

Westport Commission on Disabilities
Meeting of May 20, 2019

Present: Brian Gallagher, Stanley Cornwall, Rose Rego, Anders Newcomer, Kim Legendre; Raymond Phenix arrived at 4:10 p.m. Absent: Martin Costa.

1. Call to Order: The meeting at the Town Hall Annex was called to order at 3:45 p.m. by Chairman Gallagher with the above members present. Mr. Gallagher introduced new Veterans Service Officer Carol Freitas, effective April 1, 2019, to the commission. She indicated she is a veteran of six years in the Marine Corps, and five years in the Marine Corps Reserves; a member of the Marine Corps League of New Bedford, and is involved with a Rhode Island group support homeless female veterans.

Mr. Gallagher noted that the commission is always seeking worthwhile causes to support, and encouraged Ms. Freitas to file an application for grant funds from the commission if financial support is needed for a local project. Mr. Cornwall described the kayak assisted launch project planned at the Head Landing, and indicated the commission will need the VSO to support the effort; he also noted that he has spoken to the town's new Recreation Director, who has some prior experience working with people with disabilities.

Mr. Gallagher suggested that the commission tour the new Westport Land Conservation Trust (WLCT) site on Adamsville Road, formerly owned by the Diocese of Fall River. Mr. Cornwall has suggested that the Trust building a community bandstand at the site for public gatherings.

2. Remote Participation: No requests received.

3. Minutes: The minutes of the Nov. 26, 2018 meeting were reviewed, with Mr. Cornwall making a motion to approve them as submitted. Second by Ms. Rego, and the motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

4. Annual Town Report: Mr. Gallagher reported having prepared the commission's annual town report and submitted it to the Board of Selectmen. He also indicated that he has filed the commission's budget request for Fiscal Year 2020, seeking level funding for the coming year; with parking violation funds and some generous gifts, the commission has about \$6,000 available for projects in the next fiscal year.

5. Re-Appointments: The chair noted that his appointment, and the appointment of Mr. Phenix are expiring at the end of June, and letters seeking re-appointment should be sent to the Board of Selectmen as soon as possible. Both members indicated they will apply for re-appointment.

6. Mobility Mats: Mr. Gallagher reported on a recent conversation with Ross Moran, executive director of the WLCT, about the installation of the mobility mats at Beach Avenue. He was told that the mats would be installed by Memorial Day weekend with the assistance of the Highway Department, and will remain in place until Labor Day.

7. Water Access Project: Mr. Cornwall indicated that health issues have kept him from making any progress on the kayak assisted launch project over the winter, but he is now ready to re-start the planning effort with help from other commission members.

8. 2018 Gifts: No new donations reported.

9. New Business: The chair reported hearing that Charter Communications will provide free cable services to people with disabilities; having learned that it would cost thousands of dollars to dig a trench to bring service to him and neighboring homes, he talked to state officials about the problem, only to be told it is a town issue. He indicated he would talk to the Cable Advisory Committee about the issue when Charter's contract comes up for renewal.

Mr. Cornwall noted that a previous public awareness campaign had tried to make public safety departments aware of all residents with disabilities, serious illnesses, or in-home medical equipment which serves to keep them housebound. The commission collected data cards from the public and provided the information to the town so that 911 operators would be alerted when emergency calls came from those residences. He suggested it was time to update that database, and that the Council on Aging should be asked to undertake that effort.

There was some general discussion of poor public access to the new oyster bar and café at Lees Wharf, where parking is a longstanding problem. It was noted that the town is undertaking a survey of public parking in the neighborhood in hopes of helping to alleviate the parking issues there.

10. Next Meeting: The next meeting was confirmed for 3:45 p.m. on Monday, June 24 at the Annex.

11. Adjournment: Mr. Cornwall made a motion to adjourn at 4:35 p.m. Seconded by Mr. Phenix; the motion passed 4-0.