

Westport Commission on People with Disabilities
Minutes of Meeting
Thursday Feb. 16th, 2017 - Town Hall - Rm.201

Attendance: Jim Ross - chairman, LuAnn Giunta, Tom Holleman, Marina Derman, Diane Johnson, & Stacie Curran - Absent: Evan Levinson - (Present from Human Services - Elaine Daignault & Sarah Heath)

Jim Ross - Called meeting to order 8:34am –

Welcome/Intro: How do we want meeting to work? First step is to establish guidelines so we may work as a team. Organization of roles and providing an opportunity for the public to provide input and guidance as we grow.

Approval of Minutes from Jan. 19, 2017 meeting: - Reading of Mission Statement, highlights of inaugural meeting reviewed, Stacie Curran: Made motion to approve minutes: LuAnn 1st, Jim Ross 2nd, all in favor.

Discussion of Mission Statement: “Westport is a Town where people with disabilities have the equal opportunity and support to enjoy full and equal access to lives of independence, productivity, inclusion and self-determination.”

LuAnn - likes that it is short and can be memorized; Marina - wants to get to our work, not get caught up on words. Stacie - values the word: Support (equal opportunity, and support...) - We can always review and revise in the future.

Strategic Planning: How to engage the Community; get guest speakers, where do we see the commission going and how to be effective. Planning will be ongoing but there will be an Executive Committee meeting to begin establishing the long and short-term plan.

Committee Updates:

Federal/State & Local Policy & Administration & Gen. Support: Jim Ross - There are laws in place to assist and protect people with disabilities including ADA, IDEA, & the Olmstead Decision. It is our charge to inform the public about their rights and advocate for people with disabilities at a state and local level.

- Discussion of creating a website for the Commission as a platform for communication.
- Information included could be Town requirements, Business responsibilities, working with Town ADA coordinator, participate in State forums to generate conversation and focus on our region, CPD could become the leader to others in western CT.
- Should CPD host a speaker series?
- Jim will tap Marina’s experiences at the State level.
- **Tom:** question about us making Statements as a Commission - submitting our positions. This will be an ongoing discussion as we educate ourselves and gain input from the public.
- **Elaine Daignault** - Discussion of other Agencies that do presentations - and/or push info out.

- **Marina**- spends a lot of time in Hartford and states that calling, emailing, and showing up, all is important. They track the intensity of public input and pay attention, and balance their time to the topics with intensity. “Canned”, organized statements by special interest groups do not generally get as much attention due to the impersonal nature of the communication.
- **Jim R.** shared his experience in working on Epilepsy Bill - and the importance of managing relations with our constituents) - How to be effective - Collaborates in Policymaking.
- **Jane Tarsy** - (public comment), shared the importance of going with a goal, something specific.

Transition & Employment: Stacie Curran, shared two new events around Transition, being put together by Mike Rizzo, head of Pupil Services for the Westport Public Schools

- March 29th 9:00-10:00am - ***A Guide to Transition - Understanding the Transition Bill of Rights***, will be open to Westport parents grade 6-12,
- ***A Bridge between High School & Adult Services***. (Presented by SHS Special Ed department) - will host BRS, DDS, Our probate judge Lisa Wexler, Mary Lou Huisking (SHS transition coordinator), and our own Board member, Diane Johnson.
- Discussion: - **Marina:** After the Cap & Gown meeting to be held Ffld Warde, Mar. 2nd -6:30pm (ARC - adult service)

Public Comment:

- Elaine introduces **Mary Lou Huisking**, a long time Westport Public School teacher with 23 years of experience as an advocate and trainer of student with special needs. Mary Lou is a great resource to the CPD.
- **Diane J:** Spoke of her son’s experience and volunteer opportunities, help from Mary Lou, number of community supports, but hard to get pay. A key factor: If you have paid employment, prior to leaving high school, greater level of success is forecasted. Mary Lou offered to help the commission.
- **Jim R** - encourage & implore employers that everyone can contribute, Discussion: sheltered workshops, Fair pay, proportional wages, state limitations on how much a person can earn before they may jeopardize their state dollars.
- **Owen Bregman** commented on free labor for people with disabilities and some of the options that some may not be aware of including 13 weeks of Labor reimbursement thru BRS for employers. Owen also stated that there is a fine line between earnings and losing your SS benefits as a result of going over the income limitations. There are ways to address this issue.
- Maybe we could get BRS to educate our businesses on the benefits and laws on employing people with special needs.
- **Marina:** Mentioned a program called Project Search, a grant funded program, providing year-long internships in hospitals. - Could be a model for other businesses, or opportunity for Norwalk H.
- **Bob Fatherly** - Chariman of Commission on Senior Services - introduced himself, shared story of his son, appreciates our work, & Jim Ross will be their guest speaker at their next meeting.

Transportation/Mobility:

- Diane Johnson shared that she is currently taking a class in Transportation-NADTC, what are best practices across the country.
- Discussion: Westport is re-evaluating Door-to-Door services since Norwalk Transit has increased their costs and service areas associated with this service in Westport. There is a new survey on Transportation recently getting attention, Diane is trying to understand the scope, talking with peers, etc.
- **Elaine D** – adds that the Town is working with Westport Transit District Directors to evaluate affordable and equal transportation options for seniors and people with disabilities. There are 2 RFPs out (requests for proposals) - for filling this gap.
- Further discussion: Door-to-Door, their fees, Handicap access bus, trying to find ways to equal access, Uber, ITN - hope they can expand their limitation on who qualifies to be driven, maybe the Commission could help review the RFPs. This was the area of greatest concern in our initial survey when forming this commission.
- **Mary Lou:** (public) - High school can get you Disability Discount Passes - for Costal Link and Metro North - need to look into eligibility.
- Discussion - on Door-to-Door, availability, passes, tickets

Housing:

- **Marina Derman** presented the barriers of housing for persons with disabilities. Affordable housing and Supplemental funding (with small or large supports) can be confusing and difficult to get.
- Discussion of Act 8-30g, Marina is looking into how New Canaan is handling their affordable housing. Mention of Section 8 housing (affordable housing) - can we tag housing for individuals with disabilities? We have some homes here, STAR, CLASP, etc.

(Meeting running over - will pick up in agenda here at March meeting)

Public Comment:

Freda Heckt is the founder of the Circle of Friends, hopes she can help us in any way and be a resource to the Commission. The Mission of Circle of Friends is Social Opportunity. They are taking on other shapes now. She stated that transportation and housing are of great concern to people with disabilities right now.

Motion to Adjourn to work session - 9:50am

respectfully submitted,
Stacie Curran