

River's Edge Convention Center Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – April 10, 2018

Present Jodi Domeier, Marty Mahowald

Not Present Ibrahim Abdi, Patty Gaetz, Brian Hart, Julie Lunning, Alvin Yu

Staff Present Bill Dunsmoor, Rich Gallus, Tony Goddard

1. The meeting was convened at 5:05 pm at the Convention Center. Board members introduced themselves to three members of the public who had attended in order to make comment on accessibility concerns. The three guests were Todd Ceder, Ann Johnson, and Kim Pettman, all of Sauk Rapids.
2. There being no quorum present, the Board opened the floor to comments. Goddard noted that he would begin by responding to several issues that had been raised in advance of the meeting via email. He also noted that the Convention Center is in full compliance with the Americans for Disability Act (ADA) and has made a number of alterations that go beyond the code. Management must, of course, weigh such expenditures against the facility's other needs and the number of benefiting people.
  - Braille signage in elevators – was upgraded during annual inspection;
  - Improved bariatric bench – one is on order to increase our inventory;
  - Wheelchair-adapted meeting/dining tables – Dunsmoor is researching and wants to get feedback tonight before choosing among options;
  - Video phones – Goddard reported that another City department is experimenting with the technology, and having technical problems, which are being addressed by the IT department. River's Edge will not adopt before the technology is de-bugged and will make a judgement about the usefulness for our facility, due to limited traffic.
  - Pettman asked about the timing of the new elevator installation, because she is attending a May conference. Dunsmoor replied that we believe the elevator will be operational by the end of April.
3. The three guests spoke in turn and engaged in a discussion with the board and management present. No decisions will be made at the meeting, but management will take all suggestions under advisement. Subject areas covered:
  - Toilet supports All of the toilets in the Convention Center are wall-mounted – a design that simplifies cleaning and maintenance, but that provides less support than floor-mounted toilets. Retrofitting the plumbing to floor-mount is prohibitively expensive, but there are inexpensive stainless steel supports that can reduce the risk of collapse. They would be needed in the handicap stalls in each restroom, ideally.
  - Hearing enhancement devices After the issue was raised, Dunsmoor noted that we already offer the devices; patrons can request from the meeting planner or Convention Center staff.
  - Wheelchair-adapted tables Patrons using chairs often have significant difficulty using the standard tables, both for meeting and dining purposes. The increase in the use of power chairs complicates the situation further because they are bigger and often taller.

Dunsmoor has been researching the choices available in the marketplace and got feedback from the guests about what types are more useful. He noted that an ideal table would be sturdy, flexible, and easy for staff to move.

- Room layout Patrons using wheelchairs are often stymied by insufficient space between tables, making the passageways too narrow. Gallus commented that this is an issue frequently discussed with meeting planners, who often want to push the capacity of rooms when planning an event. There was discussion about the need for disabled patrons to make their needs known to meeting planners and/or to convention center staff so that accommodations can be made. There are some organizations that are already attuned to these issues, but most are not.
  - Screen size for presentations Patrons with vision challenges may have difficulty seeing all of the detail on screens and would benefit from larger screens. Staff remarked that this, again, is a decision made by meeting planners. The facility has larger screens available, but cost is a factor.
  - Scope of need Staff noted that we have little sense of the scope of the need for more adaptive equipment or planning. For example, we believe that there has never before been a request for a wheelchair-adapted table. The guests responded that many in the disabled community are reluctant to complain and that many believe that the facility is not friendly to their needs, so do not consider attending events here. Their advice: “build it and they will come.” The guests departed after being thanked for their attendance and comments. Watch future meeting minutes for follow-up actions.
4. Board and staff discussed the comments and plans for considering the suggestions offered. Staff will continue to research the physical fixes – toilet supports, adapted tables, etc. Discussion focused primarily on the idea of being more purposeful in dealing with meeting planners. We already employ a checklist approach when working with meeting planners and can be more assertive about urging planners to think about their patrons’ needs. This seems to be most important with community events, especially if it is true that disabled people in our community do not feel welcome. Staff will develop a protocol for promoting this effort to meeting planners. Better information on the website would also help communicate.
  5. Next Meeting: Tuesday June 12, 2018, 5:00 pm
  6. Adjournment at 6:45 pm.

Submitted by Tony Goddard