

**TOWN OF AMHERST
COMMITTEE on DISABILITIES MINUTES
August 14, 2023**

Present Officers:

Erica Rodman – Chair
David Wantuck – Vice Chair
Rachel Martin – Secretary
Deborah (Debbie) Bucki – Town Liaison/Councilwoman

Present Members:

Luci Miranda – Member
Susan (Sue) Zummo – Member
Barbara Robertson – Member

Interpreter:

Karen Gambino
Barbara

ADA Coordinators:

No present ADA Coordinators

Visitors:

Jim Zymanek – Director of Emergency Services and Safety, Town of Amherst
Pat O’Conner – 27 Chateau Terrace South
Allita and Richard Dockery – 18 Roycroft Blvd
Samantha Smith – 60 Freuhauf Avenue
Amanda Casali – 23 Freuhauf
Bob and Lisa Drdul – 92 Chateau Terrace
Emma Gagliano – 117 Hendricks Blvd
Joy Testa and David Cinquino – 74 Freuhauf Avenue
Cathy Skora - 90 Freuhauf Avenue
Colleen Quinlan – 70 Bernhart Drive

Excused:

Tom Roetzer – Member
Chong Cheng – Member
David (Dave) Whalen – Member

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm.

I. Minutes

- a. May minutes approved as read

- i. Luci Miranda – first
- ii. David Wantuck - second
- iii. All in favor

II. Old Business

a. Squire Project

- i. Most recent update from Erica – recommended that the residents reach out to the Independent Living Center with further concerns regarding the project. At that point the committee had done all that was within their scope.
- ii. No initial questions from the committee members.
- iii. Debbie believes the project was approved by the Planning Board at the June meeting. Would need someone from that committee/board to answer any questions about what is next with this project.
- iv. Erica asked if there is a way for this committee to handle this and other future projects that is supportive of the town residents while also working collaboratively with the Town in a way that is helpful. Debbie said the Town Attorney was not available for tonight's meeting, but that they would be invited to meetings in the future to help answer some questions.
 - 1. Debbie did mention that typically the discussions regarding projects like this usually would have gone to the Planning Committee rather than this committee but that the Town Attorney could weigh in and meet with us regarding our role as a committee.
- v. Erica added that it's important that we understand that we can be a liaison between residents and the Town but that we do not want to be seen as adversarial.
- vi. Will save comments on this from residents for after all old and new business is covered at this meeting out of respect of other agenda items (see below).

b. Health Fair

- i. Thank you to Debbie for making sure we had a table spot. Barb Robertson, Dave Whalen, and Dr. Cheng were present at the fair. Thank you for attending and representing this committee.
- ii. Luci also put together a lot of materials for the fair. Sue provided her written piece on her lived experience that was made available.
- iii. Barb said it was an honor to represent the committee. She said it was very crowded and lots of interesting tables. There was constant traffic.
 - 1. She noted that a frequent theme is that there are not enough jobs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Hoped the town could bring more awareness to this. Erica added that Bob McCarthy has wanted to make sure the town provides opportunities for people with disabilities so we will plan to reach back out to him regarding this.

- iv. Luci said we should start planning for next year so we are ready to represent well for 2024. Supplies are starting to be used up and may need updating. Erica mentioned that Dave would be a good resource for this.
 - 1. Rachel will add this as an agenda item for January 2024 to ensure we are talking about this early in 2024.
- c. Social Media
 - i. Erica mentioned that our Facebook page needs to be active. Erica asked that people like and follow the page and to share the posts – this is how information gets disseminated in the community. This boosts traffic and makes it more visible. You can also message the page and say “Can you share this page?” through the messages that they can then share with the community. Would like to have more activity so we can have a larger audience. Please like and share the posts.
 - 1. Even if you don’t use it often, go on when you do and seek out the posts from this committee, like and share. Get in, like it, share it!
 - 2. Erica said we’re also connected with other town pages and try to support each other.
 - 3. Barb Robertson – asked for the exact name of the Facebook page. It is “Amherst Committee on Disabilities.” (No “Town”). It is a picture of the Town of Amherst teal-blue and white seal saying “established 1818.” The background says “Committee on Disabilities” with depictions of people of all abilities in the background.
- d. Amherst Central Park
 - i. Erica thanked everyone who was able to attend the meeting on this project. Met with the playground planner, town architect, and several employees of the Town of Amherst.
 - 1. David: They are trying to make the playground inclusive and accessible, with the equipment as well as the surrounding area, safety features of the space, accessibility of people getting to the playground, ability for parents/grandparents to have places to sit and ability to play, changing and bathroom areas, emergency phones, etc.
 - a. During the meeting, they clearly explained the process. On track for a 2025 opening of the playground. Plans should be done by the end of this year, then ordering supplies and planning the actual work. Accessible splash pad also mentioned.
 - b. Inclusive Play by Design – www.inclusiveplaybydesign.com
 - 2. Committee’s role moving forward:
 - a. Rachel asked if there was going to be an ice ring. Debbie said there may be an “ice ribbon” – and the committee would like to be able to make that accessible to all residents as well. This is something we can send to the town architect to see if this is still in the plans and if we can weigh in on making this accessible as well.

III. New Business

- a. Jim Zymanek visited us tonight – He spoke first on the agenda:
 - i. Emergency Management – to deal with natural disasters in the town and other emergency situations. Has worked with Dave Whalen in the past.
 1. Emergency Management department is him and one other town employee (Brandon Peters)
 - ii. Working with People Inc Homes to make sure their questions are answered when it comes to emergency preparedness – to help with terminology.
 - iii. Part of education is terminology – difference between travel bans and travel warnings, etc.
 - iv. Shelter Operations – explained it is not always the same shelter every time.
 1. Erica mentioned wanting to talk with Jim more about making sure shelters are accessible.
 2. Erica asked when the last accessibility evaluations were done for the shelters. Asked if Dave Whalen and committee chairs could talk to him about making sure contacts in the community are up to date.
 - a. Town of Amherst Senior Center is main shelter, but he named several others and explained that during the Christmas Blizzard 2022, they had opened some up simply because they were the closest Town building that could take people to get them out of the weather.
 - b. Harlem Road Community Center is also used.
 - c. Northwest Community Center will also be added to the list soon.
 - d. Erica brought up communication within the shelters especially for people who may need help with interpreting or other accessible communication if needed/requested. Asked if shelter staff are aware of how to provide this information in the shelters.
 - i. Jim stated that they have some things, but are always happy to work with the committee to enhance.
 - ii. David Wantuck added that it would be best if they have some VRI and captioning assistance available for people who need it. David also recommended doing test runs for these systems 2x/year. Jim said they are scheduled to do this testing quarterly.
 - v. Jim attended the emergency management training by Dave Whalen
 - vi. Erica offered to work with Jim on a meeting and Jim agreed. This will be scheduled later to include: Jim, Brandon Peters, Dave Whalen, and Committee Chairs.
 - vii. Rachel mentioned that if they were to come across someone in the shelters who need any help from an Intellectual and Developmental Disability

standpoint, she could be a contact. Jim said he would take her contact. They also use the county when they need help.

- viii. Jim offered to come to future meetings 1-2x/year and encouraged anyone to reach out when issues arise and before they become a bigger issue.
- ix. Sue Zummo – asked for maps of flood zones. Debbie said there are maps and sometimes they do change. She also suggested the building and planning departments to make those available. Debbie said they do exist and the town does have them.
- b. Resolution 2023-623 – rezoning of Eggert Road (Project)
 - i. The proposal is by Ellicott Development – intention to build two large apartment buildings on Eggert Road behind the former Cantalician School. Property is very close to a group home at 289 Crosby Blvd as well as a near the ECO playground. Emma Gagliano submitted an email to ask the committee to advocate that this project is done in a way that ensures safety for everyone in the area including people with disabilities.
 - ii. Rachel shared that she contacted OLV who owns the group home and is happy to help connect the committee with their staff. They were unable to attend tonight.
 - iii. Debbie said this has already gone through the planning board and will go to Town board next – date not yet set for a vote. The next meeting is next Monday at 7 pm (August 21, 2023), she is not sure if this is on the agenda. Some concerns were raised at the Town Board Meeting including flooding issues down the steps close to the Eggertsville playground which is behind the building. The planning board passed this unanimously. The Town Board would make the decision sometime in the next few meetings.
 - 1. Motion to open the floor to the residents of the town of Amherst:
 - a. Luci Miranda – first
 - b. Sue Zummo – second
 - c. All in favor
 - 2. Emma Gagliano shared her concerns:
 - a. A neighbor spoke to staff at the home (not leadership)- regarding their driveway which is shared with the property and there is one entrance. Concern that the building would block the access to the driveway. Would block any emergency services access because of the steep access to the home and the access is through that driveway.
 - i. Also, quality of life with that being the only remaining green space they have to look at from their porch, and only being able to look at buildings.
 - ii. Emma had reached out to OLV but hadn't heard back from them yet.
 - 3. Lisa Drdul – Wanted to come to these meetings and at that point she was already frustrated with other town departments concerning limitations that she as a resident has as well as other neighbors she

has with other mobility and disabilities issues. Wanted to share that there is a lot of frustration from the residents – saying there are three unanswered emails to other town departments. Felt this was a last effort to try to get help from this committee. Said nobody wants to be adversarial, but when you are passed from one committee to another, it builds. Said she appreciates this committee so much and wanted us to know what we do and what we try to do. Lisa hopes to become more involved in this as a volunteer – would like to help in any way that she can. She has found this to be the most receptive and worthwhile committee she has worked with.

4. Sam Smith – She said this committee should be included in planning projects. Said that the committee tried to get answers and struggled to get some. Said that concerns can be addressed and abated when the appropriate committees are in place. Sees this committee being able to say “Can this person live and experience this space.” And not just “checking the boxes.” Trying to address and resolve these issues before they become community headaches. Wants this committee to absorb this responsibility within this committee (proactive vs. reactive).

- a. Erica responded that while ADA is bare minimum, being more accessible should be the town goal.

5. Debbie shared that she will share the recording of this meeting with the planning board and other applicable committees and groups.

- c. Encourage everyone to share things to post on social media (Facebook page) – send a message for things to share.

IV. Next Meeting

- a. September 11, 2023 6:30 pm

V. Closing

- a. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm
 - i. Motion to adjourn
 1. Luci Miranda – first
 2. Barbara Robertson – second
 3. All in favor