



COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES
CITY OF NEW HAVEN
165 CHURCH STREET
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06510
(203) 946-7833 VOICE
(203) 946-8582 - TTY/TDD
(203) 946-8587 – FAX



JOHN DeSTEFANO, JR.
Mayor

DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
January 8, 2007

Present: Marjorie Eichler, Chris Getlein, David Hicks, Stan Kontogiannis, Matthew Ranelli, Linda Reeder, Robin Tousey-Ayers, Heiwa Salovitz

Absent: Maria Elena Alvarez, Dana Canevari, Elaine Quinn

Staff: Michelle Duprey

David Hicks opened the meeting and a quorum was established. The minutes for December were reviewed. There were some changes to the minutes suggested by David Hicks. He then moved that the minutes be accepted as amended. The motion was seconded and then unanimously approved.

Chairman's Report

Maria Elena Alvarez will be resigning as of this meeting.

David Hicks suggested some homework to be done for the February meeting. He wants each of the Commissioners to put their name on paper and suggest an issue which the Commission needs to address. He is hoping to get everybody involved. He talked about the bylaws of the Commission which state that each Commissioner shall serve on one subcommittee. With these suggestions in mind, he is prepared to assemble a plan for the year.

Department Report

Michelle Duprey reported that in December she submitted a yearly budget to the Mayor's office. The budget was a no growth budget without any increase from the current year. There will be public hearings on the budget if anyone is interested in attending. She doesn't anticipate any drastic changes in the budget she submitted to the Mayor's office.

The Department was not selected as a finalist in the Accessible America Award. There was further discussion on this item.

Michelle stated that she has also been working on some accommodation requests for Sober Houses which is housing for people in recovery.

She also informed the group that three complaints to HUD against the New Haven Housing Authority were filed with assistance from the Department. One of the Commissioners inquired

as to whether we have received the 504 Review that was conducted by HUD by Carl Harris. We have not received a copy of the findings of that review.

Old Business

Disability Parking

David Hicks reported that following the last meeting, a letter was sent to the New Haven delegation about disability parking. The letters were mailed on December 14. There were no direct replies to that letter. After discussing the letter with Ms. Rosemarie Hice, legislative assistant for Representative Robert Megna, David Hicks removed the mention of doctors needing to be more discriminating in making certifications. He also reported that Representative Megna will be writing a proposed bill. David Hicks and Matt Ranelli explained the legislative process for a bill and Matt Ranelli suggested that it might be a multi-year project.

David Hicks stated that:

- On December 18, Representative Leonard Greene, of Beacon Falls, proposed a bill to increase fines for violating disability parking.
- On December 20, he communicated by email with Representative Steve Fontana, who serves on the Transportation Committee. Representative Fontana's reaction was positive, but he stated he would not be able to commit the energy required to push the bill through committee.
- On December 29, David Hicks previewed a report by the Office of Legislative Research (OLR) on Disability Parking (2006-R-0804). He said that the report made some strong points, but that it had some weaknesses as well, and he hoped it could be amended.

David Hicks stated that in January he got responses from several representatives. He also reported that Senator Toni Harp's assistant informed him by email that Senator Harp, in response to the December 14 letter, will be proposing a bill on disability parking. Therefore legislators in both the House and Senate are producing general concept bills.

On January 4, David Hicks compiled some data that he hoped would be incorporated into the OLR report, in particular a comparison between Connecticut and the other New England states. This he emailed to Rosemarie Hice.

David Hicks announced that when a public hearing is scheduled in Hartford, it will be important for Commissioners to testify.

Stan Kontogiannis made a motion that a subcommittee be formed to continue to work on this issue. Matt Ranelli seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. Volunteers for the subcommittee are Stan Kontogiannis, David Hicks, and Marjorie Eichler.

Housing Subcommittee

Linda Reeder reported that Executive Director Jimmy Miller of the Housing Authority of New Haven (HANH) responded to the Commission's letter to HANH's Legal Department with a letter agreeing that HANH did have to follow the State Building Code. Linda Reeder distributed a draft of a follow-up letter to Jimmy Miller and reviewed it with the Commission. The letter asked that HANH's website be updated to accurately reflect the percentage of accessible units required by state codes. The letter also asked HANH to share with the Commission its plan for communicating with their design and construction professionals, so that accessibility requirements are met. After some discussion and suggested amendments, Matt Ranelli made a

motion to accept the letter as amended. The motion was seconded by Robin Tousey Ayers and unanimously approved.

Linda Reeder reported that the Commission had received no response from HUD to its November 13 letter requesting the results of its 504 Review of HANH and asking again that HUD-funded projects comply with state building codes regarding the percentage of accessible units required. She distributed a draft letter which referred to an attachment of another copy of the November 13 letter and asked again for a response. Matt Ranelli suggested that the letter include mention of HANH's own finding that it must comply with the state building codes. A motion was made by David Hicks and seconded by Matt Ranelli to send the letter as amended. The motion was unanimously approved.

Board of Education

Robin Tousey-Ayers talked about the recent issue faced by parents because of the firing of paraprofessionals by the Board of Education for failure to pass a required test. Robin Tousey-Ayers updated the group. She also reported on sending a letter to Robin Golden, who is perceived as being the ADA Coordinator at New Haven's Board of Education.

There were several suggestions on how to approach the terminations. Michelle Duprey suggested the parents go to Mayor's Night Out and present the response they received from Dr. Mayo on the issue. There was discussion regarding the Commission holding a public meeting and inviting Dr. Mayo and Robin Golden. Michelle Duprey suggested that the City might help the paraprofessionals prepare for the test. Robin Tousey-Ayers reported that another test would be given on January 14. Michelle Duprey also suggested contacting the Connecticut Attorney General, Richard Blumenthal.

There was a motion from Stan Kontogiannis to form a subcommittee to address this concern, which was seconded and unanimously passed. Volunteers to serve on the subcommittee are Matt Rannelli, Robin Tousey-Ayers, and Stan Kontongiannis, and Marge Eichler.

New Business

Amendment to Bylaws

David Hicks introduced the issue of amending the Bylaws to include a "Leave of Absence" for Commissioners who could not attend meetings for an extended period. The rationale for the proposed change is the difficulty of establishing quorum of more than 50 percent, if or when several Commissioners were on leave of absence but still counted in quorum. Stan Kontogiannis inquired into how other City Commissions deal with this issue. Matt Ranelli suggested it would be atypical to have such a policy. There will be further discussion at future meetings.

Accessible Taxi Cabs

David Hicks introduced the topic of establishing accessible taxi cab service in New Haven, and discussion followed. Heiwa Salovitz talked about his experience with accessible cabs in California and said that the other option of calling a week in advance for "My Ride" service is not practical. Heiwa Salovitz reported that some municipalities distribute coupons for half off cab fare to persons who qualify. Heiwa suggested forming a subcommittee. There was further discussion on the issue. David Hicks talked about Standard Taxi Company and showed the Standard Taxi brochure, as well as a workbook published by Easter Seals to foster accessible cab service in local communities.

Michelle Duprey stated that taxis are expensive in general, and that it would be more practical to get "My Ride" to comply with federal laws than to depend on taxi service which can be expensive. Michelle said that "My Ride" is in violation of Federal laws, as next-day service is required. It was decided to continue the discussion at the next meeting.

There was a motion for the meeting to adjourn, which was seconded by Heiwa Salovitz and unanimously passed.