

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Minutes for Thursday, March 11, 2010

Present:

Members: Laura Brelsford, JoAnn Haas, Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Gordon Slater, Don Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, and Dave Wood.

Alternates: Larry Braman, Bet MacArthur, and David Peterson.

Staff: Michael Muehe and Kate Thurman.

Absent: Kate Patton Regal and Kathy Watkins.

Guests: Elizabeth Dean Clower, Cambridge Resident; Becky Fuentes, Assistant Commissioner of Administration at DPW; Neal Goodman, Cambridge Family and Children's Service; and Peter Montalto, Cambridge Family and Children's Service.

February Minutes – Elizabeth Dean Clower asked the Commission to amend the February 11, 2010 minutes to indicate that she was present. The minutes were approved as amended.

Announcements – Don Summerfield reported that the Boston Center for Independent Living is holding their annual Marie Felton Award Ceremony on March 12.

Public Works Report – Michael Muehe introduced and welcomed Becky Fuentes, the Assistant Commissioner of Administration for the Department of Public Works (DPW), who reported on this year's snow season.

Becky reported that we got 52 inches of snow last winter and, as of March 11, we had gotten 34 inches. DPW received 718 complaints about snow removal violations and issued 498 tickets in the winter of 2009-2010.

In the past, the City has issued hand-written tickets, but this year electronic ticketing was implemented in order to avoid any delay in mailing them to property owners. In addition, Becky reported that DPW is working on implementing hearings with clerk magistrates in order to have a court process that would require repeat offenders to pay their tickets for sidewalk clearance violations. She said that court rulings could allow the City to put a lien on properties until owners have settled their violations.

Becky also reported that DPW is committed to publicizing the snow hotline number again next year. Becky said that DPW is still discussing the Commission's request that DPW provide an estimate on what it would cost for DPW to shovel all City sidewalks. She also said that DPW is looking into the possibility of shoveling curb cuts on sidewalks opposite of City property and will report back to the Commission regarding their decision.

Don Summerfield reported that there is confusion with businesses at the Carl Barron Plaza in terms of who is responsible for clearing the sidewalks and curb by the disability parking spaces. Becky said that DPW can speak with the management company about this.

In response to Michael Muehe's question about having the Parking Control Officers (PCO's) issue tickets from their hand-held devices, Becky reported that they are unable to do so because the devices work with only one software platform at a time, but they are able to store the information about sidewalk clearance violations in them.

JoAnn Haas reported that the recycling and rubbish collectors often throw the barrels and bins back on the sidewalk in such a way that it blocks passersby and asked Becky if they could place them more neatly. Becky said they have instructed all DPW trash collectors and the recycling contractor to do so, but that this requires constant supervision.

Becky reported that all sidewalk obstructions should be reported to DPW. For example, they have inspectors for rubbish violations and botanical obstruction violations, such as overhanging trees or shrubs protruding into the sidewalks.

Bet MacArthur suggested that DPW place posters in the contractor's building, reminding the workers of the need to keep from obstructing the sidewalks.

Don Summerfield reported that several sidewalks are obstructed by the growth of trees, to which Michael Muehe replied that DPW has worked very hard on maintaining an accurate inventory of street trees in order to determine where the problem areas are. He requested that this issue be deferred until next month when Kathy Watkins can report on it.

Michael Muehe thanked Becky for her report.

Chair's Report – Rachel Tanenhaus reported filing a complaint with the Hackney Division of the Boston Police Department because a taxi driver refused to take her with her Guide Dog. She said that they were very responsive and suspended the driver for five days.

She also reported that the sub-committee will begin interviewing applicants for the Commission vacancies and will keep Commission members updated.

Rachel discussed the addition of a Q&A section in the AccessLetter, which was mentioned at February's meeting. She requested that members work on this because the staff does not have the time to do so.

Don Summerfield suggested including a question about the rights of service animal users when a taxi driver refuses them, citing allergies as the reason.

It was decided that each Commission member would submit two questions to be considered for the Q&A segment of the AccessLetter.

Disability Reframed Community Film Series Update – Bet MacArthur reported that the next film to be shown will be *Murderball*, and that Sunday, April 11 is the tentative date. She said that films will continue to be shown at the Citywide Senior Center and that the window shades are getting fixed.

Michael Muehe reported that he is working on getting updated equipment for projecting films on the screen. He also said that the Brookline Commission on the Disabled has expressed interest in our film series and the possibility of having a joint screening.

Executive Director's Report – Michael Muehe reported that the Arlington Commission on Disability is planning on holding a regional forum for local disability commissions in May. He asked interested members to fill out a registration form.

Michael reported that the City's annual Holocaust Memorial event is being held on Tuesday, May 4 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Temple Beth Shalom of Cambridge, 8 Tremont Street, and that in the past, two of our Commission members have attended to take part in the lighting of candles to represent different groups. Don Summerfield volunteered to attend, and JoAnn Haas said she may be able to go.

Michael also reported that the Cambridge Taxi School, which has been closed for several months, is starting up again. He explained that drivers have to attend Taxi School and pass an exam in order to get a Cambridge hackney license. He said that the amount of time that we have been given for a joint presentation with the Council on Aging has increased from 60 minutes to 75 minutes.

Michael informed members that he spoke with somebody at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, which purchased Youville Hospital in Cambridge, about developing a partnership to collaborate on outreach projects.

He also said that Emily Kane will be starting as the Commission's new intern next week and will be working on the AccessLetter, both writing and editing articles, and will also be helping with publicity and logistics for the film series.

Michael informed Commission members that a Google group of Massachusetts Commissions on Disabilities has been formed and is open to Commission members statewide.

Project Coordinator's Report – Kate Thurman reported that she is working on cleaning up and streamlining the CCPD contact database in Access. She thanked Larry Braman, who has volunteered some of his time to work with her on this. She said they are adding many new features that will allow for recording more detailed information for each person, including mailing lists and programs (taxi coupons, snow exemptions, trash and recycling exemptions, etc.) in which they participate. Kate reported that the new system will save a lot of time in keeping logs and generating quarterly reports.

Public Input – Elizabeth Dean Clower reported that a construction project recently started on Flagg Street and is wondering if there is an alternative way to get to Memorial Drive. Becky Fuentes suggested that she contact DPW, who should be able to provide her with information.

Old Business – Rachel Tanenhaus reported that NBC and Universal Sports have agreed in response to a petition to broadcast a two-hour recap each night of the Paralympics, but that there will be very limited coverage. She also said that she will be writing an article on the Paralympics, which will be published on March 23 on the Department of Public Health website.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:19pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kate Thurman, Disability Project Coordinator