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MARIA ELENA ALVAREZ
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
May 8, 2006

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

Absent: Dana Canevari, Marjorie Eichler

Staff: Michelle Duprey

Maria Elena Alvarez opened the meeting. She distributed an updated Commission list. The minutes for April were reviewed. There was one typo and an addition to the minutes. Elaine Quinn made a motion to accept the minutes as amended, which was seconded and unanimously approved.

Chairman's Report

No report

Old Business

Letter to HUD

Linda Reeder distributed her letter concerning accessible housing for review, before sending it to Julie Fagan of HUD. The Commissioners reviewed the letter and there were no suggested revisions.

Designated Parking

Stan Kontogiannis has continued doing research on designated parking. He wrote and distributed a report of his interviews and findings thus far. He shared the report with the group. He is waiting to hear from the CT Department of Motor Vehicles. The CT DMV stated much of the abuse of the permits had been on college campuses such as UCONN. Stan expects to receive more information back from CT DMV by the next meeting, in which case he will then complete his report. There was further discussion about having a term on all permits, even those designated "lifetime." Another suggestion was for different colored permits every year as a way to prevent abuse.

Stan Kontogiannis distributed an article from the New Haven Register regarding designated parking in West Haven.

Letter to Support for MS Society

David Hicks reported that he sent a letter of support regarding the MS Society's budget request for a pilot program for persons with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 64. He sent the letter via e-mail to several State Legislators. He received a response from Representative Cam Staples who stated he would support the request. Michelle Duprey reported the initiative passed, but somehow it got tied in with other funds which are targeted for people with AIDS. The MS Society is now trying to work out how the funds will be allocated.

Website

David Hicks presented a draft of the web site page for the Commission on Disabilities. There was much discussion about the proposed draft. It was decided to eliminate mention of the guest speakers who spoke to the commission so long ago that they no longer hold the positions they formerly represented. It was also agreed that the mention of the "Trees of Hope" participation should be retained, but the term "fundraising" should be removed. Discussion of the website took place before Robin Tousey-Ayers joined the meeting. As she had made certain suggestions for the website the commissioners discussed them and the group reached consensus on these suggestions.

Following up from the previous meeting, David Hicks shared that he had written a Letter to the Editor of the New Haven Register, by email, concerning Governor Rell's proposed car tax repeal and the negative effects it would have on persons who drive vehicles modified to accommodate their disabilities. He wrote the letter as an individual, not as a Commissioner, as discussed previously. Although the Register did call him to confirm that he wrote the letter, he did not know if it was published. In any case, by the time of the commission meeting the car tax had been rejected by the legislature.

Department report

Michelle Duprey reported on two state statutes which were recently passed at the State Assembly. One which prompted discussion is an update of an older statute freezing property taxes for the elderly, which now also would cover persons with disabilities. However, participation by municipalities is not mandatory, and requires separate ordinances by the municipalities. New Haven does not as yet have any such ordinance. Thus for the city to participate, the Board of Aldermen would need to introduce such ordinances as would be consistent with the statute. Michelle Duprey said she will bring additional information regarding this issue to the next meeting.

New Business

No new business

Other

Ms. Karla O'Brian attended the meeting and talked about her recent experience with Hooker School. Her daughter was temporarily disabled and needed to use a wheelchair at that school. As the school had no provision for transporting Ms. O'Brian's daughter, Ms. O'Brian herself transported her daughter to school. And though she was able to access the school, the process for obtaining a reasonable accommodation was so lengthy and bureaucratic that, by the time it would even have been considered, she no longer would have needed the assistance. It was Ms. O'Brian's feeling that the school wished Ms. O'Brian would temporarily remove her daughter from school and have her home-schooled during the period of her daughter's recuperation.

It was decided that Matt Ranelli and Robin Tousey-Ayers would draft a letter of inquiry about the process for obtaining a reasonable accommodation for temporary assistance. Elaine Quinn moved to contact the Board of Education (Robin Golden) and inquire about the process. The motion was seconded by Robin-Tousey-Ayers and unanimously approved.

Announcements

Elaine Quinn noted that May is Mental Health Awareness Month. She distributed a calendar of events. She also distributed a Newsletter from the Family Service Committee about children's activities on May 23, 2006, as well as a pocket guide.

Stan Kontogiannis shared an article regarding a HUD housing project in Middletown, CT. The project is specifically designed to suit the needs of people who are deaf or hearing impaired.

Elaine Quinn announced information about the Housing Resource Forum which will be an all day event held on June 16, 2006 at City Hall. The Department is participating in this event.

Kelly Murphy, from Economic Development for the City of New Haven, is coming to the July meeting of the Commission on Disabilities. Michelle Duprey confirmed these plans with her.

David Hicks returned to his topic of the Website page for the Commission and wanted to know if there were any pictures which might be included. It was decided not to include pictures. He was also concerned about whether there was a contact number so people could reach the Commissioners. Michelle Duprey replied there is a general contact number, and if it is disability related, it would reach her.

There was a motion to adjourn by Linda Reeder, seconded by Matt Ranelli, and unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned.