

Mayor's Advisory Committee on Accessibility

March 15, 2016 4:00 – 6:00 pm

City Hall, Conference Room 12

Draft Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 4:02pm with Elaine Zimmerman volunteering to chair the meeting.

Introductions were made around the table with committee members identifying themselves along with City Staff. Ned Holt, Phet Keomanyvanh, Shelly Waterman, Michael Watson, Tom Charbonneau, Emily Bishop, Cleary Buckley, Nate Besio, Ron Redmond, Elaine Zimmerman, Emma Stone, Ralph Montefusco, Gabriel (guest)

Announcements – Nate Besio reminded everyone about Disability Awareness Day in Montpelier on March 23, sponsored by the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights. The event includes guest speakers, workshops and time to have lunch with local legislators to discuss issues.

Elaine introduced our guest speaker, John Killacky, Executive Director, of the Flynn Theater.

He spoke of both the renovations implemented by the Flynn to make the theater more accessible along with more welcoming programming.

Highlights include:

Increasing accessible seating from 6 to 12 seating;

Installing railings along the wall;

A hearing assist system;

2nd accessible bathroom;

New box office – sidewalk to lobby to make it accessible, lowered the window for those who use a chair;

Featuring Artists with disabilities like Larry Bissonette; screening of films – nonverbal artists; facilitated conversation after the film;

Offer sign language;

Touch tours before show for those with visual impairment;

Lowered work that they hang in gallery; large print description and audio description; braille copy for all exhibitions;

To make the Flynn more welcoming to families with children with autism they researched what adaptations that other theater companies are doing. As a result they have adapted to be sensory friendly for specific children's programs; change in lighting levels and volume levels. They offer headphones, coloring in lobby, doors open in the lobby during the performance to be more welcoming; trained ushers how to be welcoming; confront their own ignorance and stereotypes.

Vermont Autism Task Force is recognizing the Flynn's achievements in this arena.

Questions and Comments:

Is the website – ADA accessible website – yes.

Emily (AmeriCorps) noted that with some websites people can select what works for them (background and font) on a website.

Comment from Gabriel on what happens when people stand up and if you are in a wheelchair you can't see. If you purchase front row seats, you might be blocked by the orchestra.

John noted that orchestra seating is not permanent;

Shelley applauded the work the Flynn is doing around families with autism and said it resonates with her; she plans to share it with friends. She suggested the Flynn might want to provide common courtesy literature.

John noted there are some things on the website.

Michael Watson appreciate the focus on artists with disabilities and noted the pitch of the aisle is difficult to navigate.

Question – Is there access to stage and accessible dressing rooms? Yes there is.

Nate – just went last year and asked if there is training for proper etiquette on dealing with patrons with disabilities. Yes, it is included in their orientation.

There was a brief discussion about what the Flynn does with animals that are not service animals. They err on the side of being welcoming.

Public Comment – Ron Redmond introduced Jeff Nick Chair of the Marketplace Commission and Kelly Devine Burlington Business Association.

Kelly discussed her work on livable and walkable communities to include access for all abilities. She did a project on lower Church and St Paul projects to widen sidewalks. She spoke of the right of way passage so folks can pass safely which makes a more friendly, more welcoming community. Every sidewalk should have enough of a right of way – not Church Street which already has it, but the side streets. Kelly was speaking of the instances when a group gathers blocking right of way, or lays on the sidewalk. Kelly is exploring if there should there be a regulation or ordinance defining the space. The committee asked her to keep the committee informed and possibly they would sign on as support. Kelly noted that an ordinance would set up rules and parameters so it becomes self-policing.

Other Business

- a. Elect a Chair of the Committee – The committee asked what does the Chairman do. We discussed facilitating the meeting, follow up on the contact requests like parking and the Mayor; assists in the development of the agenda. Nate Bezio offered to run the meeting; there were no objections.
- b. Frequency of meetings – Marcy Esbjerg of CEDO suggested going to quarterly meetings with specific topics for each meeting. Some people felt that was too few and was concerned about the diminished interest. The group discussed every other month. One person suggested scheduling it a year in advance. The group agreed to meet again on April 19 to continue this discussion.
- c. Future topics – There was some interest in having a focus for the meeting. Ron Redmond said that this administration is very data driven and would like the group to look at Church Street Marketplace and measure activity that the Committee evaluates. The group wondered who was maintaining their Facebook page and Marcy said she would get them that information. Agenda topics should be noted and be able to be changed with input from the Committee. Shelley presented a communication/outreach strategy about a column on the Accessibility Committee submitted monthly to the North Avenue News. Emma will check and provide information to Shelley. Does the committee want to take turns writing columns on topics? Advertise the meetings at the end of the article.

Role of Committee –

- Marcy suggested that the committee present an annual report to the Mayor advising him of their accomplishments and suggestions. The group asked if they wanted to go to subcommittees that meet more frequently? What is the purpose of the Committee? Rather than having a seat at the table some feel they are still an afterthought and there is no defined role. Gabriel wants to impact ordinance/legislation. Emma noted that it has been helpful to be a liaison to Parks and Rec and have a productive conversation that has made a difference.
- d. At the next meeting, the group should review appointments and who is up when also which seats are open.

The meeting adjourned at 6:04.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcy Esbjerg
Assistant Director
CEDO