

Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Minutes for Thursday, January 14, 2010

Present:

Members: Laura Brelsford, JoAnn Haas, Eileen Keegan Bongiorno, Kate Patton Regal, Don Summerfield, Rachel Tanenhaus, and Dave Wood.

Staff: Michael Muehe, and Kate Thurman.

Absent: Owen O'Riordan, Gordon Slater; and Kathy Watkins (DPW).

Guests: Miriam Cooper, Cambridge resident; Sandy Durmaskin, Cambridge resident; Diane Hopson, Cambridge Resident; Rich Klouda, Cambridge resident; Johny Lainé, Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination; Peter Montalto, Cambridge Family and Children's Service; Naomi Pinson, Cambridge resident; and Judy Van Ingen, Cambridge resident.

Minutes – JoAnn Haas asked that the December 10, 2009 minutes be changed to read:

The idea of “Adopt-A-Corner” also came up at the meeting. Don Summerfield talked about the City ordinance at the meeting. JoAnn said that she and Kate Patton Regal are going to check into getting local news stations to mention it during the meteorologists' report. JoAnn has called the Cambridge Chronicle. Barbara Broussard, who heads the association, will email JoAnn the contact information for each of the Cambridge neighborhood associations so that she may forward them a public service announcement (PSA).

The minutes were approved as amended.

Announcements – Michael Muehe reported that he received a call last summer from an intern at the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) offering a presentation on their services and welcomed Johny Lainé as the Commission's Guest Speaker for the evening.

Guest Speaker –Johny Lainé introduced himself as a Trainer at the MCAD and reported that they receive complaints from people who believe they've experienced discrimination in Massachusetts, including in employment, public accommodations, education and banking and lending. He explained that there are four types of discrimination: disparate treatment, harassment, disparate impact, and accommodation.

Regarding the State's employment law prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities, Johny explained that employers are required to respond to requests for reasonable accommodation, noting that the average cost of such an accommodation is only \$200. In addition, it is illegal for employers to inquire about a person's disability in a job interview and nor is the applicant required to report or discuss their disability. Michael Muehe added that pre-

employment inquiries, including those of references, about disability or medical conditions are prohibited.

Lastly, Johny explained that complaints must be filed within 300 days of the alleged incident of discrimination.

Public Works Report – Michael Muehe reported for Kathy Watkins, and said that the Department of Public Works (DPW) has received 425 complaints of snow removal violations and that DPW and the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department have issued 226 tickets so far this year. Michael said that tickets are sent to the property owner. In addition, a hanging sign notifying occupants of the violation is placed on the doorknob of the residence.

JoAnn Haas reported that she has been in touch with Kelly Thompson Clark at the Chamber of Commerce regarding the Adopt-A-Sidewalk initiative. She also said that Kelly will contact all the businesses in the City to remind them of the snow ordinance and inform them that they need to clear the sidewalks all the way to the curb, and especially by designated disability parking spaces.

JoAnn also reported that she has been in touch with the Postmaster at the Cambridge Post Office, as they have a program requiring mail carriers to report sidewalks that are not shoveled. The Post Office will pick a winner for the best neighborhood in regards to clearing sidewalks. JoAnn reported that the Postmaster would like for somebody from the Commission to attend their ongoing meetings about keeping the sidewalks cleared all year long.

Chair's Report – Rachel Tanenhaus reported that there have been numerous issues with taxicabs regarding accessibilities, including problems with dispatchers. She handed out copies of a letter she wrote to Robert Haas, Commissioner of the Cambridge Police Department, and Richard V. Scali, Chairman of the Cambridge License Commission regarding the need for enforcement of ADA and Cambridge hackney regulations and expressing interest in better ADA regulatory enforcement, including the possibility of instituting a testing program.

Executive Director's Report – Michael Muehe reported that the Commission had previously discussed sending a letter to the MBTA regarding accessibility at the Concord Rail Station and said he will check in with Gordon Slater about that.

Michael thanked JoAnn Haas for drafting an article on snow removal for the AccessLetter. He also reported that the Cambridge Human Rights Commission has a new director, Marlissa Briggett.

Disability Project Coordinator's Report – Kate Thurman gave an update on the Faith Community Outreach Project, which was started by Carolyn Thompson. She said that Carolyn had created an extensive list of houses of worship all over Cambridge and sent out dozens of

letters offering our assistance with disability access issues to clergy, but received minimal response. Kate reported that she would like to keep this project going, and feels that we might have more success if we can identify two to three congregations that have some kind of connection to us via individual commission members and work with them independently. She asked members to let her know if they are interested.

Public Comment – Diane Hopson, a Cambridge resident, reported that Mayor Simmons held monthly meetings with clergy people.

Miriam Cooper, a Cambridge resident, said that she has had numerous problems with taxicab drivers refusing to transport her because she has a guide dog. She said that both drivers and dispatchers need to be better educated about accessibility laws and regulations.

Michael Muehe reported that there are 256 licensed cabs in Cambridge and that only 8 are wheelchair accessible. He said that complaints can be made either through our Commission or through the License Commission.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate Thurman, Disability Project Coordinator

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