

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

Present – Members: Laura Brelsford, Larry Braman, Donald Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, Dave Wood, and Kathy Watkins for Owen O’Riordan; Alternates: Bet MacArthur; David Peterson
Staff: Michael Muehe, Carolyn Thompson

Absent – Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Susan Ellis Holland, Dave Krebs, Kate Patton,

Guests – Sandy Dermaskin, Naomi Pinson, Sara Willig

Minutes – The Minutes for February 12, 2009 were approved.

Announcements – Rachel Tanenhaus said that the Mass. Dept. of Public Health was sponsoring a one-day *Conference on Accessible Health Care: It Takes More than Ramps* for health care providers on April 3 in Holyoke, MA. Laura Brelsford handed out 2009 MBTA calendars with photos of access features on the bus and subway lines. Don Summerfield reported that he had filed a complaint with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) against Cambridge Eye Doctors for a high doorway threshold.

Department of Public Works (DPW) Report –Kathy Watkins gave a street/sidewalk construction project update on work resuming this spring and bids just going out for work that will begin in the late spring or summer of 2009. [See attached report.] She described several larger projects in the planning stages for Broadway, Western Ave. and Concord Ave. The City is applying to the Mass. Dept. of Transportation for a Public Works Economic Development (PWED) grant for the extensive work along Concord Avenue from Fresh Pond Parkway to Blanchard Road. This will include concrete sidewalks on both sides of the street, raised bike lanes, and new paving. This project provides critical connection between transportation, housing, recreation and jobs in the community and will make the area more accessible to people with disabilities. A MOTION was made to send a letter from the Commission to Secretary James Aloisi of the Dept. of Transportation in support of the project. The motion passed unanimously. [See attached letter.] Kathy also said that the bid for construction of the new elevator to the Harvard Square T station will go out as soon as the City and the MBTA resolve some legal issues.

Presentation about *My Life, My Health* – Rachel Tanenhaus explained how the Dept. of Public Health has been using a Chronic Disease Self-Management Program developed by Stanford University with groups of elders in Massachusetts. They would like to expand its availability to younger people with disabilities. This free training, called *My Life, My Health*, presents non-technical information, is highly interactive and emphasizes empowerment. The program is based on several assumptions:

- People with various chronic conditions have similar concerns and problems
- People have to deal not only with the disease(s) but its impact on their lives and emotions
- How the program is taught is at least as important as the subject content

A five year study showed that, compared to people who did not take the program, those who did improved their healthful behaviors, improved their health status, and decreased their days in the hospital. Two trained facilitators present *Your Life, Your Health* in a workshop format with participants meeting for two and a half hours once a week for six weeks in a community setting like a senior center, church or library. Each week focuses on a different self-management technique:

- Dealing with fatigue, pain, isolation and frustration
- Appropriate exercise for strength, flexibility and endurance
- Appropriate use of medications
- Communicating effectively with family, friends, health professionals

- Nutrition
- How to evaluate new treatments

Rachel said the program teaches people to recognize the “symptom cycle” (pain > tense muscles > tiredness > shortness of breath > stress and anxiety > depression > pain) and how to break it, and provides each participant with a tool box for dealing with symptoms. They realize that no one tool works for every symptom and that not every person can use all of the tools. Just changing one or two things can make a significant difference. The information is available in print or on audio discs but gone over verbally in the groups. Participants are encouraged to take the four day training and become facilitators themselves.

Chair’s Report – Laura Brelsford asked for an update on the **disability film series** from Bet MacArthur who has been collecting titles and chairing the online discussion about how we might proceed. Bet emphasized that the film(s) we decide to show should be no longer than two hours. It would be very helpful if people suggesting individual titles would provide basic information as to the length, date of release, setting/story line, etc. All of this information can be found on the website of the International Movie Database at <www.imdb.com>. We need to think about cultural diversity, availability, and whether or not we want to choose a theme for the series. Several people thought it would be better to do a series with a film every month or two or quarterly, rather than a “festival” where we would show several films over one or two days. The consensus was that the film would be open to the general public, but that this could also be a good tool for networking and building the disability community. There was a good bit of discussion about whether or not we could or should charge admission or ask for donations. No conclusion was reached.

Michael Muehe reported on a conversation he had with our audiovisual staff contact at MIT. They have several rooms of various sizes available, all of which are set up for showing DVDs. Not so many lecture halls or auditoriums are set up for showing a 16 or 32 mm film. As long as we have an MIT sponsor, there is no charge for using the space.

Executive Director’s Report – Michael Muehe gave a quick update on the request that came from the Governor’s Office for a “blanket waiver” of AAB regulations in order to move ahead quickly on projects that may be eligible for some of the federal stimulus money. The Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) will not be granting such a waiver of the requirements that new construction meet certain access requirements. Instead, they will draft an expedited process to handle these requests and issue a Memorandum of Understanding to that effect. There is word that some of the economic recovery stimulus money will be coming to Cambridge in the form of community block grants in FY10 and could speed up the time table for some projects. We can also expect level funding of \$50,000 in the FY10 City budget for the line item dealing with access upgrades in city buildings. Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) and Mass. Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) will again be sponsoring a one-day workshop in Cambridge, this time focusing on emergency preparedness for people living in high-rise buildings. It will be held at the Manning Apartments in Central Square, though we do not have an exact date at this time.

Disability Project Coordinator’s Report – Carolyn Thompson distributed information on a survey that is being conducted to collect information from people with disabilities regarding their experiences with public transportation. The survey can be found at <http://mtcinc.transit.sgizmo.com>. The deadline is March 31, 2009.

The City will host its 20th Holocaust Remembrance on May 6, 2009 at Temple Beth Shalom on Tremont Street in Cambridge. Rachel Tanenhaus and Sara Willig volunteered to light the candle in remembrance of people with disabilities who were killed by the Nazis.

Information was shared about the untimely death of Bob Rizzo, Jr. who managed operations contracts for the MBTA's paratransit service, The RIDE. He is remembered fondly for his courteous service and always taking the time to listen to suggestions from people with disabilities. The disability community also mourns the death of the Rev. Nancy Eiesland, professor of the sociology of religion and disability studies at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. Eiesland's contribution was to articulate a coherent theology of disability that did not see people with disabilities as "objects" of charity. Her book, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, became a beacon for other disability scholars and seminarians. A colleague calls her work the "most powerful discussion of God to arise from disability studies."

New Business – Cambridge-based Vinfin, Inc. is presenting a free film series called *Moving Images* on March 28, 10 am to 7 pm at Harvard Medical School. There will be two tracks running concurrently, one on developmental disabilities and the other on psychiatric disabilities. It was suggested that some CCPD members attend to get some ideas for our own film series.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Thompson