

Farmington Human Relations Commission
Minutes

DATE: August 1, 2016

Commission Members Present: Ruth Grobe
Donna Mambrino
Zalman Nakhimovsky
Jolanta Sliwinski
Christine Mergenthaler

Town of Farmington: Amanda Moffo
Matt Blume
Dan Aparo
Amy Suffredini

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 pm by Ruth Grobe.

Minutes: Upon motion duly made by Donna Mambrino and seconded by Jolanta Sliwinski, the minutes of May 2, 2016 were accepted as written on a vote of four in favor and one abstained.

Update from Town Council

Amy Suffredini indicated that summer has been pretty quiet for the Town Council. The Gateways Committee continues to target parts of town for improvement and is currently working on the area along Route 4 from Mountain Spring Road to the Farmington River. The consultant is doing a marketability study and traffic study before a plan for use and development. The next step will be bringing sidewalks up to code for ADA standards. Nothing has really moved on it this summer. Another area of focus will be the Five Corners on Route 6 (off of exit 37 from I-84).

Update from Police Department

Dan Aparo indicated that there were no updates from the Farmington Police Department.

Update from Department of Public Works

Matt Blume said the Department of Public Works is wrapping up construction from West District to Depot Place. The next step is to go from Depot Place to the bridge to repair that section of sidewalk. On Route 177, there will be new left turn lanes to go to Railroad Avenue and New Britain Avenue, as well as a right turn on to the bridge from New Britain Avenue. The package store at that corner is closing and coming down, which will affect pedestrian traffic during the construction process. They will attempt to work on one side of the street at a time to make optimum conditions for accessibility. The project hopes to bring new traffic signal equipment that works independently of the signals on the other side of the bridge to avoid double lockdown. There will also be no cobble stones in the sidewalks of the new project.

Per Commission suggestion, Matt said that he will talk to the Department of Transportation regarding a larger flashing wheelchair sign for construction. The plans are mostly in design right now, and the timeline for completing the construction is approximately the summer of 2018.

Accessibility Issues

Update on repairs to accessible ramp at McDonald's

The ramp at McDonalds was repaired with the help of Town Planner Bill Warner, but a new issue arose in the form of the handicapped entrance button. The button had been turned off by McDonald's employees as a result of neighborhood youths misusing it. Teenagers were repeatedly kicking the button and would not relent at the request of restaurant staff. The staff then disabled the button. The suggestion was made for restaurant employees to contact the police regarding the rambunctious teenagers rather than disable handicapped access to the restaurant. Dan Aparo said the manager at McDonalds is very understanding and he will reach out to speak with her regarding the matter. There was also a Commission suggestion to invite residents from New Horizons to the schools for discussions to help raise awareness and foster understanding.

Update on CC=A Activities

Ruth Grobe is currently working with the deans at UConn Health to make UConn a model of accessible and informed healthcare. They have a lot of work to do and need more examples of issues to help them in the process. In response to CC=A advocacy, State Representative Mike Demicco put forth a bill to require medical offices to put in more accessible medical equipment and machines. It passed the House but didn't make it to the Senate. He wants to submit again in the next session. Our state representative is really on the case of medical issues for people with disabilities.

Conversation with New Horizons Residents

Residents feel that the ramp into George's pizza is unsafe and the CVS ramp is very long and has a sharp turn that feels unsafe as well. They want to know how we can remedy that. Unfortunately, because those are private property, it is up to the property owner to repair, and George's has been there for so long that they are not held to the same standard as new construction. One suggestion was that the town may be able to get a grant to fund better access to private property like George's, enabling them to afford the project. Matt Blume will look into it.

Zalman Nakhimovsky wanted to know if there was a text-only routine police department number for non-emergency calls from people with speech disabilities. Dan Aparo said that the technology is there, but unfortunately Connecticut doesn't have it. It may be a few years before it comes to CT police departments. Another suggestion was to increase training for dispatchers regarding speech impairments. One solution in the meantime was that the dispatcher does have email, so people may be able to email non-emergency complaints directly.

Residents would like to see a motorcycle officer in Farmington in order to promote a greater “out-of-cruiser” police presence. Dan Aparo said that while they do not have a motorcycle officer, they do have bicycle officers out and about as well as foot patrol officers with regularly assigned routes.

A question was asked about former Town Council Chair Bea Stockwell’s ambition to build sidewalks all over town. This did not prove to be feasible, but our present zoning regulations require that **all new** buildings, residential or otherwise, must have sidewalks. This is currently resulting in many “sidewalks to nowhere” but eventually there is hope for them to connect.

Several residents raised issues with accessibility and safety at the annual Firemen’s Carnival in downtown Unionville. The sidewalk black top is very uneven where it meets the grass; perhaps it could be marked during the Carnival with colored paint? It would also be helpful to have picnic tables in a more accessible place; at present, you have to drive your wheelchair over roots and rocks to get to any tables. The Carnival area may be slated for improvement by Center Plan, a for profit developer.

New Horizons resident and Citizens Coalition Co-Chair Gary Gross expressed that residents need to vote to help get things done. He announced that Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty is planning to come speak about the importance of voting to New Horizons residents.

Next Meeting Date: TBD

Upon motion duly made by Yolanta Sliwinski and seconded by Zalman Nakhimovsky, the meeting was adjourned at 7:47 pm on a vote of five in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Amanda Moffo