

City of Cambridge

# Commission for Persons with Disabilities

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Avril dePagter  
Chair

Mary Devlin  
Secretary

Loring Brinckerhoff  
Gary Dmytryk  
Jerry Friedman  
Stelios Gragoudas  
Valerie Hammond  
Nicole Horton-Stimpson  
Jackie Jones  
Philibert Kongtcheu  
Daniel Stubbs

Rachel Tanenhaus  
Executive Director/  
ADA Coordinator

Kate Thurman  
Project Coordinator

**The next meeting of the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities  
will be held online via Zoom on Thursday, July 14, 2022 at 5:30 PM**

PLEASE MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO JOIN BY 5:30 PM

## AGENDA

**\*Please keep your microphone muted when you are not speaking\***

- |  |         |                    |
|--|---------|--------------------|
| 1. Introductions                           | 2 min.  |                    |
| <i>If needed, alternates named</i>         |         |                    |
| 2. Announcements                           | 2 min.  | CCPD staff / Board |
| 3. Approval of June 9 Minutes              | 2 min.  | CCPD Board         |
| 4. Updates from the Election<br>Commission | 40 min. | Tanya Ford         |
| 5. Discussion on Member Interests          | 30 min. | CCPD Board         |
| 6. Public Works Update                     | 5 min.  | Jerry Friedman     |
| 7. Old Business                            | 3 min.  | CCPD staff / Board |
| 8. New Business                            | 3 min.  | CCPD staff / Board |
| 9. Public Input                            | 3 min.  | general public     |

## **CART/closed captioning will be provided for this meeting**

Captions can be turned on within the Zoom platform. Additionally, you may stream CART in a separate URL at <http://bit.ly/CCPDCART>  
(captions will not appear until the meeting has started)

The City of Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities, does not discriminate, including on the basis of disability. The Commission for Persons with Disabilities will provide auxiliary aids and services, written materials in alternative formats, and reasonable modifications in policies and procedures to persons with disabilities upon request.

**The next CCPD meeting will be held online on Thursday, September 8**  
(There will be no meeting in August)

Approved 10/08/2022

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)

# Minutes for Thursday, July 14, 2022 CCPD Meeting

Online via Zoom

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm

## Present:

Members: Loring Brinckerhoff, Avril dePagter, Mary Devlin, Gary Dmytryk, Jerry Friedman, Stelios Gragoudas, Valerie Hammond, and Dan Stubbs

Absent: Nicole Horton-Stimpson, Jackie Jones, and Phil Kongtcheu

Staff: Rachel Tanenhaus and Kate Thurman

Guest speakers: Tanya Ford and Charlie Marquardt of the Cambridge Election Commission

## Minutes:

The June 9, 2022 minutes were approved unanimously

## Updates from the Election Commission:

### Overview

- Tanya Ford, Executive Director, and Charlie Marquardt, Commissioner, of the Cambridge Election Commission (the Commission) provided updates and spoke about accessibility issues around elections.
- The goal of the Commission is to encourage everyone who is eligible to vote to vote. They also ensure that everybody's vote is counted.
- Tanya said that they work closely with Rachel and Kate in terms of reviewing procedures, surveying polling locations, ensuring accessible ballot drop boxes, etc. They want to be sure people with and without disabilities can vote and don't get turned off from voting, and they look forward to collaborating with CCPD in order to do that.

### Changes to Precincts

- One of the big changes this election season is that changes captured by the biannual census are requiring some precincts to be redrawn. The Commission is required to rebalance Cambridge precincts to make sure that the population of each is within 5% of one another. This regulation applies to whole population in each region, not just voters. Cambridge has grown significantly, especially North and East Cambridge. The Commission had to move a lot of precinct borders around, meaning that some residents were moved to different precincts. This was further complicated by the state moving their precinct borders around first; Cambridge had to adapt to their newly redrawn precincts.
- In Cambridge, the maximum allowable precinct size is 3,800 residents; because one district came out to include 3,897 residents, the Commission had to create a sub-precinct for 97 people. The City now has 33 wards and precincts and 9 sub-precincts.

## Voting by Mail

- Tanya reported that in 2020, the state created a temporary law due to COVID allowing all eligible voters to vote by mail rather than having to go to their polling location. A lawsuit brought by the Disability Law Center against the City of Boston requiring them to provide reasonable accommodation for anyone requesting access to online voting for people with disabilities that prevent them from being able to independently mark a paper ballot. As a result, the state created an online portal with accessible PDF ballots that voters could mark, and then print and mail it or email it to their local Election Commission. While not named in the lawsuit, the City of Cambridge made this option available to Cambridge voters, as well.
- Last year for the municipal election, the Commission worked with Rachel and the Information Technology Department (IT) to create a system allowing voters to submit their ballot through a secure online portal. Cambridge was able to do so because the state does not oversee municipal elections.
- The deadline to apply for a vote-by-mail ballot for this year's elections is 5 PM on August 29 for the September 6 primary, and November 1 for the November 8 state election.

## Accessible Voting Equipment

- The Secretary of State's Office must certify any voting equipment used in the state, which has created some challenges in equipping polling places with reliable, accessible machines that are available to people with disabilities who are unable to independently mark their ballots. Cambridge has been using the AutoMARK accessible voting machine for about 20 years, which is the last time the Secretary of State approved an accessible option.
- Because the City is not permitted to choose their own election equipment, they are still using the very old AutoMARK machines, which have become unreliable. The Election Commission thoroughly tests each AutoMARK machine before and during elections, but they still tend to break down a lot. They may work perfectly when tested, and then stop working for no apparent reason a few minutes later.
- Additionally, the state holds the contract for repairing AutoMARK machines, so cities must rely on them to do so. Because the machines are so old, their parts are no longer being made and often have to be sourced secondhand from places like eBay.
- There are other issues with the AutoMARK, as well. Users wear headphones and the machine reads each candidate out loud. The machine requires users to mark "yes" or "no" for each candidate listed; it does not enable voters to skip directly to the candidate(s) for whom they are voting.
- The Commission has been working hard to encourage the Secretary of State to approve newer, more reliable technology, and is hoping for some collaboration from CCPD in doing so. They need help from the disability community to pressure the Secretary of State to move forward. It would be helpful to get other cities and towns on board, too.
- They would also like help explaining to voters who rely on these machines that it's not the Election Commission that is refusing to provide more reliable accessible voting equipment, as they have no choice under state law other than to use the equipment certified by the Secretary of State. However, on Election Day, responsibility does fall on the Commission. While they do train poll workers to offer assistance if the machine isn't working, the Commission feels very strongly that everybody should be able to vote independently and privately. Additionally, anytime the Secretary of State's Office receives complaints about the AutoMARK not working, they call Tanya to tell her it's not acceptable to have nonworking equipment, with which she adamantly agrees. However, by not certifying modern technology, the Secretary gives no other option to cities and towns.
- It was noted that there is a free statewide conference being held online on July 21 by REV UP Massachusetts. REV UP is a national movement to get out the disability vote and stands for Register! Educate! Vote! Use your Power! It will be attended by people from all over the state and is a good opportunity to advocate for state certification of new accessible voting technology. (For more information about REV UP Massachusetts, see <https://revupma.org>).

- Loring suggested that a few CCPD members come together and draft a letter to the Secretary of State. Tanya mentioned that the Election Commission could also sign on to it. It was noted that the difference between a letter and a resolution is that a letter requires certain City reviews and approvals that add time to the process, whereas a resolution doesn't.
- Charlie noted that the Election Commission has written up resolutions in the past and passed motions to send them to the delegation of the Commonwealth and to the leadership of the affected committees at the State House.
- Mary asked what other efforts are going on throughout the state in regard to updating accessible voting machines, noting that Cambridge is one of just 351 cities and towns in MA. Tanya said that she, Charlie, Kate and Rachel met recently with Amelia Fowler, Voting Rights Advocate at the Disability Law Center who is one of the leaders of REV UP Massachusetts. Among other things, they discussed collaborating on the creation of a resolution that would be sent to all cities and towns, giving them the opportunity to sign on to it. Amelia will be reaching out to the other communities about it.
- Tanya added that it can be difficult to work with other cities and towns because most of them no longer have election administrators; many election officials received threats after the 2020 election and left their positions.
- Tanya also noted that there is more that needs to be done to ensure accessible elections than just updating equipment. While CCPD staff survey each polling location in Cambridge to ensure accessibility, many other communities do not have that resource, resulting in a lot of physically inaccessible polling places around the state.
- Tanya reported that cities and towns must pay for voting equipment themselves; there is sometimes funding available from the Secretary of State's Office. Cambridge is fortunate to have the resources to purchase new equipment, but not all cities and towns have the funding to do so. They do have the option of renting equipment from the Secretary of State, but it is much more expensive long term to rent.
- While there is not enough time for new voting equipment to be certified by the state in time for this year's elections, the process needs to be started. In the past, the Secretary's Office has not shared any information about available equipment until they certify new machines. Mary added that Chapter 50 of the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) contains the regulations on how election machines are selected.
- Valerie made a motion that a working group meet to further discuss a resolution on this issue. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.
  - Stel, Valerie, Loring and Avril volunteered to work on it

## Discussion on Member Interests:

- Avril reported that she, Loring, Mary, Kate and Rachel interviewed board candidates. Some candidates mentioned some interesting ideas that CCPD could work on. Kate gave an overview of the member appointment process, noting that it will likely be Fall before new members are appointed.
- Loring said that it was nice to hear from other members of the local disability community and suggested that CCPD consider increasing engagement with the community. For example, CCPD could have a forum every so often to invite members of the public to speak about disability-related issues they face in Cambridge.
- Mary said that it feels like the Commission has lost focus on its mission in the last year or so. She would like for the board to recommit to focusing on community needs. Gary agreed and encouraged the board to have a retreat. Rachel will reach out to the facilitator to get that process started.
- Another idea that came up was collaborating more with other City boards and commissions.
- A motion to create a small working group for planning the retreat was seconded and passed unanimously (note: Mary had to leave the meeting prior to this motion, so was not present for the vote)
  - Valerie, Avril, Dan, and Mary expressed interest in joining the retreat planning working group.

## Public Works Update:

- Jerry reported that he's part of a group from different City departments that is working with a consultant to develop new urban design guidelines for the public realm. Rachel attended the first meeting, as well. They are currently about two months into the 18-month process. The public process will be happening over the next year.
- DPW has now received bids for the River Street and Carl Barron Plaza projects, and construction is expected to start this fall.
- Avril noted that SeeClickFix is a great resource for residents. She reported a sidewalk issue and it was fixed within a week.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kate Thurman