

Minutes - DRAFT

Brookline Commission on Disability
Wednesday, March 9, 2022; 5:30 PM – 7:15 PM
Meeting held via Zoom

Members in Attendance: Jim Lee, Chair; Jim Miczek; Elaine Ober; Ann Kamensky; Rob Heist; Shawn O’Neal; Joan Mahon; Henry Winkelman; Miriam Aschkenasy, Select Board Member; Nancy Moore, Transportation Board Liaison

Note taker: Sarah Kaplan, ADA Coordinator – Ex. Officio

Presenters: Desiree Patrice; Mark Shamon, Andres Achury; Ben Weinstein-- all MBTA GLT;

Members of the public in attendance: Lydia Kaufman; Abby Swaine; Nancy Blumberg; Saralynn Allaire; Andrea Davenport; Tina Kurys; Ally Dewey; Joseph Blumberg; John Buck

Meeting commenced at 5:35 PM.

Introductions/Public Comment: None.

Presentation by MBTA GLT Team re: Beaconsfield Station Accessibility Improvements (D Branch):

Desiree Patrice introduced her the team working on this station. They came to the Commission to discuss the progress made on creating a direct accessible path between Beaconsfield’s station and the Waldstein Park. This was a request made by the Commission when they presented their conceptual ideas regarding this station last year. They worked closely with Brookline DPW and have presented this to the Transportation Board, the Shared Mobility Advisory Committee, and the Parks and Open Space Committee.

Similar accessibility improvements have been made/are underway at at other stations on the Green Line D Branch. When completed the D Branch will be the first fully accessible branch of the Green Line – expected by Fall 2023.

The Upgrades to the stations will be as follows: a) raising the platform heights to 8 inches above the top of the rail; b) extending the platforms to 225 feet; c) adding accessible pathways and a second egress path from each platform; d) increasing lighting levels at all stations

Accessible parking spaces will be near the accessible platform entrances. New benches will be added to the platforms. Beaconsfield will get a new covered bike rack and they will move the heated shelters to the pedestrian entrance area.

A fully raised platform of 14 inches is not currently possible because those platforms will only work with Type 9 cars and above. The majority of train cars (Types 7 and 8) currently owned by

the MBTA have doors that open out and are not flush with the body of the train. Retirement of these types of cars are planned for 2029 and 2031 respectively. Once all the supercars arrive and the old types of cars are retired, the platform can be raised again to work best with the Type 9 and Type 10 cars. As such, the raising of platforms will be done in stages. Re-raising the platforms will cause minimal disruption to riders.

The platforms will have yellow tactile warning panels from end to end on both sides. Both platforms will be built with accessible transition walkways at each end to support access from the parking lot to the platform. There will also be accessible track crossings at either end. Emergency call boxes will be added to each platform. They are working with wayfinding experts on signage.

Currently connected to Beaconsfield Station is connected to a staircase at the Dean Road Bridge and a path along Beaconsfield Road that leads to a crossing at Clark Road. The only accessible crossing is at Dean Road. There is currently no easy way to access the Waldstein Park.

The team proposes creating a direct station to park pathway along the tracks and below the bridge from the outbound station platform; from the station platform a pedestrian would head towards the stairway, then keep left to follow the path under the bridge and into the park. The width of this path would be limited by the tracks and the bridge abutment wall. Overhead catenary support poles and guide wires create other obstacles along this pathway, all of which can limit the pathway width. Despite the obstructions the GLT's analysis found that a 7-foot (84 inches) path is feasible. The MBTA will take responsibility for the work on the pathway to the park fence, and all work with the park will be the Town's responsibility.

The plan going forward will require continued communication with the Parks and Open Space Committee as well as the Commission on Disability as they continue to work with the Town. There will be a 75% Public Meeting in Summer 2022; a 100% Public Meeting in Fall 2022; a Bid in Winter 2022. Construction should begin in Spring 2023.

Miriam asked about residential outreach. In addition to public meetings that they will make the abutters aware of, the MBTA plans to send out flyers in the area and an email blast focused especially on homes within 300 yards of the station.

Henry asked about the pathway and the GLT confirmed that they believe a full 7-foot-wide path is possible (84 inches in width). Abby spoke about attending public meetings regarding construction and there being robust participation from the neighboring residents. Saralynn expressed concerns about the safety of the pathway under the bridge and asked about lighting and emergency call boxes. The GLT team confirmed that the pathway will be fully lit and have accessible emergency call boxes. System-wide Accessibility is very involved in the placement and design of the call boxes.

Jim Lee asked about raising the platforms in stages and asked when the second stage would be completed. The GLT Team said that due to the need to acquire new cars and attend to upgrades throughout the Green Line system of 63 stations they estimate the final raising will be done more than 6 years and less than 15 years from now.

Review of the February 2022 minutes:

- Elaine and Jim Lee will send minor edits to the ADA Coordinator. **Vote:** Jim M made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Miriam seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Henry abstained due to his absence at the last meeting. All other members present voted in favor of the motion. **Motion carried, 8-0-1.**

Variances: None.

Old Business

Discussion re Meredith Mooney's support request re ARPA grant related to restaurant outdoor seating

Miriam informed the group that she will be abstaining from the conversation because she is part of the Select Board subcommittee evaluating ARPA proposals, but she will be listening.

Rob thought it was brief but he did not find anything objectionable in it. Jim M. concurred. Elaine thought its brevity was a good thing.

The ADA Coordinator stated that Meredith would like to know if the Commission supports this project.

Jim Lee spoke about his mixed feelings on the idea of supporting the proposal due to his mixed experience with different types of outdoor restaurant seating in Town. The way he reads the proposal, he sees as a way to guarantee that any of the parklets built in Town using this funding must be accessible, which he supports. He knows building the parklets are expensive and sees the partial funding at a good incentive for local businesses to participate and prioritize accessibility.

Joan raised a concern about what the Commission could do if the parklet was not actually accessible. She is concerned about the differences in design vs. implementation vs. the practicalities of using a parklet at a given restaurant.

Jim Lee would like the Commission to be more involved in the design approval process.

Saralynn asked about the complaints that the ADA Coordinator has received regarding outdoor seating. She did not have the complaint log on hand, but from her recollection

the majority of complaints regarding outdoor seating is related to access on the sidewalk due to outdoor seating on the sidewalk, not as much related to the parklets. All complaints are addressed with the assistance of CPD.

Abby supports the proposal and thinks the public share of the cost should be high because storage of these parklets in the off season is expensive. She also talked about spacing issues and lack of accessible furniture.

Miriam informed the Commission that this grant is only about funding and changes nothing about the process that the Town requires restaurants to go through. The ADA Coordinator emphasized that the outdoor restaurant seating must be accessible and that the Town has rejected an application from a restaurant that could not provide an accessibility plan in the past. Accessibility is also a cornerstone of the current outdoor seating policy, thanks in large part to the Commission's input.

Rob asked if outdoor seating is here to stay – it is not his preference. The ADA Coordinator spoke about how restaurants have wanted outdoor seating since before the pandemic and the realities of the pandemic changed the perception of these requests in Town. Outdoor seating is here to stay. Henry also spoke about hearing mixed responses from businesses in Washington Square. Miriam said that the Town is currently evaluating effectiveness and losses to Town revenue. Fees will slowly increase to offset the loss in parking revenue. Accessible parking will remain untouched. The restaurants and public have provided an overwhelming amount of positive feedback.

Nancy asked about the opportunity for other types of local businesses to provide feedback as a loss in parking may negatively effect businesses that are not restaurants. Miriam said that through the Small Business Committee, most feedback from local businesses is that as people start dining outside again that there is an increase in overall foot traffic that is hopefully a positive for other local businesses. There is also a balancing act between parking and creating parklet seating. Some parking will remain. Nancy wants to know if abutters can object to specific permits. Miriam says she thinks that is likely but that the permitting process is still being finalized. If they come before the Select Board there will always be public comment and perhaps a public hearing.

Jim M asked if the parklets will be level with the sidewalk or if they will use ramps. The ADA Coordinator said that the portable ramps bought by the Town for restaurants were rarely used, so this proposal was developed. In speaking with Meredith, the ADA Coordinator believes that the goal of CPD is to get as much sidewalk seating off the sidewalk and on to these parklets, thereby creating both more accessible seating and a more accessible path of travel for all residents.

- **Vote:** Henry made a motion that the Commission support the proposal to seek funding to create totally accessible outdoor restaurant seating parklets.

Jim M. seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Miriam abstained. All other members present voted in favor of the motion. **Motion carried, 8-0-1.**

New Business

BCOD Goals for 2022: Every voting member spoke briefly about the goals they wish to focus on this year as a Commission

- Jim M: Focus on sidewalk access; especially tertiary sidewalks (residential sidewalks) that are often unwalkable, often due to tree heaves or tree lawn overgrowth or lack of snow shoveling.
- Elaine: Focus on getting the Commission more involved with the process of building and space design as early as possible.
- Henry: Focus on affordable accessible housing for people with disabilities and seniors. Henry wants to do more research and bring information to the Commission. Jim asked Henry to take a lead on this issue and maybe the Commission could invite Zapata back to a future meeting.
- Ann: Increase the number of books and media at the Brookline libraries about and by people with disabilities. There may be options within the Minuteman Library System, but less on location at each branch. Jim encouraged Ann to put together a list and the Commission will purchase and donate them. The ADA Coordinator offered to help, as did Joan. Miriam connected the Commission with the Library Trustees via email.
- Rob: Publicize the 9-1-1 Disability Indicator form using the Access Brookline column.
- Joan: Wants to approach the Coolidge Corner Theatre (CCT) about providing open captioning on each movie they show at least one night. They also have the captioning devices but opening captioning is a form of universal design. She wants the Commission's support in her appeal to the Theatre.
 - **Vote:** Jim L. made a motion to allow Joan on behalf of the Commission to approach CCT to request open captioning for each film, a least 1 night per week. Joan seconded. A roll call vote was taken. All members present voted in favor of the motion. **Motion carried, 9-0-0.**
- Shawn: Focus on having the Commission put together a resource book and suggestions. Henry pointed to the Senior Center resource book as an example and maybe help expand their section on disabilities and help publicize it. Discussed reviewing it and putting it on the agenda for a future meeting and inviting Ruthann.
- Miriam: Focus on the move to hybrid meetings and support the push for Language Access Services. Miriam was told this meeting can stay completely remote. The ADA Coordinator is forming a language access policy working

group and asked a member of the Commission to sit on that working group – specifically Joan due to her experience as a person who is hard of hearing and her work with the Deaf Community.

- **Vote:** Jim L. made a motion to nominate Joan to the LAP Working Group. A roll call vote was taken. All members present voted in favor of the motion. Rob was not present for this vote. **Motion carried, 8-0-0.**
- Jim L: Increase community outreach. Create a Gmail account/contact form that the Commission monitors and can answer. Add said account to the BCOD website. The purpose is to answer basic disability questions to the public directly.

Feedback on the Annual Report: Jim M. liked it. Jim Lee thanked all that he contacted for their assistance.

Vote on March 2022 Access Brookline Column: Due to lack of time, the column was not reviewed, only voted on. **Vote:** Jim L. made a motion to approve the article as written. Shawn seconded, and a roll call vote was taken. All members present voted in favor of the motion. Rob was not present for this vote. **Motion carried, 8-0-0.**

Report from Transportation Board Liaison: The Transportation Board will be sponsoring a Warrant Article to create a committee to consider adopting a Vision Zero Policy. Vision Zero benefits include potential increased funding for transportation projects and increase interdepartmental synergies. For more info on Vision Zero, go to: <https://visionzeronetWORK.org/>

Announcements/Final Questions: Henry asked about how the Commission can make changes to the BCOD website. It was determined the best way is to add a standing Website Feedback item to the agenda.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 13, 2022 @ 5:30 PM via Zoom.

Henry motioned to adjourn. Jim L. seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:21 PM