

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)
Minutes for Thursday, January 13, 2011

Present:

Members: Elizabeth Dean-Clower, Sandy Durmaskin, JoAnn Haas, Alissa Land, Don Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, Kathy Watkins (DPW), Dave Wood.

Alternates: Bet MacArthur

Staff: Michael Muehe

Guests: Miriam Cooper, Cambridge resident.

Absent: Laura Brelsford, Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, David Peterson, Gordon Slater, and Kate Thurman.

Minutes:

A motion to approve the December 9, 2010 minutes was passed by the Commission.

Announcements:

Michael Muehe announced that Kate Thurman was not able to attend the meeting.

In regards to the recent Tucson, Arizona shootings, Bet MacArthur reported hearing that the shooter may have a form of brain cancer; this has not been confirmed.

Don Summerfield commended the City and residents for removing snow and ice from the sidewalks.

Alissa Land announced that President Obama signed the National Alzheimer's Project Act into law on January 4, 2011, calling for a coordinated national plan for research and community-based programs for persons with Alzheimer's.

Chair's Report: Rachel Tanenhaus said that scheduled speaker Gary Talbot, Assistant General Manager for System-Wide Accessibility at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) was not able to attend. He will be rescheduled.

Ms. Tanenhaus also reported that the Commission's letter to Lisa Peterson, Commissioner of the Department of Public Works (DPW), asking for an estimate as to what it would cost the City to clear snow and ice from all sidewalks corners and crosswalks has not yet been finalized. She handed out a draft to CCPD members.

She also said access to taxicabs is abysmal at times and that she was threatened with a lawsuit by a driver during a recent pick-up. She reported that the driver went beyond denying access and that the License Commission is requiring him to attend taxi school again, but that she will also be filing a complaint with the Cambridge Human Rights Commission.

Ms. Tanenhaus reported that three vacancies on the Commission will be opening up during the next few months, with Kate Patton Regal having resigned and Don Summerfield and Laura Brelsford completing their second three-year terms at the end of April.

Bet MacArthur said she would do some outreach with an eye toward diversity for potential applicants. Don Summerfield suggested reaching out to persons who have hidden disabilities, and Alissa Land suggested outreach to organizations advocating for those with hidden disabilities.

Michael Muehe reported that flyers advertising the openings would go out in February or early March. Ms. Land offered to post flyers at hospitals.

JoAnn Hass suggested reaching out to advocates of children with disabilities and asked about the Youth Ambassador position, which is currently filled by Gordon Slater. Mr. Muehe reported that Mr. Slater has not resigned but is attending college in Ohio.

Ms. Tanenhaus also reported that she will be doing a presentation on disability issues for third graders at the Graham and Parks School.

Public Works: Kathy Watkins provided an update on the sewer separation project in the Alewife and Huron Avenue/Concord Avenue areas, which will be done in the next three years. She also said the project will include replacement of streets and sidewalks and will provide an opportunity to determine how they are used. Crosswalks will be evaluated and improved if necessary and the use of rain gardens will be examined, which could also be used to hold shoveled and plowed snow.

Update on Snow and Sidewalk Issues: Ms. Haas reported that the Commission's request for an estimate from DPW on what it would cost for the City to take responsibility for shoveling street corners and disability parking spaces was tabled until DPW is able to respond.

She also said that the sidewalks generally look good with the exception of corners either because of the new state snow and ice removal law and/or the local initiatives by the city.

Ms. Watkins reported that DPW plows 200 of the 300 major-route bus stops and that DPW received over 200 calls about downed trees and branches and 50 calls about downed wires after the last storm. They used more bobcats during this storm. She also said that more than 80 complaints were received about unshoveled sidewalks following the storm.

JoAnn Haas reported that the poster campaign regarding bicycles being locked to disability parking signs would begin in the spring. Sandy Durmaskin pointed out that clarification is needed because the city ordinance can be interpreted to allow bicycles to be locked to poles and street signs as long as wheelchair ramps are not blocked.

Mr. Muehe said efforts to recruit kids to help elderly and disabled people shovel snow have not been successful over the years despite efforts by the Council on Aging and the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program/Office of Workforce Development.

A motion was passed to create a subcommittee to establish a challenge to the MIT Sloan School and Harvard Schools of Design, Urban Planning and Business to solve the problem of community-based strategies for snow removal. The subcommittee will be made up of Sandy Durmaskin, Elizabeth Dean-Clower, Don Summerfield, JoAnn Haas and will be led by Alissa Land.

Rachel Tanenhaus read aloud the draft letter to the DPW regarding snow removal and said it will be finalized and sent out by the end of the week of January 17th with some minor suggested changes. JoAnn Haas will inform the neighborhood groups.

Disability Reframed Film Series: Bet MacArthur reported that the showing of the "Hunchback of Notre Dame" was well-received and that the next film will possibly be the last weekend in February. A motion was passed to send a letter to the Hollywood Express store manager asking him to reclassify the film as a classic rather than a horror film. Ms. MacArthur agreed to draft the letter.

Executive Director's Report: Michael Muehe reported two new accessible restaurants: The India Pavilion in Central Square and the food court at Cambridge Center in Kendall Square. He added that he and Kate Thurman performed accessibility checks at elementary school gardens and parks. He also reported writing a letter to the editor of the Boston Globe, which was printed on January 13, 2011, regarding the newspaper's use of pejorative terms such as "Crazed Loner" in a story about the Tucson, Arizona shooting suspect.

Regarding upcoming commission vacancies, he asked members to reach out to prospective candidates and ask them to attend a Commission meeting.

He said Rachael Tanenhaus' term as Chair and Dave Wood's term as Secretary will expire in May.

Public Input:

Cambridge Resident Miriam Cooper said she called DPW to have a large pile of snow removed at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Rindge Avenue, but that it was not completely removed from the curb cut. Mr. Muehe reminded people that the City's web-based complaint line is a very efficient way to register concerns about uncleared sidewalks and curb cuts. [Editor's note: complaints may be filed online at <http://www2.cambridgema.gov/theworks/services/snow/complaint.aspx> or by leaving a message on the snow hotline at 617-349-4903]

New Business:

Ms. Tanenhaus reported that the Department of Justice is seeking public comment by January 24, 2011 regarding the enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Don Summerfield reported that the WCVB and NECN television stations did not have their camera crews capture the American Sign Language interpreter who was standing next to Governor Deval Patrick during his snow emergency press conference.

Meeting adjourned at 7:40pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dave Wood, Secretary