



TOWN OF WAKEFIELD

COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES

NOTICE OF MEETING

March 6th, 2023 | 7:00 p.m.

Via Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84499262235?pwd=MU4yMG9wYmJEtRnkxWUVk3ZmFIZz09>

Consistent with the Governor's orders extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law every effort will be made to allow the public to view and/or listen to the meeting in real time. If you do not have a camera or microphone on your computer you may use the following dial in number: 1-301-715-8592 Meeting ID 844 9926 2235 Passcode 063493. Please only use dial in or computer and not both as feedback will distort the meeting. This meeting will be audio and video recorded. In compliance with the Americans with Disability Act, this location is accessible to people with disabilities, Wakefield provides reasonable accommodations and/or language assistance free of charge upon request. If you are a person with a disability and require information or materials in an alternate format, or if you require any other accommodation, please contact the Town's Disability Coordinator, William Renault-Town Engineer at 781-246-6308 as far in advance of the event as possible. Every effort will be made to grant your request. Advance notification will enable the Town to make reasonable arrangements to remove an accessibility barrier for you.

Meeting Agenda

Call to Order: 7:02 pm

Present:

Commission members: Marie Rej, Paula Thompson, Lorna Davidson-Connelly, Katharine Staiti, Judy Tanner, Lois Benjamin, Kristin Bardol, Janice Mirabassi. Absent: Levonne Coughlin.

Wakefield Guests: ADA Coordinator Bill Renault, Councilor Michael McLane, Councilor Mehreen Butt

Guests from the NE Metro Tech design team, advisory team, and the school: Carol Francheschi, DRA Architect; Kevin Nigro, PMA Owner's Project; Vlad (architect); Joy Pearson; David Warner, Victoria Coliami, Connie Rockwood, Jenn Ford, parent; Carla Skuzarella, Principal; David DuBarry, Superintendent.

Additional participants from some of the 12 towns that are part of the NE MetroTech district – including Council on Disability members and other interested parties from Melrose, Malden, and Woburn. Note: the audiotaped version of the meeting provides more details on these participants as they made contributions to the conversation.

Pledge Allegiance

Reading of the Commission's Mission Statement – "Our mission is to address the needs and concerns of our disabled residents and provide their full participation in the activities and services of Wakefield."



Old/New Business

- Recognition of the death of disability advocate, Judith Heumann by Commission member, Janice Mirabassi: The Wakefield Commission on Disabilities would like to recognize the life and very recent death of American Disability Rights activist Judith Heumann on March 4th, at the age of 75. Judy was recognized internationally as a truly extraordinary leader in the disability community – and was widely recognized as the “Mother of the disability rights movement”. A lifelong activist, Judy was born in 1947. She contracted polio at the age of 2 and became unable to walk. In 1949, institutionalization of children with disabilities was strongly advised. But Judith continued to live with her family. When Judy attempted to enter kindergarten, the principle of the local school blocked her family from entering, labeling Judy as a “fire hazard”. Her parents continued to fight, demanding access. Judith eventually earned an MPH degree, and was at the forefront of the disability rights demonstrations, helped spearhead the passage of disability rights legislation, founded national and international disability advocacy organizations, held senior federal government positions, and authored some important books on her life experiences. Judith wrote: “I simply refused to accept what I was told about who I could be. And I was willing to make a fuss about it.” Judith Heumann, rest in peace - - and with our thanks.
- Bill Renault shared some of the questions that he had received in advance of this meeting about the VokeTech project.
- Kevin Nigro et al began the presentation (these notes capture highlights of the presentation)
 - It is a goal of the NEMT project to make this school “the most disability-friendly school in the state”. Access for students, parents, and community members who might use the school had been included in the plans.
 - The planners pulled together an Advisory Group of students and parents with disabilities to provide input on how to best serve everyone.
 - Unrelated to the physical design on the school:
 - The admissions criteria will be the same for all students – admissions staff will not be informed until after a student’s acceptance if the student has an IEP or 504 plan. The school already has one of the highest rates of students identifying as having a disability in the state; the rate is higher than every one of the 12 towns that the school currently serves. Side note: The school is discussing the idea of starting a basketball team for students who are wheelchair users.
 - Examples of SPED services at NEMT: The school uses an inclusion model that brings Special Education teachers into the classrooms as co-teachers. Estimated that about 40 classes that are currently being co-taught. The school offers all the same SPED services that other public schools offer.
 - The school also works with specialists from Carrol School for the Blind and with audiologists as may be needed to serve students.

- Comment from meeting participant: An even greater percentage of people with disabilities are unemployed compared to people who not disclose having a disability. How does the school address this issue?
 - Vocational education can help this group of students. We understand the importance of job training, we partner with agencies that address this issue, and refer students for 688 services or to Mass Rehab for transitional services - whichever may be appropriate.
- Question: What percentage of VokeTech students have autism, IEP's, or other ed plans?
 - The new building will allow us to increase the size of the student population. We expect a 25% increase in enrollment when the new building is opened, and a 25% increase in students with IEPs. Currently, about 9% of the students in the student body are autistic; about 5% have communication differences (sensory, hearing, or vision); 10% have an emotional disability; 3% intellectual disability; 9% are neuro-atypical learners.
- Q: With the increase in school size, will you increase the curricula choices?
 - We are planning to have a wide range of programs.
- Design Team Presentation:
 - The new entrance driveway to access the building will be on Farm Street by the Saugus town line. There will be an access road encircling the school.
 - Every parking lot includes accessible parking space(s) and an accessible entrance into the building. The parking lot that will be at the level of the playing fields will also have accessible parking. There are 22 planned accessible parking spaces out of the 476 spaces – or about 5% of the total spaces.
 - The entire school will be accessible to the greatest extent possible. The building will have two elevators, one at each end of the building – eliminating the need for internal ramps.
 - All bathrooms have fully-accessible facilities.
 - Both levels of the auditorium are wheelchair accessible; the balcony has room for wheelchair seating.
 - There is a 59-foot grade change from the lower parking area to the school building. Dave Warner: The contour of the land has about a 10% gradient; accessible design cannot be more than a 5% grade. The design of the ramp attempts to preserve as many trees as possible. The ramp deck will be composite materials; the width will be 8-feet; there will be guards and railings on both sides of the ramp except where there are grade-level resting zones.
 - The ramp follows the “natural path of travel”.
 - The Advisory Group wanted the transition from the lower to upper level to be as inclusive as possible; though there will still be the option to ascend using stairs, the initial plan called for 102 stair treads; the re-designed plan now has 62 – with additional ramping added. A person who uses the stairs will travel on the same path as ramp-users for about 70% of the ascent.

- There will be double handrails, mesh siding, and equipment will be purchased to keep the pathway clear of snow.
- Anticipated construction schedule:
 - 90% of the construction documents would be submitted by the end of May 2023, and 100% by the end of June;
 - The bid process will begin in July;
 - The school will be opened in 2026.
- Questions from meeting participants:
 - Question: Will there be lighting and cameras on the ramp?
 - Response: Yes, both.
 - Q: Can students have an escort to the parking lot? Maybe add call security boxes to the ramp?
 - A: Security will be addressed closer to the school opening
 - Q: The length of the ramp is very long. It would be exhausting or impossible for some people to use the ramp. How will that be addressed?
 - A: As needed, people can park in the upper level in one of the accessible parking spaces.
 - Q: Are two elevators enough?
 - A: Note – the current school does not have any elevators and is inaccessible beyond the first floor. The proposed building has elevators in proximity to key school facilities (e.g., offices, restrooms). We will also mandate response times for any elevator maintenance issues that arise.
 - Q: Can the ramp be repaired in a timely way?
 - A: Yes, we have an excellent maintenance team at the school. The ramp boardwalk has a steel understructure.
 - Q: Are the athletic fields accessible?
 - A: Yes – including accessible seating.
 - Request from David: We would like to invite contacts from the Disability Commissions to help in setting up sports teams for people with disabilities.
 - Comment from meeting participant: Sometimes things are designed to be accessible, but “as built” are not built to the specifications. E.g., trash barrels or planters sometimes block door handles of restrooms or elevators or drawer handles are sometimes not usable to people.
 - Q: How many of the 22 accessible upper parking spaces are 8-foot wide?
 - Five of the spaces are adjacent to an 8-foot aisle in the upper lots, and 7 in the lower lot.
 - David: I would love to work with you all in the future to assure we are meeting the needs of all people.
 - Q: Why were alternative locations for the school not used that would have prevented the need for the long ramp?
 - David DiBarry: This is the place where the school had to go; it’s where it would fit. This is what the feasibility study concluded.

- Q: Will the ramp have any “off spaces” - e.g., openings to exit if a person feels they are in danger?
- There will be openings in the ramp that are near grade.
- Q: Some students may not be capable of using the ramp during high-traffic times and might need accommodations.
- You are welcome to participate in the Advisory Group meetings – zoom in. We will make whatever accommodations are needed for such students.
- Q: What percentage of your students have mobility disabilities?
- The majority of the 9% have neurological disabilities, not motor.
- Participant comment: consider creating a spot in the woods that can be used as an outdoor classroom.
- Q: Both the ramp and the stairs lack a direct line of vision. The trees block visibility. The ramp is terrifying – how would you exit if there is an active shooter?
- Having two access roads to the school will help. We have yet to really dig deep on this safety issue and have not gotten into the specific of an ALICE drill. [NB: Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate] We work closely with the Wakefield PD on this, and will continue our active-shooter drills with them.
- Comment: It is unsafe to offer kids “a walk in the woods” by using the ramp; there are other ways to include nature in the surroundings.
- Kevin: We do not talk about safety drills in open meetings – we do this with groups that include safety consultants.
- Q: Are the upper parking lots for staff and teachers only?
- Usually, but accommodations could be made, as may be needed, to allow a student to park in an upper lot.
- Q: Will there be guardrails on the catchment ditch?
- Yes.
- Qs: Will there be speed control where the road grade changes from 90 to 120 feet? And why is there no sidewalk on the road? If there are to be sidewalks, can you point out where sidewalks will be located? [go to recording for more detailed response]
- The grade of the road is 9-10%; it will level off at the location of the crosswalks with a pedestrian flashing beacon for people who are crossing. Additionally, 18 staff members are assigned to parking lot duty at the end of the day. Someone will be there to stop traffic at all locations.
- Comment: I have an autistic child who won’t take an elevator or use a ramp. She will have major challenges with this design.
- The school might not be a good fit for every student, but we would make every best effort for every student.
- Q: “Trex”-type material ices over easily. Is the ramp a safe surface?
- Slip resistance varies with the specific type of material used. We will only use materials that are the most slip-resistant.
- Q: Safety is a disability matter because it addresses how we move through space. If the rails [for the ramp] are removed in some places, how is that compliant?
- Landings that are <30” do not require handrails.

- Q: Are there toilet facilities on/near the ramp?
- No.
- Q: Is there a lighting system?
- Yes – it is not shown on the slides, but there is a lighting system.

The Wakefield Commission on Disabilities thanked the project team and the Voke officials for their time and information.

The Commission has scheduled a meeting for March 13th to pull together any Commission recommendations that arose from today's meeting.

Next (full) Meeting scheduled for April 3, 2023

Motion to Adjourn: 9:26pm

Respectfully Submitted by Marie Rej and Lorna J. Davidson-Connelly, Co-Chairs