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DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
March 12, 2007

Present: Chris Getlein, David Hicks, Stan Kontogiannis, Matthew Ranelli, Elaine Quinn, Linda Reeder, Robin Tousey-Ayers,

Absent: Dana Canevari, Marjorie Eichler, Heiwa Salovitz

Staff: Michelle Duprey

Public: Delma Skinner

Delma Skinner was introduced to the Commission. She was present at the meeting and has applied to become a Commissioner.

The meeting was brought to order by David Hicks. The minutes for February were reviewed. Matthew Ranelli pointed out a needed correction. There was a motion to accept the minutes as amended, which was seconded by Elaine Quinn. Linda Reeder abstained from voting. The motion was approved by majority.

Chairman's Report

David Hicks stated that July 26th is the anniversary of the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act and he thought that if the Commission wished to hold an event, it should begin planning now.

Michelle Duprey stated that last year the Department was going to partner with the Center for Disability Rights and provide information on emergency planning. Michelle shared some of her ideas for that concept. Elaine Quinn talked about the success, the year before, of the showing of a film (Rory O'Shea Was Here) at the New Haven Public Library, with discussion afterward. There was further discussion about past events and some ideas for this year. Elaine Quinn suggested that a decision be made at the next meeting as to whether the Commission will plan an event, and discuss more ideas at that time.

David Hicks stated that he was interested in looking into employment for people with disabilities and had spoken with the local District Director of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Iris Mellow Barnes. He had asked Ms. Barnes if she would be willing to come to a Commission meeting at some point, and she had agreed. David Hicks then asked the Commission members if they had an interest in her attending. After some consideration, it was decided that David Hicks would ask her to attend the Commission meeting in May.

Department Report

Michelle Duprey passed out the schedule of meetings for the Transit District. She also distributed a call to action from the "Keep the Promise Coalition" whose goal is to increase Medicaid limits for the elderly or

persons with disabilities. She informed the group that the MS Society Lobby Day is March 28th and handed out information on their legislative agenda.

Michelle Duprey announced to the group that the Department was awarded the grant for the beach wheelchairs and some related improvements to Lighthouse Point Park from the Department of Environmental Protection. She also informed the Commission about plans to have a shared ability dance program sponsored by the New Haven Ballet Company. This effort was initiated by the Department, and may be supported by a grant from the Greater New Haven Community Fund.

Elaine Quinn talked about a tennis program she had heard about for children with disabilities in New York. She offered to look into it, with the idea that there might be a tie-in to the annual Pilot Pen tennis tournament events.

Michelle Duprey said that the Department's budget is out and there is a public hearing on Thursday, March 29th at 6:00. Michelle Duprey answered Elaine Quinn's questions regarding changes in the budget over the years. Michelle offered to e-mail the budget to Commissioners if it is available.

Michelle Duprey reported she will be presenting briefly at the Connecticut conference on Municipalities on May 1st on Emergency Preparedness. She will also be speaking on the same topic on May 6 at the Office of Protection and Advocacy in eastern Connecticut. Other events include training at the New Haven Police Academy. She stated she has also been asked to serve on the State Independent Living Council.

Old Business

Designated Accessible Parking

David Hicks reported that he had sent a follow up e-mail to all members of the Transportation Committee. On March 7, he read on the internet the minutes of the Committee's meeting of February 28. There was only one bill related to disability parking approved. This bill asks for increases in fines only. After discussion with Representative Robert Megna's office, he found that there was resistance from the DMV and the Office of Protection and Advocacy to the other suggested changes by the Commission. After some other attempts to get support to amend the proposed bill, it seemed likely that the Transportation Committee was not going to amend the bill. David Hicks also received at this time an e-mail from Representative Candelaria, co-sponsor of Megna's bill, suggesting that the Commission continue its efforts, next year if necessary.

Housing

Linda Reeder reported that the Commission received a letter back from HUD agreeing that the Housing Authority of New Haven (HANH) did have to comply with State building codes, including 10 percent of multi-family units being accessible. The same letter stated that in order to receive a copy of the 504 Review of HANH, the Commission would need to file a Freedom of Information Act request for the report. Linda Reeder read a letter she had drafted for this purpose. After brief discussion, Linda Reeder made a motion to send the letter as written and David Hicks seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

Linda Reeder and Elaine Quinn reported on a conversation they had had regarding housing. Elaine said they were tossing around the idea of asking for more than 10 percent accessible housing during housing development phases. The discussion continued as Michelle Duprey added that she had a discussion with Tony Bialek about development at the Shottenburg lot in order to make sure this project meets the State Building code requirements for accessibility. Michelle Duprey offered to set up a meeting on their behalf. This notion was discussed. Michelle Duprey said there was no problem advocating more than the law requires when they meet.

Linda Reeder returned to the discussion regarding HUD and HANH and said she would draft a letter to HANH project managers, who work with architects and contractors, reminding them to comply with accessibility codes. She will bring a draft letter to the next meeting.

Board of Education

Robin Tousey-Ayers stated she has been attending many of the Board of Education (BOE)'s open meetings in order to understand the roles of the various attendees. She understands that the BOE has sent a representative to the PTA on the issue of the dismissal and consequent understaffing of paraprofessional aides, many of whom had worked with students with disabilities. Robin said she will keep trying and continue attending BOE meetings.

Elaine Quinn said there was an article in the New Haven Advocate on this topic which said there was no money in the budget to rehire the aides, even if they did pass the exam.

Michelle Duprey said that she did some calling around and was able to determine that there is not one ADA Coordinator at the BOE. The ADA coordinator for construction and public accommodation is Robin Golden, employment matters go to Andrea Globalwatt in Human Resources, and student related accommodations go to Marilyn Chambers, Director of Special Education. Michelle Duprey has been encouraging them to streamline the process.

Robin Tousey-Ayers stated she had not contacted State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal yet regarding the role of the No Child Left Behind Act, nor to her knowledge have other parents. Elaine Quinn asked some questions and Robin recounted the history of this issue. Elaine asked why the teachers' union was not involved.

Robin Tousey Ayers said that a case is starting to build. She heard Dr. Mayo say they had rehired six of the paraprofessional aides. There was further discussion regarding how this issue might get resolved.

(Elaine Quinn needed to leave at this time, and which point there were insufficient members to meet a quorum.)

David Hicks suggested that Stan Kontogiannis could nonetheless describe the actions of the Transportation Committee, but that nothing could be voted on.

Transportation Committee

Stan Kontogiannis reported on some parts of the meeting of the Transportation Committee which met on February 22, 2007. The Committee discussed issues related to "My Ride", paratransit, and Accessible Taxicab service. Some questions and discussion followed.

Other Business

Linda Reeder said that she was working with the Connecticut Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to develop a Power Point presentation on accessibility for architects to share with business people and local Chambers of Commerce. She asked for images or other input Commission members would like to contribute.

The meeting adjourned.