

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities
Minutes for February 12, 2009

Present – Members: Laura Brelsford, Larry Braman, Susan Ellis Holland, Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Dave Krebs, Kate Patton, Donald Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, and Dave Wood

Alternates: Bet MacArthur; Staff: Michael Muehe, Carolyn Thompson

Absent – Kathy Watkins for Owen O’Riordan

Guests – Cheryl Abbot, JoAnn Haas, Naomi Pinson

Minutes – The Minutes for January 8, 2009 were approved.

Announcements – Kate Patton reported that she is now serving on the board for the New England Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. She is also running again in the Boston Marathon to raise money for MS research and care. Don Summerfield said he had spoken with Marie Trottier, ADA Coordinator for Harvard, about a door paddle that took two months to fix.

Department of Public Works (DPW) Report – Michael gave this report on behalf of Kathy Watkins who was not able to attend the meeting. She says that DPW is gearing up for a busy, busy summer; she will bring a construction project update to the March meeting. DPW is still waiting for some final budget information to finalize the 5 Year Sidewalk and Street Plan update.

The Reverse 911 Snow Message went out to Cambridge households with telephone land lines on January 28, 29 and 30. It included a brief summary of the City’s snow removal ordinance along with phone and website for getting more information. In an email dated Feb. 9, 2009, Becky Fuentes reported that 1614 complaints had been received through Traffic, Parking and Transportation (TPT) and DPW, and 970 tickets had been issued. Most of the tickets issued by both departments were for “icy conditions” and “no path cleared” with “no access to crosswalk, HP ramp blocked, no access to crosswalk” being the next highest categories. The two departments will be meeting to discuss how to better define the particular violation categories, how to report and ticket multiple violations at one address, how to make getting the ticket to the owner of the property and collection of fines more efficient. They want to improve the front page of the reporting form to give people a better idea of conditions that might constitute a violation. It appears that “phase two” of the publicity needs to focus on the importance of clearing curb ramps.

Chair’s Report – Laura Brelsford said the ad hoc interview committee would be reviewing the seven letters and resumes that have been received and setting up interviews with applicants. There is just one vacant position on the board at present, but two more will open up when Larry Braman and Dave Krebs both finish their second terms in September 2009.

Laura opened the floor for discussion about the Commission’s *annual October event*. One suggestion was to look at issues students with disabilities face in the transition from high school to the adult world of further education/training and employment, and how to maintain connections with the state agencies that may be able to provide needed services. Rachel Tanenhaus said she knew of a good DVD program produced by Mass. Young Adult Advisory Council that was shown at Dept. of Public Health last fall, and that we could probably get some of their members for a panel presentation. The other suggestion was to look more specifically at access to appropriate health care for adults with disabilities. There have been numerous accounts of adults with cognitive and other developmental disabilities not being able to find anyone but a pediatrician who would treat them. Adults with disabilities often have trouble finding specialists to treat medical conditions unrelated to their primary disability. These people said they would be interested on planning the fall event: Rachel Tanenhaus,

Susan Holland, Eileen K. Bongiorno, Bet MacArthur, Don Summerfield, Naomi Pinson, Dave Krebs, and Michael Muehe.

Bet MacArthur led a discussion about the Commission's sponsoring some type of *disability film series or festival*. She has had a lot of experience doing this for social workers and psychologists. She raised several issues that need to be considered:

1. Type of film
 - documentary (*Emmanuel's Gift, When Billy Broke His Head*)
 - feature film (*My Left Foot, Born on the 4th of July*)
2. Venue – accessible, free, possibly an MIT auditorium
3. Schedule and Program Formats, such as
 - five films in one weekend
 - once a month
 - one a week for six weeks
 - followed by speaker or panel discussion
4. Audience
 - general public –
 - people/families that live with disabilities.
5. Cost
 - paying for license or permit
 - can we, should we charge admission
6. Committees
 - Curating – selecting the films to be shown
 - Program – length, panel, discussion, recruits speakers
 - Promotion – advertising, publicity

It was pointed out that we have all kinds of iconography that comes from film, and it is important to be aware of how this influences cultural perceptions of people with disabilities. People with disabilities are often portrayed as the villain, the sweet innocent, the hero, the dupe, the avenger. In commenting on a possible schedule, some thought that spreading the series out would give people time to process what they had seen, and that having a discussion after the film(s) was important to do. Is one time of year better than others? It's hard for people to get out in the winter. Summer could be good because people want to be in the air conditioning.

If DVDs or videos could be made available or if people could go to a theater to see a current film, they could gather later for discussion. We could include questions and topics for discussion in the publicity. How do we get people with disabilities involved when many do not get out and about; many not connected with the disability community? How do we get co-workers, family and the general public involved? Bet MacArthur, Rachel Tanenhaus, Laura Brelsford, Carolyn Thompson, and Kate Patton expressed interest in working on this project. Rachel said she could set up a Google Group for the planning group; for now Bet will email the others so we can start pooling our ideas.

Executive Director's Report – Michael Muehe said there have been quite a few complaints about individuals not being able to get a wheelchair accessible cab even when it has been booked the day before. Either the dispatcher that answers claims to not know anything about the accessible cabs, or there are only one or two on the street at a given time. Many of these minivans are owner operated, and the owners are hesitant about letting other people drive their vehicle. Michael will be meeting with staff from the License Commission and the person managing the Accessible Cambridge Taxi (ACT) dispatch service to find solutions to the problem. All complaints should go to the License Commission.

Disability Project Coordinator's Report – Carolyn Thompson distributed 2009 calendar of CCPD meetings for coming year, information about free tax filing assistance, and a new roster to board members with the request any changes be forwarded to her. Eileen said that her name is now officially Eileen Keegan Bongiorno. She shared with the Commission information about two recent publications. *Living Well: A Guide to Elder Services in Cambridge* is a user friendly 67 page resource that has been compiled with the help of several Cambridge organizations and individuals from MIT, Harvard Medical School and Boston Medical Center. Copies are available from the Cambridge Council on Aging (617-349-6220) and may soon be on the web. The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics at Cornell University has just published the **2007 Disability Status Report: United States**. You may request a free copy by calling 607-255-7727 or emailing disability <statistics@cornell.edu> or downloading it from the web at <www.disabilitystatistics.org>.

Public Comment – It was suggested by one attendee that there should be a law requiring passengers in taxi cabs to use seat belts. Too often one cannot even find the seatbelt in a cab. The question was also raised about requiring the drivers to also use seatbelts.

Old Business – Don Summerfield attended the Civil Rights Meeting at the State House; he said it was good but not well attended. He has a meeting scheduled with Rep. Marty Walz, Bill Henning of BCIL, and Margo LeClaire, General Counsel and Fair Housing Specialist for the Dept. of Housing and Community Development to discuss disparities in how rent payments are figured differently for state and federally funded housing.

Susan Holland reported on a meeting she had attended on Feb. 9, 2009 to review Cambridge Public School policy regarding life-threatening food allergies. Susan said that currently the guidelines are not consistent across the different schools and that there is no intake process for a child entering school for the first time or registry of children with such allergies. She had a very difficult time getting the information to her son's teachers this year when he started public kindergarten. He has a life-threatening food allergy that falls under the ADA definition of a disability. At the meeting were parents and caregivers, school administrators, food service management, school nurses and nutritionists. The hope is to begin to develop consensus around policy revision.

New Business – Rachel Tanenhaus said that the Dept. of Public Health (DPH) has been teaching a module called *My Life, My Health* developed by Stanford University for elders and people with chronic conditions. DPH is very interested in making health information available to people with disabilities in general. Ten minutes of the March CCPD meeting will be devoted to exploring with us how they could adapt this curriculum more specifically to people with disabilities.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Thompson