



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



**Cambridge Human Rights Commission**  
**November 7, 2024**

**Hybrid Public Meeting at 51 Inman Street and on Zoom**

**Present:** Co-Chair Stefanie Haug and Commissioners Caroline Palavicino Maggio, Sue Mapel, Olinda Marshall, Judith Laguerre, Sam Myers, Stephen Curran, Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, Beverly Sealey, Diane Smith

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Director of Operations Sarah Binney, Attorney Investigator Vanessa Lawrence, Executive Director of Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities Rachel Tanenhaus

**Absent:** Co-Chair Mercedes Evans

1. Call to Order
  - ED Almonte temporarily chaired the meeting until Co-Chair Haug arrived and called the meeting to order at 6:07pm.
2. Public Comment
  - No members of the public were present.
3. Review and approval of Previous Meeting Minutes
  - The Commission reviewed the minutes from the last Commission meeting in October 2024. Commissioner Curran moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Myers seconded.
4. Introductions and Welcome
  - Commissioners welcomed new Commissioner Diane Smith to the Commission and introduced themselves
5. Presentation – Rachel Tanenhaus, Executive Director of the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)
  - ED Tanenhaus explained the structure and initiatives of the CCPD. CCPD ensures access to programs and services for all residents of Cambridge regardless of disability status. The CCPD refers to the city office, which currently employs 2 staff, as well as the Commission which has 11 Commissioners and meets on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month on Zoom. The Commission also has working groups that focus on different issues facing disabled residents.

- CCPD works internally to ensure that access is integrated into every department in the city. This includes not just ADA compliance but also a culture of access and inclusion. CCPD informs city policies, such as the reasonable accommodation policy for city employees and the employee telework policy. CCPD works with city departments to ensure their communications and policies are accessible.
- CCPD does not provide direct service and refers constituents to appropriate services and programs. CCPD works externally to help residents understand their rights, and often refers members of the public to CHRC when their rights are being violated in housing, employment, education, and public accommodation.
- CCPD administers a taxi discount program which enables disabled residents to get discounts on Cambridge taxis. CCPD also administers the temporary Disability parking pass program, which allows users to park in all Cambridge parking spots and can be used for 2 3-month periods.
- Commissioner Haug asked about what topics are particularly relevant to Cambridge now. ED Tanenhaus shared that the Commission frequently discusses the building of bike lanes in a way that is safe for disabled pedestrians and does not eliminate accessible parking. Commissioner Smith asked about how CCPD relates to Cambridge's Special Education programs. ED Tanenhaus explained that CCPD does not inform Special Education programs and policies because the Cambridge Public Schools have their own coordination.

## 6. Staff Report

- ED Report
  - ED Almonte and Al Lawrence will attend a Boston Fair Housing conference on Wednesday, November 13. This conference will have other members of Fair Housing Assistance Programs (FHAP) throughout New England.
  - ED Almonte submitted a Statement of Work to HUD to request partnership grant funding. This funding supports CHRC's outreach programs. The proposed programs for FY25 are:
    - A training for housing providers and advocates about source of income discrimination
    - An internal housing discrimination training for city employees
  - In December, FY26 budget planning season will begin.
- Attorney-Investigator Case Report

- 16 New Intakes
- 6 New Cases (filed or to be filed) \*potentially 8
  - Housing
    - Source of income (3)
      - Complaint against a Management Company for discrimination based on gender identity, disability, and source of income. C believe that Respondents are failing to address maintenance requests, misgendering her, making false accusations against her, acting rude and disrespectful towards her, and threatening her with eviction in an effort to force her to lose her voucher. C alleges R's told her that she would never be a woman.
      - C alleges R's discriminated against him based on source of income. C alleges that R's neglect of his apartment has led to a mold issue and health problems. C alleges that R is trying to evict the Sec 8 tenants from the building.
      - C alleges that she reached out to a real estate agent regarding an online listing for an apartment in Cambridge. C was told by R's that they don't accept sec 8 at all of their locations and directed them towards locations in a different zip code
    - Racial discrimination (1)
      - Discrimination based on source of income and race. C alleges that R's purposefully excluded her from housing privileges (free food program) and is facing eviction because R refused to participate in/accept RAFT because she is one of two Black residents on her floor
  - Employment (1)
    - Discrimination based on national origin and sexual harassment. C was asked for explicit sexual photographs by a colleague. C alleges that he was given more works, less support, and less pay because R's abused their power to help him with his immigration paperwork. C alleges his office was vandalized multiple times and nothing came of the investigation.
  - Public Accommodations (1)

- C alleges R's discriminated against her when she tried to take a tour of a gym because they would not allow her to enter the building with her service dog.
- Investigations
  - Employment: discrimination based on gender identity and race
    - Complaint and Position Statement have been filed; Document production submitted
  - Housing: discrimination based on age, source of income, and disability
    - Complaint, Position Statement, and Rebuttal have been submitted
- Housing: discrimination based on source of income and family status
  - C has proposed settlement offer, monetary compensation to cover new apartment deposit, and education on the voucher program and anti-discrimination laws
- Housing: discrimination by a fellow tenant based on race
  - Complaint and Position Statement have been filed; mediation failed, awaiting additional documents from C
- Commissioner Laguerre noticed the frequency of service animal complaints and expressed an interest in education initiatives for the public. Al Lawrence explained the difference between service animals and emotional support animals and how the rights for users of these animals change in public accommodation and housing contexts.
- Director of Operations Report
  - On Tuesday, December 12, DOO Binney will answer housing questions at the YW, a local shelter and service provider for women. Staff from the Office of the Housing Liaison and the Multiservice Center will also be present.

## 7. Old Business

- Mediation Training with Community Dispute Settlement Center (CDSC)- On Thursday, December 5, Commissioners will have a training with CDSC staff from 6:00pm-7:00pm on Zoom. Commissioner Haug discussed the recent mediation she participated in. The mediation was for source of income discrimination in housing. The complainant was with an advocate and the property manager was had legal representation. An agreement has not yet been reached.

## 8. New Business

- Sexual Orientation Definition – A member of the public joined the Cambridge LGBTQ+ Commission meeting to propose an update to the definition of “sexual orientation” in the city ordinance to make it more inclusive.
  - Current Definition in City Ordinances: "The term “sexual orientation” shall mean the actual or supposed heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality of an individual."
  - Proposed Update: “Sexual orientation shall mean one’s physical, intimate, emotional, sexual, romantic attraction or relationship to people of a particular gender OR multiple genders, or lack thereof. A person’s sexual orientation may be identified by terms including, but not limited to, asexual, aromantic, bisexual, gay, lesbian, heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual, and queer. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation shall include both discrimination based on actual knowledge of sexual orientation as well as discrimination based on supposition or assumption of an individual’s sexual orientation, which can include assumptions based on someone’s gender expression or identity.”
- Commissioners Myers, Marshall, and Curran expressed concern with the proposed definition. Commissioner Curran proposed reviewing the definition further and discussing at the next Commission meeting. Commissioner Myers proposed looking at definition examples from other municipalities. ED Almonte offered to get feedback on the proposal from the law department in advance of the next meeting.

9. Adjournment.

- Commissioner Curran moved to adjourn at 7:35pm, Commissioner Myers seconded.

**The next Commission meeting will be on Thursday, January 2, at 6:00 p.m.**