

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities
Minutes for January 8, 2009

Present – Members: Laura Brelsford, Susan Ellis Holland, Eileen Keegan, Kate Patton, Donald Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, Kathy Watkins (for Owen O’Riordan), and Dave Wood

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

Absent – Larry Braman, Dave Krebs

Guests – Sandy Dermaskin, JoAnn Haas, Liza Hoffman, Naomi Pinson, Bobby Vilinsky, Sara Willig

Minutes – The Minutes for December 11, 2008 were approved.

Department of Public Works (DPW) Report – Kathy Watkins presented some new language for improved pedestrian access around construction sites that will be included in all future contracts. [see Attachment] Included are time limits for responding to complaints and a graduated structure of deductions (\$250, \$400, \$500) from Contract payments for failure to respond. She said that Massachusetts Highway Dept. will be applying for a variance for the steep Walden Street Bridge which was the result of noncompliant design and not the fault of the construction company. She added that Department of Public Works (DPW) will be doing an update in the next month or so to its 5 Year Street and Sidewalk Plan which is now a year old.

In regard to snow clearance, Kathy said she will look into the status of the “reverse 911” calls about clearing sidewalks that has evidently not yet been sent out to Cambridge households. Kate Patton suggested that it might be good for someone from DPW and the Commission to attend the next meeting of the Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association to respond to questions about the City’s responsibilities for snow removal. Bet MacArthur described the positive results that came from her initiative to hand out a “friendly reminder” flyer to her neighbors about the importance of clearing snow and ice.

Executive Director’s Report – Michael Muehe gave an update on the effect of the City’s revised snow removal policies and procedures. He said that so far this year the Parking Control Officers (PCO) have issued 400 citations to property owners who failed to clear snow and ice from their abutting sidewalks and curb ramps, as many as were issued in all of last winter. The PCOs are to be congratulated for their dedicated work on this. The new reporting system on the City’s website, <www.cambridgema.gov/TheWorks/services/snow/complaint.aspx>, is working very well and is easy to use. The day-glow orange tags on the doors of properties that have been fined are also drawing a lot of attention.

The Cambridge Community Television (CCTV) *Easy Access* program, “People with Disabilities in Cambridge,” began airing this week. We have several more projects with CCTV. If you are interested in participating, let Michael or Carolyn know. Also, let us hear about any problems you have with the Cambridge wheelchair accessible cabs. After hearing the disheartening story from one person who was not able to get an accessible cab on New Year’s Day even after calling ahead to make arrangements, Michael will be talking with the License Commission about how the Accessible Cambridge Taxi (ACT) program is handling its calls. There was also a complaint about how some cab drivers refuse to take Taxi Coupons when the “expiration date” has passed even though they can still be redeemed. Does that wording need to be on the coupons? Michael said that perhaps this could be discussed with the Council on Aging and the Taxi Cab Advisory Committee.

Michael had a good meeting last week with Larry Braman and staff from Traffic, Parking and Transportation and from Geographic Information Systems to discuss having a map that shows the location of Disability Parking spaces in Cambridge. One should be available in a few months.

Disability Project Coordinator's Report – Carolyn Thompson brought to the Commission's attention the fact that the second Thursday in April is Passover, a Jewish religious holiday. A MOTION was made to move the April meeting from the 9th to the 16th. The motion passed. Carolyn thanked Bet MacArthur, Maureen Coyne and Kate Patton for helping process the January-February issue of **AccessLetter** for mailing the end of December. Carolyn will be serving on the planning committee for the Holocaust Commemoration this May, and will try to smooth out some of the access issues that have been a problem in past years.

Chair's Report – Laura Brelsford thanked Kate Patton for chairing the first part of the meeting in her absence. Having just come from an MBTA meeting, Laura reported that the Governor had signed the Bus Stop Bill that will go into effect in 90 days and will now allow MBTA Police to ticket in all municipalities! The new fine for parking in a Bus Stop is set at \$100. If the MBTA issues the ticket they get the money; if the city or town writes the ticket then the money is split between them and the MBTA. The drivers on the buses will be able to hit a button from their seat to log the location of Bus Stops where these violations most frequently occur on a GPS device. This is good news for elders, people with disabilities and anyone with a stroller or small children. If a bus cannot pull up to the curb, these people have a very difficult time boarding or exiting the bus.

Public Input – The effects of recent and future State budget cuts on health and human services was brought up. A recent report said that the State was cutting 100 case management positions in Mental Health. This is on top of a previous cuts. Rachel heard this morning at the Dept. of Public Health that the Governor will be coming out with additional cuts next Tuesday, and more are expected in July for FY2010. The immediate 9-C cuts are not something we can change, but when the first iteration of the new budget comes out at the end of January there will be an opportunity to speak at various Hearings.

Old Business – Rachel Tanenhaus spoke of the need for some disability awareness training at local hospitals, particularly around issue of service animals, and asked if that was something that the Healthcare Access project could do. Michael said that the project is limited to outpatient doctors' offices and clinics, but that he could give her contact information for people to speak with at Cambridge and Mt. Auburn hospitals. Bet would also like that information in relation to their psychiatric departments.

The idea of doing a disability film festival, first discussed at the December meeting was brought up. Bet agreed to lead a discussion on this at the February meeting of the Commission.

New Business – Donald Summerfield brought up the equity issue of how rent payments are figured differently for state and federally funded housing, and wants to bring the matter up for discussion with lawmakers who could affect a change. The State law has stricter limits on the amount of money a person (on SSI/SSDI) can earn before the person's rent gets recalculated. In Federal housing a person is allowed to earn as much as \$7000 before the rent is recalculated. This is a disincentive to seeking employment. Michael suggested that Donald speak first with Bill Henning at Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) about this ruling.

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

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Thompson