

# AccessLetter

**Cambridge Commission for  
Persons with Disabilities**

## First Parish in Cambridge Now Wheelchair-Accessible

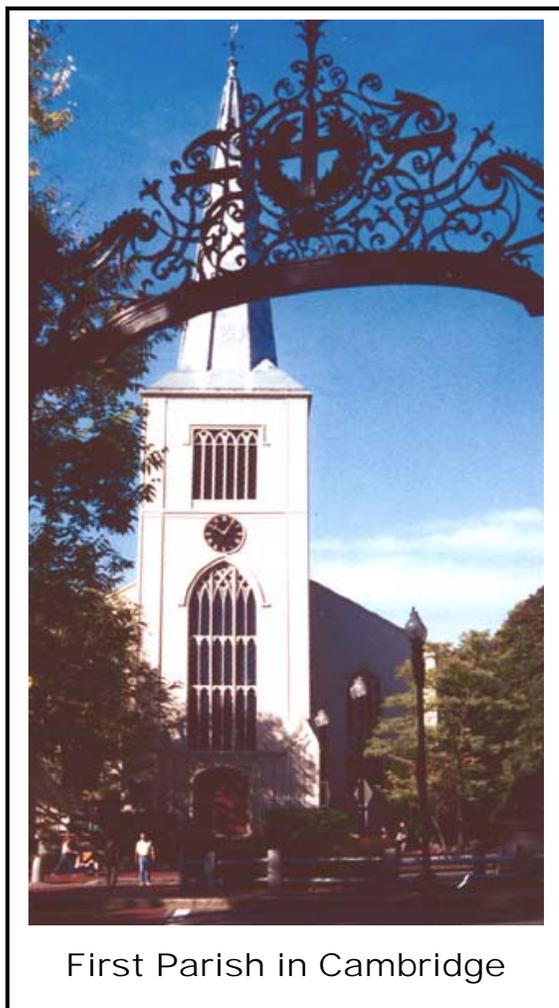
On May 5, 2005, the First Parish in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist (UUA) will officially cut the ribbon on its new five-stop elevator. The elevator is the culmination of more than a decade of visioning and planning and represents a key milestone for this Harvard Square congregation housed in the building at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Church Street.

Parish Minister Thomas Mikelson, who has served the church for 16 years and is retiring in 2006, says "I will leave First Parish with a sense of satisfaction that the congregation nurtured and completed this project during my tenure. It is a major accomplishment that our facility is now wheelchair accessible at all levels."

Throughout the 1990's First Parish members and friends had imagined ways of improving access to the meeting house, which has steep steps at its two primary entrances. The church is landlocked on all sides, and so an elevator tower addition was out of the question. Further, the 1860s era building has a number of offset levels and little space to spare for an elevator footprint.

Over time, various architects examined alternatives from lifts to ramps and less than full-height elevators. Inspired by code changes allowing greater shaft heights for limited access elevators, Cambridge architect Robert Fondren convinced the congregation to take a leap of faith and install a single five-stop elevator. This approach was daring, considering constructing the elevator foundation required deep excavation and shoring of the existing building in a confined internal space.

(First Parish continued page 2)



First Parish in Cambridge

## Commission Welcomes Four New Members

The Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities is excited about having four new enthusiastic members on its citizen advisory board. They have all been appointed by City Manager Robert W. Healy to three-year terms beginning May 1, 2005. Please help us welcome Laura Brelsford, Susan Holland, Donald Summerfield, and Kate Patton.

(Commission Members continued page 2)

(First Parish continued)

The age of the building, asbestos removal, an undersized electrical system, and displacement of existing rooms posed further challenges, all of which were successfully addressed by Metric Construction, the project's general contractor.

Kate Meyer, Chair of the Standing Committee that is the church's governing body, compares the project to a "brain transplant" to describe the complexity, invasiveness, and expense of the construction. She indicates "the project is similar to any extensive rehabilitation of a sensitive older building in that you embark on a journey knowing there will be many twists and turns —some disappointing and others a pleasant surprise." Fortunately, the congregation also had the equivalent of a Clerk-of-the-Works in member Ernie Sabine, who camped out for the eight-month construction period, was the eyes and ears of the congregation, and helped make day-to-day decisions.

What does the new elevator mean? Visitors who enter at street level at the One Church Street entrance (previously an emergency exit) now find themselves in a beautifully designed elevator lobby. In particular, Sunday worshippers who previously could not attend services (or who did but climbed stairs with difficulty) will feel more welcomed. Throughout the week, hundreds of other individuals attend meetings and Parish-sponsored public programs such as Tuesday Meals and the Cambridge Forum. These activities and a myriad of other events sponsored by local organizations and businesses now have the ability to welcome guests with mobility impairments.

The First Parish in Cambridge will continue to educate the congregation and community about the benefits of the elevator and to seek the additional funding from members, friends, Harvard Square neighbors, and grant-making institutions needed to cover the cost of this extensive remodeling. Thanks to a deep commitment to access and full participation, First Parish's facilities will play an even greater role in the months and years ahead as one of the important public gathering spaces in Harvard Square.

by Kate Meyer

(Commission Members continued)

**Laura P. Brelsford** is a recent graduate of Mt. Holyoke College where she helped establish their Ableism & Disability Awareness Planning Team (ADAPT). The group staged several events that helped raise awareness about a wide range of disabilities and led to some renovations that made the campus more accessible. Ms. Brelsford is now employed as a Compliance Officer with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. As a wheelchair user she is particularly interested in working to improve improved access to buildings and the transportation system. She also wants to working with young children about their perceptions of disability.

**Susan Ellis Holland** comes to the Commission as a strong advocate for people with disabilities, including her elderly disabled father and kids in elementary school. She is a registered nurse who has worked primarily with pediatric patients and their families at the Shriners Burns Hospital for Children in Boston. At Shriners Ms. Holland cared for patients after burn injuries, supporting them and their parents during reconstructive surgeries and rehabilitation. She has extensive experience in nursing administration, leadership, staff development and teaching.

**Donald Summerfield** says that having a disability himself helps him to see the barriers that confront people with disabilities and to be very aware of the lack of access that people deserve. Mr. Summerfield has been attending Commission meetings and other related events for a good part of the last year, and has enthusiastically lent his voice to various causes. He has demonstrated his ability to advocate for himself and other people with disabilities, and he wants to help educate the public at large about these issues. He has a background in the restaurant industry where he worked for over a decade prior to a stroke a few years ago.

**Katherine Patton** is a psychotherapist and clinical consultant to a Boston Public School based program where she works with emotionally disturbed children and their families. She is also the primary caretaker for her mother who has Multiple Sclerosis (MS) so she understands issues that relate to people across the

lifespan. Ms. Patton wants to work for equal rights and better access to resources. She is interested in raising awareness about the issues that people who live with disability face every day, and reducing the barriers that limit their participation in all that Cambridge has to offer its residents.

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## Disability and Social Security Reform

With all the national debate on Social Security reform and with increasing scrutiny of President Bush's plans to partially privatize the Social Security system, comparatively little attention has been paid to the disability portion of the system.

According to the Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), an umbrella organization consisting of nearly 100 national disability organizations, Social Security benefits are critical for almost 7 million people with disabilities and their families. They get benefits from Social Security's retirement, survivors and disability insurance programs. All 3 programs use the same benefit formula so changes in one affect them all.

The need for disability benefits is critical. About 3 in 10 men and 1 in 4 women become disabled before reaching normal retirement age. Even with Social Security, the poverty rate for workers with disabilities and their families is 18 percent, a figure twice that of others who get benefits. Without Social Security, the poverty rate would rise to 55 percent.

CCD points out that, while a lot of people are talking about near-term changes to make Social Security "solvent" or able to pay future benefits, it is also possible to make the system more secure financially with small changes over 20 to 30 years. CCD recommends that any changes should follow these principles:

- Keep Social Security's current structure based on payroll taxes.
- Preserve Social Security as a social insurance program for everyone who is eligible.

- Guarantee monthly benefits adjusted for inflation.
- Preserve Social Security to meet the needs of people who are eligible now and in the future.
- Restore Social Security's long-term financial stability.

The National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), which advocates for civil rights for people with disabilities, recently joined with other civil rights organizations, including the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) to launch a campaign to protect Social Security from privatization and painful potential benefit cuts.

"Privatization would lead to deep benefit cuts that would hurt workers with disabilities and their families," said John Lancaster, NCIL's executive director. "More than seven million Social Security checks go to people with disabilities and their families," Lancaster explained, "to help them live and work independently." NCIL believes that the proposed private accounts could result in major benefit cuts, massive new government borrowing, and could destroy the social insurance system designed to reduce risk from certain life events.

"Protecting Social Security from the President's high risk privatization scheme is critical because it is one of our nation's most fundamental civil rights programs," said Wade Henderson, executive director of LCCR. "Privatization will effectively discriminate against women, Americans with disabilities and minorities by denying them a secure retirement. It will play roulette with the welfare and retirement security of more than 47 million retirees. We will not stand by and let the President undermine the retirement security that so many Americans have spent their whole lives working for or allow cuts to programs that so many Americans count on to make ends meet."

For more information Social Security reform and people with disabilities, visit the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, at <[www.c-c-d.org](http://www.c-c-d.org)> and the National Council on Independent Living at <[www.ncil.org](http://www.ncil.org)>.

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## Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

- May 2      **The Light at the End of the Carpal Tunnel: Recovering from RSI through improved Functional Movement**, a personal story of healing and demonstration of the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education, 7:30-9 pm at the Friends Meeting House, 5 Longfellow Park in Cambridge. Presented in conjunction with RSI Action. For more information go to <[www.rsiaction.com](http://www.rsiaction.com)> or email Josh at <[josch@rcn.com](mailto:josch@rcn.com)> or call 781-640-8794.
- May 3      **Celebrating Families Celebrating Transitions: Resource Fair** sponsored by Dept. of Mental Retardation (DMR) Metro Regional Staff, Yesodot, and Charles River ARC, 4-8 p.m. at Holiday Inn, 399 Grove St. in Newton. Visit exhibits, learn about social and recreational opportunities, meet DMR Transition Coordinators and representatives from other state agencies: Mass. Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), Mass. Commission for the Blind (MCB), and Mass. Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH). Attend presentations on Guardianship, Transitional Planning, and Social Security Benefits. For more information contact Roni Hovav at <[rhovav@jvs-boston.org](mailto:rhovav@jvs-boston.org)>.
- May 3      **It's Not Easy Being Different: Understanding Bullying and Teasing in the Lives of Children with Special Needs**, 7:30-9:30 p.m. seminar at the Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center (JCC), 333 Nahanton St. in Newton. Speaker is Dr. Jerry Schultz, Director and Clinical Neuropsychologist at The Learning Lab at Lesley University. Sponsored by the Special Needs Services Dept. of the JCC of Greater Boston. Registration fee is \$10 for JCC members, \$15 for others; contact Judy Pearl at 617-558-6508 or <[jpearl@jccgb.org](mailto:jpearl@jccgb.org)> for more information.
- May 4      **Women Maximizing Abilities Now**, a peer support group for women with chronic illness or physical/emotional disabilities meets from 2-3:30 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month at the Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St. in Cambridge. For more information contact Mary Quinn at 617-354-8807 or <[woman@braintrust.org](mailto:woman@braintrust.org)>.
- May 4      **RSI (repetitive strain injury) Monthly Drop-in Support & Information Meeting** (no registration is necessary) on first Wednesday of each month, 6-8 p.m.; be sure to arrive before 7 p.m. when the lobby door is locked. New location: 650 Beacon Street in Boston, 4<sup>th</sup> floor Conference Room, just steps from the MBTA station in Kenmore Square. RSI Action volunteers will answer questions and provide resources and support, including the opportunity to view our provider evaluation book. For more information, call 617-247-6827, check web at <[www.rsiaction.org](http://www.rsiaction.org)> or email <[cnot@rsiaction.org](mailto:cnot@rsiaction.org)> and include your phone number so you can be informed of any last-minute changes to the date or location.
- May 5      **First Parish in Cambridge Gives a Lift – ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new elevator**. Come to a Community Accessibility Celebration and Reception, 4:30-6 p.m., to mark the completion of their new five-stop elevator that makes all levels of their buildings at Church Street and Massachusetts Ave. in Harvard Square wheelchair accessible! Come share good company, elevator rides, refreshments, and music. (See related article on page 1.) Please RSVP to Larry Childs at <[larschild@comcast.net](mailto:larschild@comcast.net)>.
- May 6      **Assistive Technology, Disability & Adventure** is a one-day conference in Amherst for recreation program leaders, people with disabilities, students and educators, adaptive equipment designers, and occupational and physical therapists that will explore outdoor adventure, access to recreation, and competitive sport through the context of disability and Assistive technology. Will feature multimedia presentation and hands-on workshops. For more information contact the Lemelson Assistive Technology Development Center, 413-559-5613 at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA or the web at <[www.atforum.hampshire.edu](http://www.atforum.hampshire.edu)>.
- May 6      **Career Expo for People with Disabilities**, 10 am – 3 pm at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel, 111 Huntington Ave. in Boston. A FREE event sponsored by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and the Mass. Division of Career Services. Job opportunities for college students, graduates and professionals; come dressed in business attire and bring copies of your resume. Meet with Fortune 500 company representatives and government agencies. To pre-register, go to <[www.eop.com/exporegistration](http://www.eop.com/exporegistration)>. For more information call 631-421-9421 or email <[info@eop.com](mailto:info@eop.com)>
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- May 7        **Accessible Cycling Fair** from 11 am to 4 pm, rain or shine, at Robinson State Park in Agawam, Mass. near the Connecticut border. Check out the wide variety of accessible bicycles and other wheeled devices at this popular spring event. The Universal Access Program of the Dept. of Conservation and Recreation is sponsoring the program. For more information and directions, contact Gigi Ranno 617-626-1294 voice or <gigi.ranno@state.ma.us>.
- May 7        **Spring Fling Family Fun Day** with activities for kids of all ages and abilities, noon to 3 p.m. at the Veronica Smith Senior Center, 20 Chestnut Hill Avenue in Brighton. Sponsored by The Arc of Greater Boston to raise funds that will benefit kids and youth with developmental and cognitive disabilities. Tickets are \$5 per person, maximum \$25 per family. RSVP to The Arc of Greater Boston, 221 N. Beacon Street, Brighton, MA 02135 or call 617-783-3900.
- May 8 – June 19        **Mixed Abilities Movement and Dance** for all ages led by Erica Sigal, 1-2 pm on six Sunday afternoons at the Brighton YMCA, 617 Washington Street in Brighton. No session on May 29, Memorial Day Weekend. The building has two brand new lifts so the space is wheelchair accessible. Fee is \$72 for Family members, \$100 for Youth members, and \$140 for non-members. Contact Stephanie Hunter at the YMCA, 617-787-8663 or <shunter@ymcaboston.org> to register.
- May 9-11        **Facing Issues, Creating Solutions** - National Spinal Cord Injury Association (NSCIA) annual conference in Washington, D.C. For more information see <www.spinalcord.org>.
- May 10        **Partnering for Recovery: Building Bridges** – FREE one-day conference (8:15 am – 4 pm) for consumers, family members, advocates, policy makers and providers at the DCU (formerly the Centrum Centre) in downtown Worcester. Workshops will include recovery and peer support in day treatment, the role of goals and promises in effecting positive changes, challenges faced by people with co-occurring disorders, the role of peer specialists, understanding cultural differences, and supporting consumers as parents. This conference is sponsored by Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership which manages the mental health and substance abuse services for Mass Health. To REGISTER, email <MBHPregistration@ValueOptions.com>, call 800-495-0086, press2, x 4147 or go to <www.masspartnership.com>.
- May 10        **The Olmstead Challenge – Altering Accepted Practices** will provide an overview of 2005-2006 legislative initiatives and budget issues that will affect the disability community in terms of how services are to be provided in the most integrated, least restrictive setting. To register for this one-day conference at the Hilton Boston Logan Airport, 9:15 am to 3:30 pm, contact the Disability Law Center (DLC) at 11 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108, <dpc\_ma@yahoo.com> or call 800-872-9992 voice or 800-381-0577 TTY. Sponsored by DLC, Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL), Disability Policy Consortium (DPC), Northeast Independent Living Program (NILP), Mass. Home Care Association, and MetroWest Independent Living Center.
- May 10        **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software. Meets 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at MIT in Building 2, Room 142. Guest speaker tonight: CCPD's own Michael Muehe, who will talk about speech recognition software in the workplace. Go to their website at <www.bostonvoiceusers.com> to find out more about meetings and discussions.
- May 11        **Cambridge City-wide Holocaust Commemoration**, 7-8:30 p.m. at Temple Beth Shalom with music, readings, remembrances and special remarks by Ilse Heyman, a holocaust survivor. The event is at 8 Tremont Street with parking available at St. Mary's Church, Norfolk and Harvard Streets. The evening program is sponsored by the Mayor's Office, the Human Rights Commission, the Peace Commission, the Multicultural Committee of the Dept. of Human Service Programs, the Public Library, School Department and various community agencies and congregations. For more information, contact Cathy Hoffman at the Peace Commission, 617-349-4694 or <choffman@cambridgema.gov>.
- May 11        **New RSI Action Support Group** will meet on Wednesdays for 4 weeks in Kenmore Square area. Speakers will talk about relevant RSI issues. Details to be announced; contact RSI Action at <www.rsiaction.org> as soon as possible if interested
- May 12        **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 – 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment,
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- May 13 **Personal Care Attendant (PCA) Services Forum**, 11 am – 12:30 pm, at the Multicultural Independent Living Center of Boston, 22 Beechwood Street in Dorchester. Discussion will focus on legislation (Senate Bill 139) that has been introduced to improve working conditions for PCAs and make it easier to locate, hire and retain caregivers. For more information see the web site for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), local 2020 at <[www.pcaqualityworkforce.org/](http://www.pcaqualityworkforce.org/)> or contact Becca Gutman at 1-877-409-2020, x133 or call 617-989-8005.
- May 14 **NAMI Walks for the Mind of America** to raise awareness about mental illness and funds for services to individuals with mental illness and their families. The Massachusetts NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) 3-mile walk begins and ends at Artisan Park next to the Charles River, almost across from WBZ Station at 1170 Soldiers Field Road, just west of the Harvard football stadium in Brighton. Registration is at 9 a.m. For more information go to the NAMI web site at <[www.namimass.org](http://www.namimass.org/)>.
- May 17 **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC)** monthly meeting on 3rd Tuesday of month, 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, in Boston.
- May 18 **Women Maximizing Abilities Now** – see the May 4th listing for details.
- May 20 **Mental Illness Among Elders – a management training workshop** presented by MassHousing, 8:45 am -1 pm at King's Beach Tower, 130 Eastern Ave. in Lynn. Participants will learn how to recognize and respond to problems, understand group dynamics when mental illness is involved, and learn practical approaches for nurturing the housing community. Course qualifies as part of the HUD Resident Service Coordinator training requirement, and social work CEUs are available. Registration is \$25-35 if not a member of the Training Assistance Program. For more information contact Janeen Harris at 617-854-1069 or <[jharris@masshousing.org](mailto:jharris@masshousing.org)>.
- May 25 **Strategies for Dealing with Cognitive Impairments caused by dementia – a management training workshop** presented by MassHousing, 8:45 am -1 pm at Blake Estates, 1344 Hyde Park Ave. in Hyde Park (Boston). Participants will learn about types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, become aware of possible causes that trigger certain behaviors, and learn communication techniques for dealing with residents who have these cognitive impairments. Course qualifies as part of the HUD Resident Service Coordinator training requirement. Registration is \$25-35 if not a member of the Training Assistance Program. For more information contact Janeen Harris at 617-854-1069 or <[jharris@masshousing.org](mailto:jharris@masshousing.org)>.
- May 25 **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA (AACT)**, 1 – 3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room 2. Call 617-973-7507 voice or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information or to request Interpreters. Due to security measures, please bring proper identification to gain entrance to all meetings.
- May 26 **LD/ADHD Task Force** for persons with Learning Disabilities / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is sponsored by Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and is now meeting at MRC State headquarters, 27-48 Wormwood Street in Boston (south of Fort Point Channel) in the 6th floor large conference room. Business meeting at 11 a.m. - 1p.m. For more information contact Angelica Sawyer at 617-661-3117 (voice).
- May 26-29 **Autism One 2005 Conference** in Chicago, IL – see <<http://autismone.org/homepage.cfm>>.
- June 1 **Women Maximizing Abilities Now** – see the May 4th listing for details.
- June 1 **RSI Monthly Drop-in Group** - see May 4th listing for details.
- June 9 **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 – 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.
- June 14 **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software. Meets 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. (See May 10 listing for details.)
- June 8-11 **Conversations and Connections across Race, Disability and Identity** - Society for Disability Studies 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, at San Francisco State University in California. For information, see <[www.uic.edu/orgs/sds/generalinfo.html](http://www.uic.edu/orgs/sds/generalinfo.html)>.
- June 19 **Transitions: Government Benefits, Guardianship, Consent Issues, and Estate Planning for Families with Loved Ones with Disabilities**, 1-6 p.m. at Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center, 333 Nahanton St. in Newton. Presentation by Theresa M. Varnet, LSW, JD. Pre-registration is required; RSVP by 3 pm on June 15; \$10 for TRANSITIONS families, \$25 for non-members. For more information contact Roni Hovav, TRANSITIONS Facilitator, 617-399-3260 or <[rhovav@jvs-boston.org](mailto:rhovav@jvs-boston.org)>.

- June 15      **Women Maximizing Abilities Now** – see the May 4th listing for details.
- June 21      **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC)** monthly meeting on 3rd Tuesday of month, 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, in Boston.
- June 22      **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA** meets from 1-3:30 p.m. (on the 3rd Wednesday this month.) at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room 2. Call 617-973-7507 voice or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information, to request Interpreters, or confirm date and time of meeting. Due to security measures, please bring proper identification to gain entrance to all meetings.
- July 14      **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 – 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.

## Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

The Commission was established in 1979 to act as a clearinghouse on disability and access issues throughout the City of Cambridge. We strive to raise awareness of disability matters, to eliminate discrimination, and to promote equal opportunity for people with all types of disabilities – physical, mental and sensory. The Commission provides information, referral, guidance, and technical assistance to individuals and their families, employers, public agencies, businesses and private non-profit organizations.

The goal of our 11-member citizen advisory board, comprised primarily of individuals with disabilities, is to maximize access to all aspects of Cambridge community life. Our regularly scheduled Commission meetings, which always include an opportunity for public comment, are held at 5:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month.

**Access Notice:** The City of Cambridge and Commission for Persons with Disabilities do not discriminate on the basis of disability. This newsletter is available in e-mail, large print and other alternative formats upon request. To add your name to our mailing list, to inquire about alternative formats, or for information about other auxiliary aids and services or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, contact CCPD.

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 Robert Patterson  
 Kate Patton  
 Donald Summerfield



*AccessLetter* is produced by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities,  
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51 Inman Street, second floor, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139

We welcome your articles, comments, criticisms, and suggestions. Write us!

**Read past issues on our website: [www.cambridgema.gov/DHSP2/disabilities.cfm](http://www.cambridgema.gov/DHSP2/disabilities.cfm)**

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**Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities**

51 Inman Street, second floor  
Cambridge, MA 02139