

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)

Minutes for Thursday, January 12, 2012

Present:

Members: Miriam Cooper, Elizabeth Dean-Clover, Sandy Durmaskin, JoAnn Haas, Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Alissa Land, Bet MacArthur, Naomi Pinson, Rachel Tanenhaus, Kathy Watkins, and Dave Wood.

Alternates: Don Summerfield

Staff: Michael Muehe and Kate Thurman.

Guests: Chris Burke, Cambridge Police Department; and Owen O’Riordan, Department of Public Works.

Minutes:

A motion to approve the December 8, 2011 minutes was passed by the Commission.

Announcements:

JoAnn Haas announced that Fair Test, a local nonprofit organization, is endorsing a bill regarding accommodations on the MCAS exams for students with disabilities.

Elizabeth Dean-Clover reminded those in attendance to email Kate Thurman [kthurman@cambridgema.gov] prior to meetings with electronic copies of documents they plan to hand out so that she may distribute them in accessible formats. If a document is too large to email, she requested that it be brought in on a jump drive.

Public Works Update: Kathy Watkins and Owen O’Riordan presented on this year’s changes to DPW’s Five Year Street and Sidewalk Reconstruction Plan. Ms. Watkins noted that there is always some uncertainty with what the budget will allow when planning five years out, so projects are subject to change.

Ms. Watkins said that the Five Year Plan has an increased emphasis on complete streets, which are defined as streets designed for all users – pedestrians, cyclists, bus riders, drivers and residents. More sidewalks are included, which provides for increased accessibility for pedestrians. She also reported working very closely with Michael Muehe on sidewalk accessibility issues.

Please see

<www.cambridgema.gov/theworks/ourservices/engineering/aboutengineering/fiveyearplandescription.aspx> for more details, including a copy of the Five Year Plan.

Ms. Watkins also said that they have been working on improving sidewalk access in construction zones, but that it’s impossible to supervise private contractors at all times. She encouraged people to call DPW at 617-349-4800 if they encounter accessibility problems in a construction zone.

There was some discussion about audible pedestrian signals (APS), and Mr. Muehe noted that APS technology has improved a lot in the last five years. He said that new designs incorporate vibrotactile

signals, which include a vibration alerting pedestrians when it's safe to cross, and a locator tone indicating the location of a push button requesting a pedestrian cross. Signals that are only auditory are sometimes very loud and disruptive to residential neighborhoods. It was also noted that loud signals make it difficult for individuals who are blind or partially sighted to hear traffic.

Mr. Muehe explained that the 2009 Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices has incorporated a requirement that these type of vibrotactile signals be used at intersections with traffic lights. He said that Cambridge intersections are different than most because the pedestrian signals do not have push buttons. Rather, they are concurrent signals, meaning that they automatically activate according to changes in the traffic lights. The City is now trying to decide, when installing vibrotactile APS going forward, whether or not to remove the push buttons or leave them on the units, but deactivate them. The Traffic Department is hoping to do some testing in the next year and is open to suggestions as to where some test installations should be done.

Dave Wood asked to what extent private companies constructing large developments are responsible for street and sidewalk construction. Mr. O'Riordan explained that contractors must first apply for permits from the planning board, and that there are specific requirements depending on the development. He said that the City expects that a lot of street and sidewalk surfaces in Kendall Square, for example, will be reconstructed with redevelopment of the area.

Police Community Liaison Update:

Elizabeth Dean-Clower said that she will set aside time on the February 9 agenda for a question and answer period for Superintendent Chris Burke, and asked that members email Kate Thurman [kthurman@cambridgema.gov] by Friday, January 27 with questions they would like for him to address at that time.

There were some questions for Superintendent Burke about traffic violations. He said that the Police Department evaluates crime analysis data and accident locations to determine where to station officers and that they look to place officers in certain areas during high impact times to hopefully reduce traffic accidents.

Superintendent Burke noted that with the addition of bike lanes, the City is getting more vehicles in a more confined area and that there are concerns about both vehicular and bicycle traffic. He said that the Police Department's goal is to reduce the amount of accidents and that they are happy to partner with CCPD on their efforts to do so.

There was some concern expressed about the responsibilities of detail officers at construction sites, where officers often concentrate on the detail, but do not direct traffic, whether it be cars, bicycles or pedestrians. Superintendent Burke reported that the primary function of detail officers is ensuring public safety, which includes directing traffic. He said that there is a detail sergeant whose whole job is to check detail officers on site each day, but that it's impossible to provide supervision 100% of the time.

Naomi Pinson noted that she has called the non-emergency Police phone number [617-349-3300] in such situations and has received very positive responses. Superintendent Burke encouraged people to call this number with any such concerns.

Superintendent Burke said that he will begin speaking next month about high accident locations and will then answer the questions that have been submitted.

Action Item:

- CCPD members will email Kate Thurman by Friday, January 27 with questions they would like for Superintendent Burke to address at the February meeting. Ms. Thurman will then forward a list of the questions to Superintendent Burke.

Chair's Report: Elizabeth Dean-Clower reported on current activities, committees, interests, obligations, priorities, etc. of CCPD, including:

- Annual Employment event in October
 - There has been a strong interest for having the business community be more involved.
 - Would be helpful to begin planning in April or May
- Film Series
- Bicycle Parking
 - Department of Traffic, Parking and Transportation (TPT) is working on new language to clarify in the regulations that locking bicycles to street poles designating disability parking spaces is prohibited.
 - TPT is also working on possible signage to be added to these poles.
 - JoAnn Haas will follow up with TPT in March
- Snow & Ice removal efforts
- Visitability
 - Michael Muehe and Sandy Durmaskin are looking into drafting an ordinance for City Council to consider
- Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) variance applications
 - Staff continue to receive a lot of MAAB variance applications
 - Michael Muehe will make judgement calls as necessary as to whether or not applications should be brought to the board's attention, considering time constraints, etc.
- School disability awareness curriculum
- Healthcare issues
 - Physician-assisted suicide will be included on the state ballot this year. CCPD should decide if it wants to take a position, write an article, etc., although it was noted that not every member may share the same position.

Ms. Dean-Clower said that 2012 is an exciting year and that there is a lot of potential for issues and activities that CCPD can work on, and that the board will need to figure out how to identify and hone in on focus areas.

Update on Sidewalk Obstruction Issues:

Update on Initiatives to Improve Snow & Ice Clearance

JoAnn Haas said that the Agassiz Community has put together a document for residents to place on neighbors' doorsteps requesting that they keep their sidewalks clear of snow and ice. She said that the other neighborhood associations could do something similar, as well, and that it would be nice if CCPD members would be willing to attend some neighborhood association meetings to introduce CCPD and spread the word about such initiatives.

Ms. Haas reported that Green Street Initiatives is hosting a free hot breakfast sponsored by the Harvard Square Business Association on Friday, January 27. Sandy Durmaskin plans to attend and hand out materials on CCPD and snow and ice removal, such as DPW's updated snow brochure.

Miriam Cooper requested that accessible handouts be available, including CDs containing electronic copies of documents.

JoAnn Haas requested information from individuals with visual disabilities about what unshoveled sidewalks are like for them. She asked that individuals email her by January 20 with any such feedback they'd like to offer.

Development of Snow & Ice FAQ

Ms. Haas handed out copies of the draft Snow & Ice FAQ and asked that people email any edits or suggestions to Michael Muehe [mmuehe@cambridgema.gov] by January 20. Mr. Muehe will have all relevant City departments review and approve the document before it is finalized.

A motion to approve the draft FAQ subject to any edits we get from the Council on Aging, Department of Public Works and/or the Department of Traffic, Parking and Transportation was seconded and approved.

Action Items:

- Members wishing to give input on the difficulties that unshoveled sidewalks cause for individuals with visual disabilities will email JoAnn Haas by January 20 [editor's note: members of the public may email such input to Kate Thurman at <kthurman@cambridgema.gov>].
- Members will email Michael Muehe by January 20 with any edits to the Draft Snow & Ice FAQ.
- Mr. Muehe will forward the draft FAQ to relevant City departments for review and approval.

Disability Reframed Film Series: Bet MacArthur said that there is nothing to report on the film series, nothing that the committee is struggling on finding a way to get together.

Executive Director's Report: Michael Muehe reported receiving a request from a former colleague who wanted to know if we could help find a meeting space for a group that is meeting to discuss healthcare issues. Healthcare for All (HCFA) will hold focus group meetings geared towards consumers of healthcare services, including people with physical and/or mental disabilities on Wednesday, February 22 and Tuesday, February 28 from 6-7:30pm in the second floor conference room of 51 Inman Street. He said that the goal of the meetings is to share personal experiences of trying to access healthcare in the last year, what's working, what is not working, and what kind of recommendations can be made to whom in order to improve things. The meetings are limited to 15 people and RSVP is required. [Editor's note: please see "Healthcare Issues Take Center Stage: Discussion Series Feb 22nd and 28th" article in the February-March, 2012 issue of *AccessLetter* for more information. Individuals may RSVP to Harriotte Hurie at <hhurie@wesleyan.edu> or 617-306-1414].

Mr. Muehe reported that the Silver Ribbon Commission is wrapping up its work, with the final meeting having been on January 11. The Commission was established a year and a half ago to look at establishing housing for seniors. He said that a report on its findings is forthcoming, and that the concepts of Universal Design and visitability were met with great deal of interest and positive enthusiasm. He will work with Sandy Durmaskin to write a letter to City Council requesting the passage of an ordinance for new residential construction to be at least minimally accessible.

He reported that Mary Thomas, Harvard's new Disability Services Director, will be attending the March CCPD meeting, along with a senior member of the Harvard Planning Office.

Mr. Muehe also said that Lesley University approached him last week inquiring about whether CCPD would support a variance application. He said that it's an interesting and rather difficult set of situations. They are currently renovating and adding on to 29 Everett Street (Founder's House), which was originally the home of founder of Lesley. Originally, the amount of money they were planning on spending was less than 30%, meaning that MAAB regulations required that only the renovated parts of the building be accessible. However, in the course of renovation, it became clear that they will have to spend more money, thereby triggering the 30% trigger in the regulations that require full accessibility. The original home is an old three story Victorian house with a lot of level changes even within the same floor. Lesley has applied for MAAB variances that would exempt them from making the 2nd or 3rd floors of the Founder's House accessible at all, although the new portion of the building will be accessible with an elevator.

Mr. Muehe said that the 2nd and 3rd floor space is used for administrative offices for the Provost. The first floor will be accessible. Lesley University claims that the provost is an administrative function that will not involve students at all. Mr. Muehe said that they have the option of declaring these floors employee-only areas, which would exempt them from MAAB jurisdiction, but that by reaching out to CCPD, they are trying to find some kind of reasonable compromise.

Mr. Muehe said that the value of the renovations is 1.275 million dollars and that the assessed value of the building is about \$3,000,000.

Project Coordinator's Report: Kate Thurman reported that Ann Connolly, who has been volunteering in the office for several years, recently accepted a new position. She thanked her for her dedication and work.

Ms. Thurman said that a high school sophomore recently contacted staff with an interest in doing some volunteer work. He will be coming in for a few hours after school on several days throughout the week.

She also reported having recently been on the interview panel for a new Project and Outreach Coordinator position within the Peace Commission and Police Review Advisory Board. She said that over 200 applications were received, and that 13 first interviews were conducted.

Public Input:

There was no public input.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kate Thurman, Disability Project Coordinator