

Burlington Committee on Accessibility
January 29, 2013
6-8pm
Contois Auditorium, City Hall

Committee Members Present:

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

Committee Members Absent:

Russ Scully, Michael Watson,

Others in Attendance:

Terry Bailey, Ellen Zeman

Announcements, Public Comment

Ralph Montefusco called for the approval of the minutes from prior meeting. There were no calls for changes. Minutes for January 14 approved.

Ralph announced that the next meeting of the Burlington Accessibility Group, also known as BAG, would be on Feb 21st from 10am to 12pm at the Fletcher Library.

The agenda was altered and guest, Terry Bailey, from the School Board was asked to speak before scheduled.

Terry Bailey began explaining his prior experience in the school department both in Burlington and in Virginia. Terry began to explain that the school board is responsible for the maintenance and budget for the schools. Terry also stated how currently the school board is working on sustainability and conservation of energy at Barnes. The school board is also working on making schools around Burlington more accessible. All school buildings do comply with ADA codes, but some still need more work than others. Currently, two schools in Burlington are single story. The academy has a second floor but it does have an elevator.

Under the school board there are 11 facilities. Terry began to explain what each of these facilities is used for. More specifically, he spoke on Edmunds Elementary and Middle School. Edmunds is the oldest school in Burlington, built in 1890. Originally, it was built as a hospital, but over time transitioned into a school. There was an elevator installed in Edmunds about 3 years ago. The elevator makes all three floors accessible, however from the outside is a different story. Due to the steps at the front of the school, the inside of Edmunds is not accessible from the outside. To enter Edmunds, one must come in from the back door. There is no ramp at the front of the school. Terry gave an example of a 6th grade boy not being able to attend Edmunds because he could not enter the school. Even though the boy lived closest to Edmunds, he has to attend the Hunt school because it was more accessible. Terry

emphasized that Edmunds has improved tremendously on the inside when it comes to accessibility in the past few years.

Pat asked if there were any plans to make Edmunds accessible from the outside.

Terry replied with a yes. There is a plan that was created in 2008 to improve schools in Burlington, including better ADA accessibility. The plan would make the complex, referring to Edmunds, more accessible and safer. For example, the side door in Edmunds was not a safe entry. Now it is locked and a camera was placed there. An electronic buzz system will be put in but it diminishes a welcoming feeling to the school. It also requires staff time but it is a better situation than before.

Ralph mentioned that due to the recent Connecticut shooting security has been a major concern in schools and some of the measures to increase security has hindered accessibility.

Terry commented that Edmunds, in particular, has the greatest issue for accessibility and security issues. He began to explain how schools were built as welcoming buildings. He referred to the Flynn school and their use of glass doors so that all people are visible. Glass doors are great for security but it gives a cold feeling to the school. Terry went back to talking about accessibility and sustainability and how these two needs are parallel. The study done in 2008 was not done to make sure that all schools were 100% accessible, but it does point out the real issues: in Champlain Elementary School a ramp is needed; it is successful to get in to the main floor, but it is not 100% accessible. The elevator does not go to the basement where after school programs and other activities are held. The school board is aware of the many accessibility issues but it comes down to time. For example, the ramp that needs to be built in the front of Edmunds would take time and excavating of the entire main entrance. Terry referred to the plans, which he had with him personally, and showed the concept drawings but stated that these drawings still needed more work and planning. The high school has a new complex because of where its built on the hillside, just getting in there is a ramp but it is difficult to access all of the programs and facilities, we have been able to do it with evacuation chairs with some assistance, however it cannot be done independently. Also, with the latest interest in security, doors for courtyard are to maintain locked now, to enter from the courtyard you need a key. Terry did emphasize that there has been a great deal of progress made throughout the schools in Burlington, but there are still ways to go.

Ralph brought attention to employees who have disabilities and have issues entering their workplace.

Terry said there is a plan to make doors more accessible with electronic locks than can be timed.

Ron mentioned that it would be a good idea to sit with someone from the school board and make a list of priorities. It would also be a good idea to sit with the Mayor to look at the budget and prioritize.

Pat asked about the study and documents being more of a concept than an actual plan.

Terry explained that the board works on a committee structure. Normally, the committee had a 5-year plan but unfortunately things can come up sporadically (i.e. leaky roofs, etc.) and money can only go so far. Little changes like adding railings can be done soon but the bigger problems can cost up to 2 million dollars and are timely.

Ralph brought to attention the issue of parents calling the school department to talk about some issues with their children having to do with accessibility and no one would take responsibility. He asked who exactly should parents call that would take responsibility.

Terry answered that it is the school's responsibility and if they do not take action then to call Dylan McNamara, who is the director of student services or the superintendent. Parents could also contact school commissioners or the principal of the school.

Ellen Zeman asked about her daughter who goes to the high school. Her daughter has a problem getting to her classes and has to go outside and use a key to enter D Building. She asked if there were any plans to make a renovation and what if so what the time plan was.

Terry said that currently the school is working on making short-term solutions because, as of right now, major renovations would take about 5 years.

Ellen shared that a good short-term solution would be to enclose the ramp way located outside so that children would not need to technically go outside to enter in and out of D building.

Terry said that the grand plan would be to update the facilities that need renovations. The school board has already authorized an architect. The next issue to tackle would be budget and finances. Temporary fixes can be done because they are within the operating budget.

Pat suggested a joint committee composed of BST staff member, a member of this committee, parents and students. That could be added into our plan and strategy to be handed to the Mayor.

Terry also added that a member of the school board could also be a part of the committee.

Shelly approved of the idea and stated that collaboration is key. To have all different aspects of the community working together would help both parents of children with disabilities and also residents with disabilities.

Ralph said that this committee would want to continue a dialogue with other members of the school board so that a transfer of knowledge could be made from both parties.

Terry assured that there would be someone from the board at the next committee.

Discussion of Mission Statement led by Brad

Brad read the revised Mission Statement. He said that the mission statement can be an overarching goal within the community. He stated his research on other cities' committees and used some of the ideas as an influence. He tried to appropriate 2 areas: 1) focusing on removing barriers 2) focusing on programs and services.

Ralph like the Mission Statement and wanted it to be emailed along with the minutes.

Ron commented that the mission statement is broad and covers everything. However, he suggested that "as the City continues to work," should be replaced with a more definite line.

Shelly suggested adding stronger language, using words such as "enforcing." Also, to add that the committee will be monitoring and fielding as the City evolves and continues to improve accessibility. She said that it would be a bad idea to leave things open to interpretation. Having strong language can show strong commitment.

Pat suggested that being too broad could lack. He said that the word "fully" should be added to the first sentence. city tries only minimal participation. Secondly building to what Ron previously stated, adding "and meets the need off," would improve the statement; also, to include "problematic" before architect.

Brad agreed to make the changes.

Paul asked how to change attitudinal barriers.

Ralph said it needs to be included into the curriculum.

Ardelle stated that if all people are included, then everyone can feel comfortable with each other.

Ralph said it is parallel to the bullying situation within Burlington schools.

Shelley stated that language is very important among schools. She said Burlington schools did try to have an inclusion committee but it fizzled out. However, good conversations came out of the committee. The important issue is how to bring about awareness of disabilities in schools. Members of the past inclusion committee could come and discuss with this committee.

Paul suggested having sensitivity training for City employees.

Pat stated the importance of a person-centered language. He explained that it is accepted campus wide; the idea of inclusive language and avoid abusive language. For example, in recent years there has been an attempt to remove the word "retarded."

Pat stated the need to push for individuals with disabilities. Persons with hidden disabilities also need awareness; it is much more than someone in a wheelchair.

Ardelle stated a powerful line, "I am a person with a disability not a disability."

Pat said that we were at a moment in cultural history that is about to shift.

Shelley affirmed that awareness is a learning experience and those who have not experienced what it feels like to know someone with a disability might find it hard to understand. Part of improving the approach is to give people better language to use and understand. (i.e. positive language)

Discussion with BSD Reps

Ralph brought forward the issue of not having a proper grievance procedure for residents.

Brad stated that there should be a place where people could find the right resources and also an outlet for residents to express their problems. Also, to be able to have liaisons in which people could talk to the business community so that they could work together.

Pat added that the role of BAG should be firmed up a bit and that there should always be permanent membership of BAG in this committee.

Paul asked if the committee should target privately owned facilities as well.

Pat answered yes but to know that the committee does not have any "teeth" but rather a way to advocate and establish a disability friendly program. Also, to give a businesses an economic incentive because people with disabilities would want to spend their money there. The committee could provide advice in some way to these businesses.

Brad said that he would like to see Church Street be more accessible, focusing on architectural barriers.

Ralph suggested spreading visions to neighboring communities.

Pat stated the importance of creating a united front.

Next Steps

Kesha stated that the 2 possible dates for a public forum were Feb 12th or 20th.

Paul asked how to bring about attention to the public forum.

Kesha answered with Front Porch Forum, PCA, and a press release from the mayors office.

Brad suggested having a public forum in the summer when the weather is warmer.

Ardelle said that a public forum was needed before the plan is given in March.

Ralph stated the 12th for the next committee meeting and the 20th for the public forum, school board members could come to public forums as well.

Paul said that candidates would come to public forum do to upcoming elections. He also suggested checking if Channel 17 could cover the forum before setting a date.

Ralph brought up Disability Awareness Day.

Kesha suggested having the mayor do something to bring about awareness.

Shelley suggested having the mayor shadow a student with a disability.

Pat stated that Burlington could create a day for awareness just for Burlington.

Pat stated the agenda for next meeting:

- Parameters for public discussion (set up like city council meetings)
- Auditory support
- Screen and projector
- To have someone stationed outside to make sure people can get in
- Other languages

Shelley stated that she has a contact in WCAX and could help with spreading the word on the public forum.

Meeting adjourned.