria Street
Olena Klimova
Jennifer L'Heureux, Congressman Seth Moulton's Office Intern
Don Mills, Mills Architects
Chris Nagle
Megan Riccardi, City Council Liaison
Andrew Varela, Councillor, Ward 7

1) Introductions/welcome/guests

The Chair, Debra Lobsitz (Lobsitz) called the meeting to order at 4:32PM, and she extended a welcome to everyone. Each commissioner and invited guest introduced themselves, and Cammarata identified participants in the meeting.

Cammarata asked for a motion to move agenda items around to accommodate guests. Neenan made the motion and Black seconded it; motion carried as all were in favor.

Old Business, #3, e "Variance request, Old Town Hall; Don Mills, Mills Whitaker Architects; Julie Barry, Planner Arts and Culture, City of Salem" was first item discussed.

Barry gave a historical overview of Old Town Hall (OTH) and the City's plan to bring it to a fully functioning and usable space, and address accessibility. Barry and Mills had been in front of the Commission (SCOD) a few months ago to glean support for variance requests from the Architectural Access Board (AAB). At that time, the SCOD expressed disappointment and disagreement with the accessibility plans as presented.

Cammarata had provided the SCOD with the revised plans as provided to her from Mills. (Added as appendix to minutes.)

Mills shared his screen and explained that the SCOD's input was appreciated, and as such, the accessibility plans for OTH had been modified. Of concern to the group originally was the handicap access being only from the north side entrance.

Black thanked Mills for the presentation, and said he was pleased the SCOD's feedback was taken into consideration.

McKinnon said she was pleased that the accessibility was below the grade of the building, she was in agreement that the mantels did not need to be removed, and she was glad that accessibility to the stage was addressed. She asked that the ramp be always available for use to the building and be open at all times. Barry said that could be accommodated.

Neenan wanted to reiterate that the plans were great, and she was pleased the SCOD's input was taken to heart. She praised the sink, the classroom, and how fully accessible they were.

Chris Nagle, asked what the time frame was for the renovations once the AAB granted a variance. Barry replied the City needed to secure funding, and that means grants, City funding, fundraising, and other grants. She said the City plans to get the project underway before Salem's 400th birthday. Nagle said the construction areas will cause rerouting, and he asked about tap boards. Mills said they would use construction fencing, and Nagle suggested we not forget that some of the trees have low hanging branches that will obstruct passing, as well.

Kapantais thanked the SCOD, Barry and Mills for the presentation, and he said he was very pleased about the comprehensive ADA review that was done of the project so that there will be no fighting for accessibility later. He asked if there would be signage for the ramp, and Mills said yes.

Lobsitz said she was pleased at the modifications from the last presentation, and she said what they did were clever, creative, and attractive ways to address accessibility.

Mills asked the SCOD for a letter of support to the AAB for the variance request. Group agreed, and Cammarata asked if he had a template that the SCOD could use. Barry said she would send it via email. Cammarata also asked Mills and Barry to explain the process with the Mass Historical Society (MHS). Mills said that MHS holds the preservation restrictions; however, support was needed at this level.

Next item moved:

New Business #4, d, "Sensory Tours in Salem; Jennifer L'Heureux, Congressman Seth Moulton's Office; Olena Klimova, resident"

Cammarata noted that L'Heureux was no longer in the meeting, and she introduced Klimova as a resident interested in obtaining information from the SCOD for her Sensory Tours, as explained to Cammarata by L'Heureux via email.

Klimova introduced herself and began her presentation. Midway through, Cammarata informed her that while her presentation indicated she provided a valuable resource, it was clear the SCOD was not the correct venue for her at this time. Lobsitz thanked her, and Black asked for her contact information.

Next item moved:

New Business #4, c, "Variance request and approval; Columbus Avenue; David Knowlton, PE City Engineer"

Cammarata had provided the Commission with the request and approval, and in David Knowlton's absence she explained that the City is replacing the seawall at Columbus Avenue and sought a variance for not making the beach accessible, due to the structure and historical appreciation for the beach, as well as the cost that would be incurred to make the beach accessible. The beach is known as "Steps Beach" as there are actual granite steps to get to the beach. The AAB granted the variance, with the conditions that the City install signage to indicate where the City's accessible beaches were, and directions to them. Black stated he went to the Willows to see the area after he received the information from Cammarata, and he was comfortable with this decision of the AAB. The group was surprised the AAB acted so quickly on the request.

Next item moved:

Old Business, #3, d, "Canal St. pathway: a request of using funds to add entrance/exit indicators for the visually impaired; Meg Riccardi, follow-up, if needed."

Riccardi said this matter is still in process, and she is pleased it is still an open agenda item. She will report as she gets more information.

Next item moved:

Announcements/Questions/General discussion/Ideas for future meetings, #5, "Wheelchair Rental Program; William LeGault communication"

Lobsitz read William Legault's letter into the record as requested.

Christie said she fully supports the idea of a wheelchair rental program, as she has firsthand experience with a family member needing such assistance. She said this is in line with what we do

McKinnon said she is in agreement with the idea, as we tout our City as being accessible, and she suggested if we could do this with a mobile app. for the reservations.

There was a question as to when Destination Salem will be in their new location, as that is where Legault suggested the wheelchairs be stationed.

Moisan agrees in principal for such a program, as they have one in Las Vegas and other places.

Holt agrees with the idea, and he asked about beach wheelchairs being part of this as well.

Neenan said there are beach wheelchairs at Winter Island and Forest River.

It was suggested that we invite Destination Salem to a meeting in the future.

Black agreed, and suggested we explore the wheelchair rental program.

Spittle asked if the beach mat at Deadhorse Beach could be longer to reach the water.

Lobsitz and Cammarata asked Commissioners to think about Legault's idea and the program, and to email Cammarata with their thoughts and results of any research they do regarding the same.

At 6:20PM, Cammarata told the group of the hard stop at 6:30PM, and before she asked for a motion to adjourn, she reported that she would let them all know of the format for the July meeting, as the state's remote order expires on July 15, 2022.

At 6:27 Spittle made a motion to adjourn, and it was seconded by Christie. All in favor.

LBC

6.23.2022