

May 22, 2025

# Holyoke Commission on Disabilities

## Meeting Logistics and Attendance:

The May 22nd, 2025, Holyoke Commission on Disabilities meeting was convened in the Holyoke City Council Chambers at 5:53pm following technical issues. (Thank you to Natalia Munoz from Holyoke Media for technical support!)

Attendees included: Lyn Horan (chair), Kelly Curran (ADA Coordinator), Sarah Wedaman (secretary), Jessica Lebron-Martinez (vice chair), Marlene Connor.

The minutes from the April 24, 2025, meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved by a verbal vote of all present members.

## Old Business:

- **Handicap Sign Removal Ordinance Update** Lyn Horan provided an update on the ordinance for handicap sign removal, noting the commission's previous work with the ordinance committee and Councilor Rivera's input. The approved ordinance generally aligned with the commission's requests, including English/ Spanish translation and a spreadsheet for tracking sign locations. The main difference was a proposed two-year review period, instead of the recommended 3-5 year period. Councilor Rivera suggested that any member with concerns about the two-year change should contact him.
- **Budget Request Presentation and Process** Lyn Horan discussed the commission's COD budget request presented at the mayor's budget meeting, outlining four categories for the use of handicap parking fines. The meeting was considered positive, with many questions indicating interest. Lyn clarified at the meeting that tickets would be enforced by a combined effort of people hired specifically for parking enforcement and the police department. Mayor Garcia has been supportive, and the commission hopes to see the budget implemented by fiscal year 2026 (starting in July 2025).
  - Councilor Patty Divine was thanked for her support in this process.
  - Important note: the enforcement of handicap parking laws are intended to help protect, not punish, disabled individuals. Fines collected should benefit this community.
  - Next Steps: finance committee reviewing the budget, with a goal to move it to a full city council vote before the summer break.
- **Research on Other Municipalities' Practices** Marlene Connor shared research on how other disability commissions utilize handicap parking violation funds. In Agawam, the disability

commission is linked with the Council on Aging, and the funds are treated as a revolving account accessible for commission-approved projects. Watertown also uses a similar revolving fund and has utilized it for initiatives like accessibility studies and providing interpreters. Marlene Connor noted that these municipalities do not have independent budgets and the ADA coordinator is often a city staff member from departments like DPW or City Planning.

- **Budget Categories and Priorities** Lyn Horan reiterated the four budget categories: commission needs (including a survey and technology), transportation, educational supports for disabled students, and structural accommodations. The survey and transportation initiatives were highlighted as particularly important. Discussions about partnering with the Senior Center for accessible transportation options were mentioned, with the possibility of acquiring retired accessible vehicles from PVTa. The education category could involve providing resources like iPads to students with disabilities. The structural accommodations category aims to improve accessibility, although state grants available through the Massachusetts Commission on Disabilities for larger projects. Such as accessible playgrounds.
  - Survey Planning and Initial Ideas– A cost-effective initial approach for the survey could involve utilizing Holyoke Gas & Electric's monthly mailings, as previously suggested by Councilor Patty Divine.
- **Update on Police Station Accessibility** – Congratulations to all. The accessible renovations to the police station doors, which have been in the works for almost two years, have been completed. Special thanks to Matt Peterson. The commission discussed the possibility of a visit and a photo opportunity to acknowledge this improvement.
- **Massachusetts Trails Accessibility Bills** Lyn Horan provided an update on Senate Bill 548 and House Bill 915, which aim to expand trail access for people of all abilities. The commission had previously written letters of support, and the letter has been updated for the new legislative term and sent out. Representative Pat Duffy has also agreed to co-sponsor the bill.
- **Variances and Disabled Parking Sign Applications–**
  - **Variance for Lyman and Maple Street Buildings** The variance for the Lyman Street and Maple Street buildings, which the commission had received information about at the end of March, is expected to be granted. Although glad to see old buildings renewed, the Commission wished for accessible apartments including in the building design. After contacting The Massachusetts Architectural Board, Lyn Horan discovered that the board had already reviewed the application without initially informing the COD, but there isn't much more the COD can do at this point.
  - **Sign Application - Angel Lopez** Jessica Lebron reviewed the sign application of Mr. Angel Lopez and had questions regarding the need for a parking sign given ample street

parking on a dead-end street and an unfinished application. The commission decided to wait for further information from Mr. Lopez

- **Sign Applications - Georgina Reyes** Jessica Lebron supported the sign application of Ms. Georgina Reyes due to the busy location across from a senior center with limited parking. Jessica Lebron noted an existing handicap parking sign nearby and questioned potential conflicts. She will follow up with the city clerk's office.
- **Sign Applications - Nelson Vega** Lyn Horan reviewed the application of Mr. Nelson Vega on North Bridge Street, a similar situation to Mr. Lopez with street parking only on a dead-end street. Jessica Lebron will check with the city clerk about this location.
  - A need to review bylaws regarding the number of handicap signs on a block and to potentially contact current owners of nearby handicap spaces was discussed
- **Sign Application - Carrie Padu** Lyn Horan recommended voting on Carrie Padu's sign application, noting it was well-completed and clearly explained the need due to her 15-year-old son's medical condition and accessibility challenges at her apartment complex on Jarvis Avenue. Pending verification from the DPW regarding sign placement on Jarvis Avenue, Kelly Curran proposed approving the application, which was seconded and passed.

## **New Business**

- **Executive Meeting Proposal** Lyn Horan proposed an executive meeting for commission members to discuss their roles, contributions, and needs. Kelly Curran suggested meeting at their place for a brief, open discussion, which was agreed upon by Jessica Lebron and Sarah Wedaman ([01:40:47](#)).
- **Potential New Member** Lyn Horan proposed Heather Leenders as a potential new member for the commission, highlighting their experience in the arts, personal experience with chronic health issues and caregiving, and consistent support for disability-related issues

**Meeting Conclusion:** The meeting concluded at 7:13 pm.

**The next Commission meeting** has been scheduled for June 26, 2025, at 5:30pm. In person at Holyoke City Hall, City Council chambers or virtually

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NOTE: Meetings for the 2025 year are scheduled as follows: June 26, August 28th, September 25th, October 23rd, and a combined November/December meeting on December 11th.