

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD)

Minutes for Thursday, March 10, 2011

Present:

Members: Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Laura Brelsford, Elizabeth Dean-Clower, Sandy Durmaskin, JoAnn Haas, Alissa Land, Rachel Tanenhaus, and Dave Wood.

Alternates: Bet MacArthur

Staff: Michael Muehe and Kate Thurman

Absent: Gordon Slater, Don Summerfield, and Kathy Watkins.

Guests: Kelly Downes, Cambridge Police Department; and Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge Community Development Department.

Minutes:

Sandy Durmaskin made a motion to amend the Update on Snow & Sidewalk Issues section of the February 10, 2011 minutes to include the discussion that curb ramps are part of the sidewalk and that abutting property owners are therefore responsible for clearing snow and ice off the ramps and need to be informed of the importance of doing so.

Ms. Durmaskin also requested that the Commission's discussion about preparing a list of the most frequently encountered snow removal issues be added.

A motion to approve the minutes as amended was passed by the Commission.

Announcements:

Kate Thurman announced that Michael Muehe is being honored with an award for his advocacy and activism for disability rights at the Boston Center for Independent Living's 15th Annual Marie Feltin Award Ceremony, which will be held on March 18, 2011 at the Fairmont Copley Hotel in Boston. She handed out copies of the City's press release, and CCPD members joined her in congratulating Mr. Muehe.

Laura Brelsford announced that the elevators at the Porter Square MBTA Station will be out of service for about one year beginning on March 21, 2011 for replacement and the addition of a second set of elevators. There will be accessible shuttle bus service during that time between Davis Square and Harvard Square Stations.

Sandy Durmaskin announced that there is an accessible condominium for sale at Cornerstone Co-Housing in Cambridge.

Alissa Land announced that a 2012 budget cut proposal from Governor Patrick's Administration calls for a 25% reduction in the number of psychiatric hospital beds and that there have been a few protests.

Kate Thurman added that the Massachusetts chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness is holding an Advocacy Day at the State House on Thursday, March 31, 2011 from 10am to 2pm for people who would like to express their opinions to their elected officials regarding on the budget cuts affecting people with psychiatric disabilities.

Ms. Tanenhaus said that the local Service Employees International Union, many members of which are mental health professionals, is organizing protests.

Mr. Muehe said that he is preparing an article for the April/May, 2011 edition of *AccessLetter* on the proposed budget cuts affecting persons with disabilities. He said that the Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) is a good resource for information on the cuts. [Editor's note: more information can be found on DPC's website at <www.dpcma.org>, by emailing them at <mail@dpcma.org>, or by calling 617-542-3822].

Rachel Tanenhaus announced that another Beyond the Ramp Conference for healthcare providers and advocates will be held on May 3rd in the Berkshires. She requested that people pass the word to any healthcare providers they may know in Western Massachusetts.

Chair's Report: Rachel Tanenhaus reported that there are three vacancies opening up on the Commission at the end of April and encouraged those in attendance to spread the word to any Cambridge residents who may be interested in applying. Michael Muehe said that the deadline was posted as being March 11, but will be extended to April 22 because not enough applications have been received.

Ms. Tanenhaus also announced that nominations for the positions of Chair and Secretary will open in April and close just before elections, which will be held during the May meeting.

She reported that Gary Talbot, Assistant General Manager for the Department of System-Wide Accessibility at the MBTA will do a presentation on accessibility. She said that Mr. Talbot is also a member of the United States Access Board.

Western Avenue Reconstruction Project:

Jeff Rosenblum of the Cambridge Community Development Department reported on the upcoming reconstruction of Western Avenue. He passed out informational materials on the project and stated that the sewer system under that road was constructed in the 1870s and must be replaced. The designing of the project began more than a year ago and was led by an advisory committee consisting of Cambridge residents and business owners, and representatives from both the Bicycle Committee and the Pedestrian Committee. In addition, several public meetings were held.

Mr. Rosenblum stated that several factors were considered in the Western Avenue reconstruction design, including:

- That it is a thoroughfare, with motorists using it to get to both Storrow Drive and the MA Pike. While the speed limit is currently designated as 25 MPH, motorists frequently drive much faster, causing unsafe conditions for pedestrians, particularly in crosswalks. A major goal in the reconstruction is to slow the traffic.
- There is a dense residential population abutting the road, and a high demand for on-street parking. There is some concern about adding crosswalks because they take up two parking spaces. There are also a lot of businesses located on stretches of Western Ave.
- The need for improved bicycle lanes, including adding them between Massachusetts Avenue and Franklin Street, where there are currently none.
- The need to improve pedestrian access, including more accessible sidewalks and bus stops.

He reported that the majority of publicly owned land is pavement, and that the City is always looking for ways to increase green space. One such increase will be accomplished by a significant expansion of Cronin Park in the Western Ave reconstruction.

Mr. Rosenblum said that traffic will be decreased from two to one lane for the blocks between Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street. The bicycle lane will be located between the sidewalk and parked cars, rather than next to motor vehicle traffic. He said that trees, light posts, trash cans, etc. would be located between the sidewalk and the bicycle lane.

In addition, there will be curb extensions at crosswalk locations. This will help with traffic calming and will make pedestrians more visible, in addition to having less street to cross. He said that the curb extensions will make snow plowing a little more difficult for DPW, and added that DPW will also plow the bicycle lane.

Mr. Rosenblum said that MBTA bus stops will be relocated to the curb extensions so that buses will no longer have to pull into and out of designated spaces. The goal is to have both the front and back doors of the buses flush with the curb at each stop. He said that another public meeting will be held in the spring of 2011 and that construction will begin sometime between September and December, 2011 and take approximately two years to complete. The project will also result in significant water quality improvements.

Access will be maintained throughout the entire construction period.

[Editor's note: for more information on the Western Ave reconstruction, go to <www.westernavenue.info>].

Update on Sidewalk Obstruction Issues: JoAnn Haas reported speaking with a Harvard student who is interested in creating an animated video for the Commission regarding snow removal, but that the cost of renting the video equipment would be several hundred dollars. Ms. Haas reported that the student is planning on submitting a grant proposal to cover the expense.

She also said that she will be meeting with Somerville resident, Trouble, in a week to work on the bicycle parking outreach project. She said that a lot of bicycles locked to poles have been dropping to the ground and blocking a large portion of many sidewalks.

Presentation from the Perkins School for the Blind: Debby Smith, Outreach Coordinator at the Perkins School for the Blind Talking Books Library, presented on services offered by her organization, including loaning audio books, DVDs with audio description, and Braille writers. The June/July issue of AccessLetter will contain an article with more details.

Public Works: Michael Muehe reported for Kathy Watkins, who was unable to attend the meeting. He said that City Council ordered a policy resolution requesting that the City Manager confer with DPW and the City Arborist regarding concerns about street trees, including sidewalk obstruction, brought by the Environment Committee. Mr. Muehe said that Ms. Watkins worked with the City Manager to answer the questions that were raised. He commended Ms. Watkins for the work she does in raising awareness about accessibility issues.

Please see the attached Policy Order Resolution, dated October 25, 2010 and City Manager Letter, dated February 28, 2011 for more information.

Disability Reframed Film Series: Bet MacArthur reported that “Temple Grandin” will be screened on Saturday, March 12. Kate Ryan, a former CCPD intern, will be the guest speaker.

Executive Director’s Report: Michael Muehe reported that last month City Councilor Craig Kelly conducted a hearing of the City Council’s Traffic and Transportation Committee about snow removal issues. He said that a lot of people testified and that Rich Rossi, Deputy City Manager; Sue Clippinger, Director of the Department of Traffic, Parking and Transportation; and Lisa Peterson, DPW Commissioner, were all fielding questions.

The Committee will generate a report that will be presented to City Council members, followed by the City Manager.

Mr. Muehe also reported visiting Darwin’s, Ltd., a restaurant on Cambridge Street, which has recently done work to improve accessibility. There used to be a two inch lip at the entrance, but they recently ramped it.

He reported being a member of the Work Without Limits Advisory Group, which promotes issues around employment for persons with disabilities (PWD) statewide. The group is launching a new public marketing campaign titled “What Can You Do?” The campaign

consists of a very basic and positive message about giving PWD the opportunity to work, and will include billboards, radio ads and a website, where the volume of traffic will be tracked. For more information, see <www.workwithoutlimits.org> or <www.whatcanyoudo.org>.

He also said that the Greater Boston Employment Collaborative is hosting a three hour workshop, "Disclosing your Disability in an Employment Context," for PWD who would like more information on when and how to disclose their disability in a work situation. It is being held on March 31, 2011 from 9:30am to 12:30pm in Boston.

Mr. Muehe announced that the Annual Statewide Independent Living Council is holding a Lobby Day at the State House on March 14 to advocate for more funding for Independent Living Centers.

In addition, United for Homecare will be having a joint community briefing with the Boston Center for Independent Living on March 14 in Dorchester, and the Clubhouse Coalition is holding an employer event at the State House on April 5, 2011.

Mr. Muehe also reported that he is writing an article for the *AccessLetter* on Cambridge artist, Sara Hendren, who designed a more active access symbol and created transparent stickers of the symbol that can be placed over the International Symbol of Access on disability parking signs. Ms. Hendren's project was covered in a Boston Globe article.

Project Coordinator's Report: Kate Thurman thanked Joanna Berton Martinez, CCPD Associate, for taking the February minutes in her absence and Sandy Durmaskin for her help mailing them.

She reminded members that the copy deadline for the *AccessLetter* is on the 15th of the month before publication. She asked that members who know of events of interest to the local disability community provide her with the information no later than March 15, 2011 in order to be included in the April/May, 2011 issue, and no later than Monday, May 16 for the June/July issue.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kate Thurman, Disability Project Coordinator

CITY COUNCIL

Policy Order Resolution

O-11

IN CITY COUNCIL

October 25, 2010

VICE MAYOR DAVIS

ORDERED:

That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Commissioner of Public Works and the City Arborist and to report back to the City Council on the following questions regarding trees that were received at the Environment Committee meeting held on September 30, 2010:

Who can the public call to get relief if it looks as if a developer is going to cut down a street tree?

If pruning is needed for street trees who does the public call?

Can hot top around tree trunks be removed because it does not allow water to percolate to the tree roots?

Can tree canopy be increased and what are the plans? Canopy Report done in 2005.

Bricks set in concrete cement not a good idea because the water cannot percolate, can this be changed?

How is the tree fund used?

Does the city own or can the city buy a watering truck?

The library beech tree with the fungus needs a timely response.

Can more plantings be planted in Parrow Park (Henry Street side)?

Is there additional funding for tree maintenance?

How many trees were planted in 2009 in the Cambridgeport area?

Can official minutes be kept of tree removal hearings?

In City Council October 25, 2010
Adopted by a ye and nay vote:-
Yeas 8; Nays 0; Absent 0; Present 1.
Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury, City
Clerk

City Manager Letter to City Council

February 28, 2011

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report Item Number 10-163, regarding a report on questions concerning trees that came out of the Environment Committee meeting of September 30, 2010, Public Works Commissioner Lisa Peterson reports the following:

Below please find a response to questions concerning trees that came out of the Environment Committee:

- ***Who can the public call to get relief if it looks as if a developer is going to cut down a street tree?***

The public can contact the City Arborist at 617-349-6433 or at dlefcourt@cambridgema.gov. If the matter needs immediate attention, they should contact either 617-349-4885 or the main DPW line at 617-349-4800.

- ***If pruning is needed for street trees who does the public call?***

The public can contact the City Arborist at 617-349-6433 or at dlefcourt@cambridgema.gov.

Individuals can also make a request for pruning using the DPW website: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/theworks> under the section titled "How can we help you?"

If the matter needs immediate attention, they should contact either 617-349-4885 or the main DPW line at 617-349-4800.

- ***Bricks set in concrete cement not a good idea because the water cannot percolate, can this be changed?***

In order for brick sidewalks to remain a viable walking surface, they need to be placed on a structural base, such as concrete or asphalt. Previously constructed brick sidewalks placed on gravel or stone dust have not maintained their shape, particularly around trees, where the growing roots can cause problems.

Having stone dust, gravel and or a graded aggregate immediately underneath the bricks will initially allow some percolation of water, however, the rate of percolation is generally poor which will result in water ponding or remaining in the top portion of the section, which will then result in subsequent heaving of the material, which then results in sidewalks that are not ADA compliant and extremely challenging to walk on and maintain. Generally, if a gravel is to be used, the recommendation is to have it firmly compacted prior to placement of bricks which results in the same lack of infiltration that people are trying to address.

Brick sidewalks on an asphalt or concrete base allow the City to use bricks and maintain an accessible walking surface for pedestrians. However, we continue to research and try other details, such as pervious asphalt and pervious concrete sidewalks (generally need a deep excavation and soil replacement if they are to be viable), looking at porous tree ways on wider streets etc.

- ***Can hot top around tree trunks be removed because it does not allow water to percolate to the tree roots?***

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that a minimum of 36" wide sidewalk be provided at all pinch points, such as trees. The city tries to maintain the existing sidewalk material (brick or concrete) at trees. In locations where the roots have grown up towards the sidewalk surface, it is not possible to provide an accessible sidewalk and maintain the sidewalk material. In these instances, asphalt is used, as it can be placed with less damage to the tree roots.

If it appears that excess asphalt has been placed around the tree, please notify the City using the contact information listed above. The City will try to correct the issue to allow more water to percolate to the tree roots.

- ***Can tree canopy be increased and what are the plans? Canopy Report done in 2005.***

The City is working hard to install many new trees each year. With the proper care and maintenance of the urban forest, we hope the overall tree canopy will increase over time.

- ***How is the Tree Fund used?***

The City receives the funds in accordance with the Tree Protection Ordinance, Chapter 8.66 of the Cambridge Municipal Code and appropriates these funds into a Tree Replacement Fund established by this ordinance.

If significant trees are to be removed from a development project by grant of a special permit from the Planning Board, or submission to the Inspectional Services Department of certification from the City Arborist, the owner of the lot shall either plan replacement trees on the same lot, or shall pay the estimated cost of replacement trees and associated costs for the maintenance of said tree to the City to be deposited into the Tree Replacement Fund.

The Tree Replacement Fund is held by the City Treasurer in an account and administered in accordance with applicable provisions of the General Laws. Per ordinance, any payments into the Tree Replacement Fund shall be used solely for the purpose of buying, planting and maintaining trees in the City.

Thus far, the Tree Replacement Fund has been used to for street tree planting, with preference given to the neighborhood surrounding the development.

- ***Does the city own or can the city buy a watering truck?***

The DPW does own a watering truck that is used to support annual flower plantings, hanging baskets, and a select number of newly planted trees in park areas without irrigation. The tree planting contract facilitates the maintenance and care of the Street Trees that are planted for the first year which may include watering.

If an extraordinary year of drought occurred we would have to evaluate and make a decision for additional watering, as needed.

During the summer of 2011, as a pilot program, Public Works will implement a "Tree Ambassador" program in which a Forestry Intern on bicycle will water trees, and provide education and outreach to businesses and residents on specific tree related benefits of watering and weeding, and the overall benefits of trees in the city.

- ***The library beech tree with the fungus needs a timely response.***

The two beech trees at the main library have received air spade treatment to help minimize soil compaction under the drip zone. The trees have also received a slow release fertilizer to help maintain vigor and appearance. The beech tree near Broadway (and perhaps one by the library, if necessary), will be treated with a fungicide 2 times during 2011 to help control cankers along trunk. As soon as conditions permit, the City Arborist will collect and submit a sample to UMass for analysis, and treat the beech(s) accordingly.

- ***Can more plantings be planted in Parrow Park (Henry Street side)?***

There are opportunities for tree and shrub installations at Parrow Park. One tree was removed in Parrow Park last year. Due to the proximity of the other shade trees, The City Arborist recommends holding off on replanting the location. We do plan to remove one more tree at the corner of Chestnut and Brookline due to its poor condition. This tree will be replanted during the fall 2011 planting season. In addition, the mixed shrub planting along Brookline Street could also use some attention, and will be reviewed for improvements during 2011

- ***Is there additional funding for tree maintenance?***

In Fiscal year 2010, the Street Tree Pruning budget was increased by \$50,000 to \$250,000 to help maintain a 6 year pruning cycle.

- ***How many trees were planted in 2009 in the Cambridgeport area?***

According to the City's GIS tree inventory records, 85 street trees were installed in the Cambridgeport area in 2009.

- ***Can official minutes be kept of tree removal hearings?***

Tree removal hearings are governed by MGL Chapter 87. The Open Meeting Law does not require that official minutes be kept of tree removal hearings. The City Arborist posts the agenda for hearings on the City web site which includes a description and location of the tree and reason it is on the hearing schedule. Written objections to removals get sent to the City Manager with the City Arborist's report and recommendation; once the decision is made by the City Manager, the entire report and objections get placed on the DPW web site.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy

City Manager

RWH/mec