

Sudbury Commission on Disability

Date: August 5, 2021

Time: Meeting called to order at 6:45 p.m.

Location: Virtual Remote via Zoom

Members Present: Pat Guthy (Chair), Kay Bell (Vice-chair), Doug Frey, Randi Korn, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Caroline Santangelo

Members Absent: Jane Kline

Also present: Janie Dretler, Select Board (SB); Jennifer Roberts, COD Liaison SB; Scott Nix, Sudbury Chief of Police; Bethany Hadvab, Town Social Worker; Valerie Fletcher, Executive Director, Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD), former Deputy Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health; Laurie Eliason, Lisa Tursi

1. Ms. Santangelo will record minutes.
2. Presentation. Valerie Fletcher, Executive Director, IHCD addressed the group on the topic of brain-based disabilities and accessibility. She stated that it is common for groups or individuals to believe that there are no design implications for brain-based disabilities because there is no reference to them in codified standards. However, given the high and growing incidence rate of brain-based disabilities, it is difficult to consider a design framework as truly “inclusive” without consideration for individuals with brain-based disabilities. Furthermore, when we go beyond “basic accessibility” and include these considerations in our design frameworks, we create an environment that is effectively “better” for everyone, and that focus should not be on the “deficit level” but on the “difference level.”

Ms. Fletcher shared research and statistics around the stigma and effects of these often “unseen” disabilities and how their impact across age, race and socio-economic groupings. In response to Ms. Guthy’s question, “how can we as a Town begin to address these issues?” Ms. Fletcher responded that “awareness and caring” was a meaningful first step. Ms. Fletcher then offered to share various documents, including “The Changing Reality of Disability” and highlighted that the IHCD has a group of over 500 “user experts” who are willing to share feedback and information with groups who reach out to work with IHCD.

All who were present were engaged in Ms. Fletcher’s presentation and thanked her for her willingness to present to the Commission. Ms. Guthy asked if the Commission could remain in touch and Ms. Fletcher agreed.

3. Public Comment. Bethany Hadvab, Town Social Worker commented that the information shared by Ms. Fletcher dovetails with the work of Livable Sudbury, helping to broaden people's perspective on issues rather than considering them strictly as a "senior" or "disability". Further, that sometimes when the word "inclusion" is heard, it implies that people aren't being included or somehow don't fit. Believes that the focus needs to be more on an individual's "lived experience".

Because of length and importance of the first agenda item, Ms. Guthy postponed the approval of Minutes (agenda item four) to a future meeting and moved to the fifth agenda item.

5. Review of Letters. The group began by reviewing the letter that had been drafted by the working group to Mr. Hayes, Town Manager. Ms. Korn opened the discussion by asking the group about the tone of the drafted letters and a discussion ensued. It was agreed that given the importance of the issues and process to date regarding the Town Self-Evaluation, the Transition Plan, and any grants that should be applied for by the Town, that a firm tone was necessary to establish the needs and protect the civil rights of so many members of the community who are voiceless. The letter was edited in detail with full participation of all Commissioners.

Ms. Santangelo made a motion to approve the letter as edited and to authorize that the letter be sent to the Town Manager by Ms. Guthy, on behalf of the Commission. Ms. Kouchakjian seconded. The motion was unanimously passed by a roll call vote of the remaining Commissioners, with Ms. Korn having previously left the meeting.

Given the lateness of the hour it was agreed that the remainder of the agenda items would be moved to a special meeting to be scheduled as quickly as possible.

Motion to Adjourn meeting by Ms. Kouchakjian. Seconded by Mr. Frey. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote each member stating aye. Meeting adjourned at 9:46 p.m.