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MARIA ELENA ALVAREZ
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
August 14, 2006

Present: Maria Elena Alvarez, David Hicks, Stan Kontogiannis, Elaine Quinn, Linda Reeder, Matthew Ranelli, Robin Tousey-Ayers

Absent: Marjorie Eichler, Dana Canevari, Chris Getlein,

Staff: Michelle Duprey

Guest speakers: Mr. Jimmy Miller, Executive Director, HANH; Maureen Novak, Special Assistant to the Executive Director

Maria Elena Alvarez opened the meeting. Introductions of the Commissioners and guests proceeded.

Jimmy Miller spoke about what HANH has been doing for persons with disabilities. A current housing portfolio was shared with Michelle Duprey and the Commissioners. Mr. Miller talked at length about a number of current rehab construction projects and the progress that is being made. He stated the goal is to make all units accessible. Normally they want 10% of the units to be accessible but it could be higher when feasible.

Mr. Miller talked about the complete renovation of Prescott Bush. They will reconfigure the units there and make them larger. There will be a loss of units, but the end result will be a high percentage of wheelchair accessible units. Katherine Harvey and Newhall Gardens are being completed. With both of these there will also be fewer units. The positive side is that they plan for 100% of the units to be accessible.

In addition to the physical improvements they are in the process of providing support services for people who live there and have committed money to these support services. These services will extend to both persons with disabilities and elderly persons. Whereas funding for infrastructure is available, funding for services is more difficult to find.

There was a question regarding what types of support services were available. Case managers provide on site support such as medication monitoring and referral to services. At Ruoppolo, for example, 5 staff members perform case management for 24 families. HANH hopes to extend these services to McQueeney and Union Avenue. Mr. Miller made note that there is an increase in persons with disabilities, who are non-elderly. Ms. Novak spoke about the target population with behavioral health needs. HANH is currently contracting ALSO Cornerstone and Continuum of Care for support services. They all have their own staff to provide services and intervention.

Michelle Duprey brought up the issue that both of these agencies work with target populations of persons with psychiatric disabilities and questioned who provides support for persons who have physical disabilities. Mr. Miller stated that they also have their own case managers at HANH through a three year grant that assist residents.

Ms. Novak stated that within the existing rehab plans the family developments, i.e. the townhouses and 2-family buildings, frequently make retrofitting for accessibility impractical. Most of the portfolio is from the 1930's and difficult to convert. It is much easier to make new construction accessible.

Mr. Miller stated that when converting units many times a ramp is not feasible. Michelle Duprey pointed out that sometimes a lift might be more practical than a ramp. She asked about the expertise of the firms that have been contracted to make the decisions. Mr. Miller stated that they have hired three construction management firms who should be starting in about 90 days, and that the firms have an expert versed in section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Mr. Miller also indicated that this person could come in and meet with the Commission.

The issue of the State Building Code's 10% accessibility requirement was addressed. Matthew Ranelli pointed out that HUD has stated that their mandated minimum is 5% wheelchair accessible. Mr. Miller said he was unaware that there was a controversy concerning the Building Code. Mr. Miller promised to have his legal department research this issue and follow up in writing to the Commission with (1) a written commitment to satisfy the State Building Code requirement to make 10% of all new construction units wheelchair accessible and (2) a written response to the question of whether the Housing Authority must satisfy the state building code for requirements for accessibility. Linda Reeder stated that it was the opinion of a State Building inspector that the 10% state requirement applied to federally-funded agencies.

Elaine Quinn asked about waiting lists. Mr. Miller and Ms. Novak explained that HANH maintains separate waiting lists for elderly persons and those needing accessible units. David Hicks asked what percent of those on the waiting lists required accessible units. Maureen Novak didn't know the answer, but said she would get the information.

Michelle Duprey then brought up the issue of accessible housing stock for Section 8 participants. Mr. Miller stated they will be holding two landlord workshops and will be conducting a survey.

Elaine Quinn asked if HANH has done a review to see whether accessible units are indeed occupied by persons with disabilities. The difficulties with reviewing this correspondence were discussed.

After all questions had been asked and answered the commissioners thanked their guests and the guests departed.

Minutes

The minutes for July were reviewed. There were some changes to the minutes. There was a motion to accept the minutes as amended, which was seconded and unanimously approved.

Department Report

Michelle Duprey reported that she attended the annual Center for Disability Rights meeting. There was no ADA celebration event as both she and CDR were not able to support these efforts. Their might be a collaborative effort with SCSU for Disability Mentoring Day in October.

Elections for Commission offices are to take place in October. Robin Tousey-Ayers, who is heading the Nominations Committee, suggested that Commissioners e-mail her with suggestions.

Sept. 16th at the CT Expo Center, there will be a Gubernatorial Forum on disability issues. The Candidates will be present then.

The Center for Disability Rights will hold a Wheelchair Awareness Day on Aug 27th in West Haven.

Old Business

Stan Kontogiannis presented a proposed letter to the Commission regarding disability-accessible parking. The letter will be sent to area college campus police. Suggestions were made regarding the letter.

Robin Tousey-Ayers presented a draft letter she composed to be sent to Robin Golden, Chief Operating Officer at the Board of Education. The letter was an invitation to come and speak with the Commission regarding her role as the ADA Coordinator for the Board of Education. Suggestions to that letter were made.

Robin Tousey Ayers talked about meeting with people in September regarding the Farmington Canal Pathways. The Commission thought that the September meeting would be a good date.

Elaine Quinn and Linda Reeder shared the outcome of the meeting they had with Karl Harris from HUD regarding the State Building Code issue.

New Business

None

Other Business

None

Announcements

There was a motion to adjourn, which was seconded, and unanimously passed.