

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities  
Minutes for April 16, 2009

Present – Members: Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Laura Brelsford, JoAnn Haas, Kate Patton Regal, Gordon Slater (Youth Ambassador), Don Summerfield, Dave Wood  
Alternates: Bet MacArthur; David Peterson  
Staff: Michael Muehe, Carolyn Thompson  
Absent – Larry Braman, Susan Ellis Holland, Dave Krebs, Owen O’Riordan, Rachel Tanenhaus  
Guests – Naomi Pinson

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

Introductions – Laura Brelsford welcomed new CCPD board members, JoAnn DiSalvo Haas and Gordon “Gordie” Slater who will be our first Youth Ambassador. She noted that the interview process had been challenging since there were a number of well qualified applicants, and reminded those present that there will be two more vacancies in the fall when Larry Braman and Dave Krebs complete their terms.

Announcements – Kate announced that she had officially changed her name to Kate Patton Regal, and reminded people that she was running her 10th Boston Marathon to raise money for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Don Summerfield reported that he had attended a good leadership training that Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) co-sponsored with Mass. Developmental Disabilities Council and the Disability Policy Consortium (DPC). Bet MacArthur announced that a new documentary, Luckey, produced by Laura Longworth will be screened at the Somerville Theatre in Davis Square on April 26 at 2:30 pm. The film is about Tom Luckey, a local designer of play spaces who finds a way to continue his artistic work after becoming paralyzed. Bet said she is also looking for a trained person to help with an access audit for a local congregation. Carolyn Thompson and Dave Wood volunteered. Bet will provide more information.

Chair’s Report – Laura Brelsford reported on the very successful press conference held in Cambridge last week to highlight the new legislation that increases the fine for parking in bus stops to \$100, and gives MBTA police permission to ticket such vehicles throughout the MBTA service area. Speaking at the event were Vice Mayor, Sam Seidel, Daniel Grabauskas, General Manager for the MBTA, and Myra Berloff, Director of Massachusetts Office on Disability.

Laura said that the Commission needed to amend the language in its By-laws to reflect the new position of a Youth Ambassador on the board. The following language was suggested for insertion immediately after Article III

Section V:

Section VI. -- Youth Ambassador

There shall be a non-voting Youth Ambassador, appointed by the City Manager, who will act as liaison between the Commission and the youth community in Cambridge. With the exception of voting powers, the Youth Ambassador will have the same rights and responsibilities as other Commission members, as described in Article III. The Youth Ambassador will be responsible for attending Commission meetings, as described in Article IV, and for keeping the Commission informed about issues of concern to youth with disabilities in Cambridge.

A motion to insert this language was made by Dave Wood and seconded by Don Summerfield; the motion PASSED unanimously. A question was raised about why the Youth Ambassador could not be a voting member. Michael Muehe explained that the City Ordinance that established the Commission set the membership at eleven voting members.

Laura reminded the board that it will be time to elect new officers next month. Both Kate Patton Regal as Secretary and Laura as Chair have served the two-year limit for their respective positions. Duties of the officers as stated in the By-laws were reviewed, and the floor was opened for nominations. Rachel Tanenhaus was nominated for Chair. Since Rachel was absent, Kate will check with her about accepting the nomination. [Editor's note: Rachel accepts the nomination.] Dave Wood was nominated for Secretary, and accepted the nomination. Nominations will remain open until the election which will be held at the May meeting.

Disability Film Series – Bet MacArthur announced that the committee has chosen a name for this series. It will be called Disability Reframed: A Community Film Series. The first film, Edward Scissorhands, will be shown on Saturday afternoon, June 6 on the MIT campus. The event is FREE and open to the public; the screening will be followed by a discussion about how this film can be viewed as an allegory about disability and physical difference. Bet will research what licensing or permit is needed to show the film. The committee will also be looking into grants and other possible funding for the future of the film series. The event will be listed in the May-June issue of AccessLetter, where there will also be a background article on the history of disability in films. There also needs to be an article in the local papers. Rachel said she would do a Facebook page about the film series, and set up an online google.docs site for suggesting future films. There was some discussion about moving the venue to different parts of the city and to different days/times in the future to make the series available to more of the residents. The youth centers in the different neighborhoods could draw in different crowds.

Executive Director's Report – Michael Muehe reported on several upcoming meetings and opportunities for the Commission. Wednesday, April 22, will be Independent Living Day at the State House; this is a good opportunity to meet with legislators. Tuesday evening, April 28, the Human Rights Commission is presenting their annual Fair Housing awards at City Hall. Michael has been participating in the statewide Employment NOW Coalition which meets in Cambridge about once a month on Friday afternoon. They are pushing the Commonwealth to become a model employer of people with disabilities. If you are particularly interested in employment issues for individuals with disabilities, contact Michael about attending these meetings.

Several years ago Don and Kate did a 30 second spot for CCTV. The studio is going to do another one of these PSAs as part of their project to increase awareness of disability and access issues in Cambridge. It will be broadcast for several months. The filming will be on May 6 or 7. Bet MacArthur and JoAnn Haas volunteered to write the script and Dave Wood volunteered to be in the PSA. The annual Cambridge River Festival will be on Saturday, June 13 from noon until 6 pm. If the Commission is interested in having an information booth/table in the area reserved for community organizations, we will need 8-10 people to staff the table in two-hour shifts including set-up (10-12 noon) and break-down (6-7 pm). Bet, JoAnn, Don, Dave Wood, Laura, and Kate signed up to help. A formal decision about our participation in this event will be made at the May meeting.

The U.S. Access Board will be holding a Town Meeting in Boston from 9 am – 5 pm on Thursday, May 28 at the Fairmont Copley Plaza hotel. This federal agency develops standards for accessibility in a variety of settings. It is then up to the Department of Justice to promulgate these standards. This is a great opportunity to speak with representatives of this federal agency. The morning session will focus on promoting accessibility in design education, and the afternoon panel will discuss accessible museum exhibit design. There will be open microphone opportunities throughout the day for input from the public. The event will be followed by a reception at the Center for Human Centered Design, 200 Portland Street in Boston. A question came up about any particular issues we should consider presenting to the Board. Michael will work on this with Larry Braman.

Disability Project Coordinator's Report – Carolyn Thompson distributed flyers for the Cambridge Holocaust Commemoration at 7 pm on May 6, 2009 at Temple Beth Shalom, 8 Tremont Street. She has been part of the planning committee for the past four months working to improve access for people with disabilities at this annual citywide event.

Carolyn announced that she has a chapter, “Ableism: Oppression as Experienced by People with Disabilities,” in a new book called, *Injustice and the Care of Souls*, (Fortress Press; 2009). This collection of essays intended for pastors, counselors and social workers provides a vision of contextually based care that takes into consideration the web of social inequalities that impact individual lives.

Comments about the book sparked a discussion about the general lack of access for people with disabilities in houses of worship and the often inadequate, misleading descriptions of the access that is provided at a particular location. Kate said that sometimes the building/sanctuary is more accessible than it appeared from the description. Complaints included needing to find the person who has the key to the lift, discovering the elevator is being used as a storage closet, and placement of furniture or planters that block access to a handrail. Dave Wood suggested the need for a more long term project of contacting local houses of worship and offering our services to do a site visits and to provide technical assistance. Bet suggested a survey similar to the one the Commission did with Cambridge restaurants about 12 years ago. David Peterson said there needed to be a pictorial guide to various accessibility features because people do not always understand the terminology. A decision was made to add this issue of access in houses of worship to the Agenda for the May meeting. Carolyn will present our outreach to Cambridge faith communities that is already underway.

Public Input – Naomi Pinson announced that the NAMI Walk in Boston will be on Saturday, May 31 at Artesani Park on the Charles River in Brighton. Registration begins at 9 am with a start time at 11 am. All are welcome; there is no required registration fee. NAMI stands for National Alliance on Mental Illness, and the purpose of the walk is to raise public awareness about mental illness and the realities of individuals and families living with these disorders, confront negative stereotypes about people with mental illness, and raise funds for resources and programs.

Old Business – David Peterson reported a recent incident that was part of a continuing problem he has been having with Clear Conscience Café, the restaurant that is adjacent to the Harvest Co-op supermarket in Central Square. David said he frequently needs to sit and rest for awhile after finishing his shopping, and thought he had worked out an arrangement where he could sit in the Café area. But on Wednesday night, April 15, one of the Café employees swatted David with a newspaper as he started to sit down, and told him he could not sit there. It is the general policy of the Café that the tables are reserved for the people who purchase food in the café. There was some discussion about whether this was a matter to take to the Human Rights Commission, having a discussion with the Manager or Customer Service Manager of the Harvest Co-op, sending a complaint letter, and whether or not seating is provided at other area supermarkets. Kate made a Motion to send a friendly letter to Harvest Co-op requesting that they provide some seating for their customers, anyone who needs it. The Motion was seconded by Don and PASSED unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Thompson