

Westport Commission on Disabilities Meeting of Sept. 23, 2019

Present: Brian Gallagher, Rose Rego, Anders Newcomer, Martin Costa.

1. Call to Order: The meeting at the Town Hall Annex was called to order at 3:50 p.m. by Chairman Gallagher with the above members present.

2. Remote Participation: No requests received.

3. Minutes: The minutes of the June 24, 2019 meeting were not available for review.

4. Guest Speaker: Mr. Gallagher reported that scheduled speaker Robin Putnam of the Mass. Office of Consumer Affairs & Business Regulation had previously canceled her planned talk to commissioners and the general public on home improvement regulations. She provided copies of the relevant regulations and links to the state website where they can be found: www.mass.gov/consumers and www.mass.gov/homeimprovements plus regular telephone help line (617) 973-8787 and toll free number (888) 283-3757 for the Office of Consumer Affairs & Business Regulation.

Mr. Gallagher detailed the process homeowners have to go through to make their home more accessible: interview contractors on the scope of work to be done; check their references and construction insurance coverage; check required supervisor's license or home improvement construction registration information, available online at www.mass.gov/homeimprovements; the homeowner must secure a written contract for any project estimated to cost over \$1,000, with sample contracts available on the state website. The signed and dated contract should contain a written description of the work to be done, and a payment schedule, with no more than one-third of the total cost to be paid in advance. The chair also provided a list of recommendations for resolving disputes with a contractor, including mediation and arbitration, and ending with legal action in Superior Court if negotiations break down or an agreement can't be reached. If all else fails, the Office of Consumer Affairs has a "guarantee fund" that will reimburse homeowners up to \$10,000 to complete problem projects.

Mr. Gallagher also noted there are other state (Commission on Disabilities) and private funding sources available for home accessibility projects, including the Westport Affordable Housing Trust home rehabilitation program, offering deferred payment loans for home improvements for properties assessed up to \$300,000. More information on the CRE-HAB program is available from Housing Specialist Leonardi Aray by calling (617) 270-3912 or email to leonardi@larayarchitects.com.

5. Mobility Mats: Mr. Gallagher reported that the mobility mats at Beach Avenue were deployed until Labor Day, providing the only handicapped accessible walkway to a public beach. Parking there was limited, and some abuse of the handicapped accessible parking spots was reported. The police department has been asked to ticket scofflaws without accessibility cards.

6. New Business: None.

7. Next Meeting: The next meeting was confirmed for 3:45 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 28 at the Town Hall Annex.

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

Approved 10-28-19