

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Minutes for Thursday, April 8, 2010

Present:

Members: Laura Brelsford, JoAnn Haas, Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Gordon Slater, Don Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, and Kathy Watkins (DPW).

Alternates: Bet MacArthur.

Staff: Emily Kane (Intern), Michael Muehe, and Kate Thurman.

Absent: Kate Patton Regal and Dave Wood.

Guests: Elizabeth Dean Clower, Cambridge Resident; Miriam Cooper, Cambridge Resident; Sandy Durmaskin, Cambridge Resident; Alissa Land, Cambridge Resident; Kathy Lydon, Cambridge Postmaster; and Paul Saia.

March Minutes: Kate Thurman requested that the minutes be corrected to reflect that Larry Braman and David Peterson were both present. The minutes were approved as amended.

Announcements: Rachel Tanenhaus reported that Angell Animal Medical Center will be offering free eye exams to service animals in the month of May.

Rachel also reported that the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA DPH) and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) are sponsoring a program called "My Life, My Health." It is starting on April 23rd in Jamaica Plain and she is one of the facilitators. In addition, Rachel said that she wrote an article on the Paralympics for the MA DPH blog, which can be found online at www.mass.gov/dph.

Don Summerfield reported that Vinfen's 3rd Annual Film Festival went very well. He also said that he attended a meeting at the Quincy Commission on Disabilities and that there were a lot of people from other commissions present, as well.

Update on Sidewalk Obstruction Issues: JoAnn Haas introduced Kathy Lydon, the Cambridge Postmaster, and reported that the outreach by CCPD and the Cambridge Post Office regarding snow removal this winter was pretty successful. She said that she has been working closely with the Post Office on initiatives to keep the sidewalks cleared.

JoAnn also reported noticing that garbage barrels and recycling bins are often placed back on the sidewalk after collection in such a way that it blocks access.

Kathy Watkins said that people should call the Department of Public Works (DPW) at 617-349-4800 to report such issues on the day of the event, and they will send collection staff out to reposition the empty bins and barrels. She reported, however, that this can be hard to manage on a windy day when lots of bins and barrels are getting blown about.

Kathy Lydon reported that the Post Office saw a big improvement in shoveling sidewalks this winter and that they had a celebration at the end of March for the streets that were nominated for the best shoveling contest. She also said that the Post Office has partnered with GoGreen to remind residents that it's important to keep the sidewalks clear year-round (snow/ice in the winter, botanical obstructions in the spring, summer and fall). She said that they will not deliver mail if the sidewalks are in dangerous conditions due to unshoveled snow and ice.

Kathy Lydon also reported that Governor Patrick signed a bill that will allow cities to place property liens to collect unpaid fines from property owners that fail to shovel their sidewalks.

She also said that the Post Office just kicked off their Adopt A Box program in which participants will call the Post Office to report boxes that have graffiti on them or are structurally damaged, and keep the their adopted boxes shoveled in the winter. Kathy reported that there are about 232 mail carriers in Cambridge.

Michael Muehe thanked Kathy for coming. He also asked her about installing seating or benches in the main lobby of the Central Square branch because some people, including those with disabilities, may need to sit down and rest for a while after waiting in a long line. Kathy said that she would look into that.

Michael also requested that the accessible, wheelchair-height service station always be staffed.

Elizabeth Dean Clower reported that there is no accessible table for customers with disabilities preparing mail at the Harvard Square Post Office.

Kathy Lydon said that she would look into these things. She welcomed people to her call with any questions, comments or ideas.

Chair's Report: Rachel Tanenhaus reported that the Commission usually takes a month off over the summer. Michael Muehe mentioned that the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Americans with Disabilities Act will be held on the Boston Common on July 26, 2010. It was therefore decided that the Commission would not meet in July.

Rachel also reported that several people from other commissions are interested in joining us at one of our upcoming CCPD meetings. She has requested that they attend in June.

Public Works Update: Kathy Watkins handed out a project update list and said that the Department of Public Works (DPW) is in the process of updating their five year plan this summer. There is a new manual on the national standard of traffic control devices that includes specific language about access during road construction.

Kathy reported that construction on Concord Avenue in West Cambridge will be starting next week and will include a new water main, raised bike lanes and new sidewalks. This project will take about a year and a half.

She also said that the miscellaneous sidewalk and ramp contract will include work on Bigelow Street access.

Kathy reported that the Whitmore Avenue sewer separation will be followed by new sidewalks and paving. This project will begin next week.

Kathy said that as part of the Sidewalk/Roadway Contract 11, which has been ongoing, DPW is requesting funding in the City's 2011 fiscal year to finish the sidewalk between Hampshire Street and the Somerville city line.

She reported that Contract 12 will be starting in about six weeks and will begin with First Street, which will include repaving and new sidewalks. They will also be adding a lane of parking and bike lanes.

Kathy also said that the Community Development Block Grant Contract is starting and a community meeting is scheduled for April 28 to talk about Elm Street improvements.

Kathy reported that JFK Street between Eliot and the Curious George bookstore will be repaved, including new sidewalks and street lighting. She also said that some of the sidewalks on side streets have very narrow sidewalks, which will be redone.

Kathy said that the MBTA has awarded the contract for the new elevator at Harvard Square Station, so that work will be underway soon.

She reported that DPW is expecting to get \$500,000 in the City's 2011 budget for design work on Main Street between Ames and Wadsworth in Kendall Square, where the brick sidewalks are in terrible condition.

The Western Avenue design is getting underway and community meetings and Advisory Committee meetings are being scheduled.

JoAnn Haas asked Kathy how long the construction on Linden Street will take. Kathy said that it will take about 2 months and they will be working from 7am to 4pm.

Don Summerfield asked Kathy about the pedestrian ramp at Essex and Mass Ave. Kathy reported that this will be included in the contract for Central Square. This will be a one-year contract and has gone out to bid, so it will be completed by the end of the summer in 2011.

Eileen Keegan Bongiorno asked if the Elm Street construction will be taking place by the school there and said that one of her walking camps will be taking place there this summer, with about 50 kids coming and going throughout the day to walk to various camp activities. Kathy Watkins thanked her for this information and said that there will be a police detail working the site to guide traffic and pedestrians.

Michael Muehe announced that on Monday, April 12 at 6 p.m., people will be gathering at the corner of Mass Ave and Western Ave and will be doing a walk-about of Western Avenue, which is being hosted by Chris Hart, a human-centered design expert who works at the Institute for Human Centered Design. Chris will be talking about how such design concepts can be used in urban settings like Western Avenue.

Rachel Tanenhaus mentioned to Kathy that many people with disabilities bring their service dogs to the dog park near Brookline and Pacific and requested that access to the park during construction be considered. Rachel also said that the park is not wheelchair accessible. Michael Muehe reported that this is on the list to be fixed.

Elizabeth Dean Clower asked about constructing curb cuts on Mt. Auburn near one of the construction sites. Kathy said that they are sometimes able to work on curb cuts that are close to construction sites even if not part of the contract. Kathy said that she will take a look at this issue.

Disability Reframed: A Community Film Series: Bet MacArthur reported that the Commission will be showing *Murderball* on Saturday, May 1, and that the next film will be scheduled for June. She thanked Emily Kane, who is interning for the CCPD, for working on publicizing the event.

Michael Muehe reported that Emily has created a Google group for the film series, in addition to the Facebook page. It is open to everybody and contains a running list of potential films.

Michael also reported that the Citywide Senior Center is working on fixing the shades in the Ballroom.

Executive Director's Report: Michael Muehe thanked Emily Kane for working on both the Film Series and the AccessLetter. He also reported that submissions for the next newsletter are due by May 15.

Michael said that the City is holding its annual Holocaust Commemoration on May 4, which includes the lighting of candles by people who are parts of groups who were affected by the Holocaust, including the disability community.

Don Summerfield said that he is planning on going, and Elizabeth Dean Clower said that she may also be able to attend.

Michael Muehe also reported that the Boston Police are conducting an undercover operation to evaluate taxicab accessibility compliance. He said that Cambridge is planning on doing this, as well, and that he is seeking participants, especially people with disabilities who use service animals.

Michael also reported that, in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the ADA, there is a campaign called “2010 by 2010,” with the goal of collecting 2,010 Proclamations of Recommitment to the ADA. He read the document, “A Proclamation of Recommitment to Full Implementation of the ADA,” which is being circulated for signatures.

The Commission unanimously passed a motion to sign the proclamation, which was then passed around.

Michael Muehe reported that City Sprouts, which creates and maintains gardens at Cambridge elementary schools, has asked Michael for advice on how to make the gardens accessible. They have 12 gardens, and Michael and Don Summerfield are planning on visiting all of them, beginning with the Fletcher Maynard Academy on April 13.

Michael also reported that the owner of Clear Conscious Café is opening a new restaurant, which has an inaccessible raised seating area. The owner is applying for a variance from the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB). Michael asked Commission members if they want to go on the record as opposing this variance, on which a hearing has been scheduled for Monday, May 24 at 10:30 a.m.

Michael explained that, while there was already in existence a raised seating platform, the new owner triggered the MAAB regulations by new construction, which altered the space.

The Commission passed a motion to formally oppose the variance.

Project Coordinator’s Report: Kate Thurman said that she had received a complaint from a resident about an outdoor dining area on Massachusetts Avenue that was occupying the bulk of the sidewalk. She reported the issue to Kathy Watkins, who stopped by the following morning along with Vinny Best, the director of the Outdoor Dining Program in Inspectional Services. They found that the arrangement of furniture and planters were not in compliance for the permit that had been issued. Kate said that, in addition to rearranging the area, Vinny followed up with the restaurant’s owner.

Kate thanked both Kathy and Vinny for addressing this issue so quickly.

Public Input: Miriam Cooper, a Cambridge Resident, said that it is helpful to have workers at construction sites who can verbally instruct persons with disabilities about access issues, reporting that a worker recently stopped her from taking her Guide Dog over hot asphalt.

Miriam also reported that a driver of one of the accessible taxicabs in Cambridge is allergic to dogs, which is on record with the License Commission, but she feels that he should not be driving one of the designated accessible cabs.

Sandy Durmaskin reported that she has spoken with drivers for The Ride regarding service dog issues and has found that refusal to take dogs is often a cultural issue and that the drivers need to be better educated.

Rachel Tanenhaus said that there is work being done to educate the drivers.

New Business: Don Summerfield said that the Joint Committee on Transportation is discriminating against people with disabilities by refusing to approve the use of a State ID, rather than a driver's license, for the purchase of alcohol.

Paul Saia said that ID cards issued by the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind are supposed to be accepted where licenses are required.

The Meeting was adjourned at 7:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Thurman, Disability Project Coordinator