

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Minutes for Thursday, May 13, 2010

Present:

Members: JoAnn Haas, Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Kate Patton Regal, and Dave Wood.

Staff: Michael Muehe and Kate Thurman.

Absent: Laura Brelsford , Gordon Slater, Don Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, and Kathy Watkins (DPW).

Guests: Elizabeth Dean Clower, Cambridge Resident; Kelly Dunn, Cambridge Department of Public Works; Sandy Durmaskin, Cambridge Resident; John Kelly, Boston Disability Commission; and Sandra Knight, Cambridge Resident.

April Minutes: A motion was made to approve the minutes, seconded and approved by the Commission.

Announcements: Michael Muehe announced that on Tuesday, May 18 from 12:30 to 3:30, there will be a Gubernatorial Candidate Forum at the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown. Treasurer Tim Cahill, Governor Deval Patrick, Grace Ross, Jill Stein, and Charlie Baker will all be in attendance, and the focus is going to be disability policy issues. He said that this is a great opportunity to meet all the candidates.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has a Universal Access Program (UAP), which is offering a free Accessible Recreation Fair at Artesani Park in Brighton from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM on Saturday, June 5, celebrating accessible outdoor recreation. There will be a cycling fair with an assortment of accessible cycles and other adaptive recreational activities, including letterboxing, face painting, interpreter programming, a DJ, snacks and Starbucks coffee.

Kate Thurman reminded those in attendance that we are showing *Luckey* from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM on the same date, June 5, as part of our Disability Reframed Community Film Series.

Secretary's Report: Filling in for Rachel Tanenhaus, Commission Chair, Commission Secretary Dave Wood reported that the interviews for the three board vacancies have been conducted. He said that the interview sub-committee will be making recommendations to the City Manager, who will make the final decision in appointing applicants to the positions.

Kate Thurman thanked the JoAnn Haas, Kate Patton Regal, Gordie Slater, and Rachel Tanenhaus for taking the time to conduct the interviews.

Update on Sidewalk Obstruction Issues: JoAnn Haas reported that she is planning on emailing the neighborhood associations to thank them for their participation in keeping the sidewalks clear. She will let them know that we are now focusing on preventing non-snow related obstructions, such as those caused by trash barrels and recycling bins. Ms. Haas also said that she will let the associations know they can call DPW at 617-349-4800 if barrels were turned over or put back on the sidewalk after collection in a way that blocks access, and that DPW will send somebody out the same day to fix it.

Public Works Update: Kelly Dunn, Communications Director for the Department of Public Works, filled in for Kathy Watkins and provided an update on on-going major projects. See attachment for details.

Ms. Dunn also reported that Kathy Watkins will update the Commission on the five year plan at next month's meeting.

Michael Muehe said that contractors need to maintain an accessible route throughout construction zones. Kelly Dunn added that DPW will take accessibility very seriously and will shut down a construction project if the contractor is not providing an accessible route.

Disability Reframed Film Series update: Michael Muehe announced that the Commission will be showing *Luckey* at 2:00 PM on Saturday, June 5 at the Citywide Senior Center, followed by a discussion led by the film maker, Laura Longworth.

Mr. Muehe also reported that the Council on Aging is hoping to have new window shades installed by June 5.

Executive Director's Report: Michael Muehe reported that Commission member Don Summerfield was hit by a car about a month ago while in the crosswalk at the intersection of Pearl and Massachusetts Avenue, and that he will likely be in the rehabilitation facility where he was transferred for at least another few weeks.

Mr. Muehe thanked Sandy Durmaskin, Elizabeth Dean-Clover and Gayle Johnson for representing the disability community by helping with candle lighting at the City's Holocaust Commemoration.

He also reported that the Cambridge License Commission and Police Department will be working with the CCPD in conducting an undercover assessment of taxicab accessibility, and that four Cambridge residents who are blind and use guide dogs have been recruited to help with the enforcement efforts.

In addition, Mr. Muehe reported that a celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act will be held on the Boston Common on July 26.

He also said that he is working with City Sprouts, an organization with maintains gardens at the 12 elementary schools in Cambridge, by conducting site visits and offering guidance on how accessibility can be improved.

Mr. Muehe reported that Cambridge in Motion, a group established in October, will be working with SCM Transportation, which received a \$20,000 grant from the University of Massachusetts. They will be hiring a consultation to develop a survey in order to determine the transportation needs and problems encountered by Cambridge residents.

Project Coordinator's Report: Kate Thurman reported attending the Community Access Monitor training, which was offered by the Massachusetts Office on Disability and held at Medford City Hall. It was a training on conducting site surveys for accessibility.

Public Comment: John Kelly from the Boston Commission on Disability (COD) announced that he went to the regional commission meeting earlier that day in Arlington, and recommend that Cambridge members join the next meeting. Mr. Kelly mentioned that none of the commissions present had paid employees, but that a lot of them do get money from handicap parking fines. He also reported that members discussed strategies and struggles of CODs. For example, the Arlington Commission has persuaded the city not to install any new brick sidewalks.

Mr. Kelly reported that Boston has a design colloquium on future street projects and that the designer mentioned that the sidewalks on Vassar Street are designed such that even able-bodied people are choosing to use the raised bike lane.

Sandy Durmaskin reported that bill 1965, An Act Relative to Provide Funds for ADA Compliance in Cities and Towns (see attachment), was introduced and will specify what disability commissions can do with money that comes in from disability parking violations. The bill would require that two members of the commission volunteer on a committee that would engage in self-evaluation and is seen as a threat to the autonomy of commissions. She said that the Disability Policy Consortium is very concerned about it. She also said that a bill to exempt group homes from access requirements has been proposed.

In response to a question, Michael Muehe reported that Massachusetts State Law Chapter 40, Section 8-J allows for the establishment of local commissions on disabilities, and requires a board of nine members. It also allows the commissions to collect the disability parking fines. He said that the CCPD was established in 1979, prior to Section 8-J, as a City ordinance and is therefore not in conformance with the State Law. He said that the City budget for the CCPD is about \$100,000 and that there is an additional budget of \$50,000 for ADA improvements to City buildings and a few hundred thousand dollars for sidewalk improvements.

It was also announced that a bill to exempt group homes from access requirements has been proposed. This would violate the Federal Fair Housing Act.

New Business: JoAnn Haas suggested that the Commission consider providing some sort of awareness to the public about crosswalks and the requirement to stop for pedestrians.

Michael Muehe reported that the Transportation, Parking, and Traffic department has an aggressive program for putting up signs in the in the crosswalks to remind motorists to yield to pedestrians. He also said that Cambridge Police has done traffic enforcements in Central Square and will issue tickets for failing to yield to pedestrians. He said that there is a group called TROMP that is actively doing public education to remind motorists to yield to pedestrians.

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Thurman, Disability Project Coordinator