

Approved June 9

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Minutes for Thursday, May 12, 2022

Online via Zoom

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm

Present:

Members: Loring Brinckerhoff, Avril de Pagter, Mary Devlin, Gary Dmytryk, Jerry Friedman, Stelios Gragoudas, Nicole Horton-Stimpson, and Dan Stubbs

Absent: Jackie Jones, Phil Kongtcheu, Valerie Hammond

Staff: Rachel Tanenhaus and Kate Thurman

Nominations & Elections:

- Dan & Loring each nominated Avril for Chair, and Mary for Secretary
- No other nominations were made
- Elections were held. All members present voted unanimously to elect Avril as Chair and Mary as Secretary

Public Works Update:

- Jerry reported that three projects have gone out to bid:
 - River Street reconstruction – from Memorial Drive to Central Square, and the Carl Barron Plaza. This project includes new sidewalks, roadway, bus lanes, separated bike lanes, and the addition of 45 new trees. The City is hoping to award this contract in July. Construction will take 30-36 months.
 - Huron Ave along the Fresh Pond Reservation from the field complex to Fresh Pond Parkway. This project will add sidewalks.
 - Belmont Street, near the Star Market on Mt. Auburn. This project includes new sidewalks, improved bus stops, and a dedicated section of bus lanes.
- Loring asked about the status of the funded Participatory Budgeting projects. Rachel will provide an update at the next meeting on what those projects are.
- Jerry reported that there is some infrastructure that's being planned for the Port neighborhood. A public walk will be held on Monday, May 16, meeting at Clement Morgan Park at 6:00 PM. Members of the public can join the 90-minute walk to learn about the history of the Port.
- Additionally, DPW and local neighborhood advocates are holding an event on June 25 that will be focused on art. The goal is to get youth interested in art, and there will be food from local chefs, as well as artists creating art.

Executive Director's Report:

- Rachel said that the Advisory Board typically votes to take the month of either July or August off; this vote will be held at the June meeting.
- She and Kate are attending the online National ADA Symposium this week. Federal agencies give updates on their perspectives of the ADA; there are workshops on case law that's happened in the past year, as well as on other issues that are relevant. This year, there have been many sessions on COVID and the ADA, reasonable accommodations, and the impact on programs and services for people with disabilities.
- Rachel reported speaking with graduate students at New York University who are writing a musical on the Section 504 sit-in in which people with disabilities took over a federal office in San Francisco for a month. They interviewed Rachel about it and are writing a musical about the sit-in.

- Rachel went with a Community Development Department (CDD) intern to look at the new MBTA Green Line stations in Union Square and Lechmere. CDD wants to write a guide for folks on how to navigate those areas. Rachel said that they got lost and couldn't find the buses at the Lechmere Station, indicating that the wayfinding in that area needs some work.
- She reported that the City has applied for a few variances from the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) for the Tobin Montessori and Vassal Lane Upper Schools. After reviewing the variances, she wrote a letter of support.
- Rachel said that CCPD staff is working with the Election Commission and the Voting Rights Advocate at the Disability Law Center on accessible elections. The Commonwealth uses very old accessible voting machines, and barriers to access happen when the machines break. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State has not approved an alternative, so there is some advocacy to push the state to adopt newer technologies. The Cambridge Election Commission would like to speak at an upcoming CCPD meeting.
- The City is planning to construct a connector between Daneyh Park and New Street and a re-design of Linear Park. Rachel participated in a site walk to both sites. There is a public event on June 4th if anyone would like to learn more.
- The universally designed playground was dedicated a few weeks ago, named after Louis DePasquale
- Avril mentioned that the DOJ put out new guidelines on web accessibility and that CCPD's web page seems outdated. Kate mentioned that staff are working with the department's Communications Manager and Webmaster on website improvements.

Chair's Report:

- Loring asked Avril as the newly elected Chair to speak about her context within the disability community.
- Avril reported that she is originally from Buffalo, NY and was in the Deaf Studies Program at Boston University with a focus on sign language and the Deaf community. She then became a paraprofessional for a student with autism and apraxia, and then a teacher in a substantially separate special education class in Brookline. She is very interested in law and civil rights and education. Avril currently works in the Boston Public Schools as an Inclusive Practices Support Specialist. In this role, she supports teachers at about 15 schools. Additionally, Avril teaches an Introduction to Special Education course at Boston University. She has a PhD in Urban Education, Leadership, and Education Policy. Her research focused on substantially separate classrooms and the people who teach in them, studying the environmental and academic impacts of those spaces on public schools. She said that people with severe disabilities are defined in relation to false ideas due to ableism.

New Business:

- Loring said it would be nice to discuss at the June meeting ideas for things the Advisory Board can do within the community framework that they're not currently doing. He suggested agenda time for an open forum on brainstorming of priorities that members can share with one another.
- Loring mentioned the idea of bringing the film series back.
- Mary noted that Vinfen holds an annual film festival and mentioned the possibility of partnering with them on a film screening.
- Deputy Superintendent John Boyle said that he could speak with the Central Square Business Improvement District about holding an event there, as it's an outdoor space.
- John informed members that Memorial Day weekend is going to be very busy in the City. Harvard and MIT have graduations on May 26 and there will be a number of dignitaries in town. There will be some street closures and additional traffic. Boston Calling starts on May 27. While not in Cambridge, it does overwhelm the transit system and increases foot traffic in Cambridge. Additionally, CRLS graduation is being held on June 9 at Russell Field.

Meeting adjourned at 6:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Thurman