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DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
October 15, 2007

Present: David Hicks, Stan Kontogiannis, Matthew Ranelli, Linda Reeder, Delma Skinner,
Robin Tousey Ayers, Heiwa Salovitz

Absent: Dana Canevari, Chris Getlein, Elaine Quinn

Staff: Michelle Duprey

The meeting was brought to order by David Hicks and a quorum was established. The first business was to review minutes for June and August, 2007. These had not been reviewed because of lack of a quorum. The June 07 minutes were reviewed and Heiwa Salovitz moved to accept those minutes as written and Linda Reeder seconded the motion. The vote was all in favor with the exception of Stan Kontogiannis who abstained. August 07 minutes were reviewed. Matthew Ranelli moved to accept the minutes as written. The motion was seconded and Robin Tousey-Ayers abstained from voting. The motion was unanimously passed.

Chairman's Report

Disability Parking Legislation

David Hicks reported on the discussion he had with Rosemarie Hice, Legislative Aid to State Representative Robert Megna, regarding Disability Parking. He stated that she was encouraging regarding the issue and said that the Legislature seemed poised to move on this issue. David Hicks suggested that the Commission think about what to ask for in any new bills and to keep that goal within the limits of what may be attainable. Stan Kontogiannis was asked to contact with DMV to hear their concerns as he had developed a contact there. He agreed that he would.

Michelle Duprey suggested that we contact the police department and get their input on barriers to enforcement to understand what improvements would be helpful. As well, they may be helpful to call upon to testify regarding proposed legislation. Michelle Duprey said she would arrange for someone from NHPD and from Traffic and Parking to attend an upcoming Commission meeting.

Constituent Concern

David Hicks received a letter from Alderman Joyce Chen on behalf of a constituent, Steven Groninger. The matter was referred to Michelle Duprey, who had also received information on Mr. Groninger's behalf, and she explained the situation. Mr. Groninger is an Alumnus of UNH and until a few years ago UNH had given him interlibrary loan services for free. Then UNH imposed a five dollar fee or gave him the option of going through the New Haven Library. David Hicks had written a draft letter response to Joyce Chen which he read to the Commission. There were comments regarding the letter he wrote which he will send to the Honorable Joyce Chen after revision.

Department Report

Michelle Duprey described the most recent, "Road to Freedom" event held on Sunday October 14, 2007. David Hicks and Dana Canevari attended the event hosted by the Department. The Mayor and Jim Ward from the ADA Watch were guest speakers. There was an exhibit about the history of the Disability Movement and a petition to support the ADA restoration act.

On Wednesday October 17, the Department is sponsoring Disability Mentoring Day, which will take place at Southern CT State University. The event pairs high school students with students from college as mentors for the day. The event is to encourage students with disabilities to consider higher education as a means to more employment opportunities.

October 16th is the 30th Anniversary of Office of Protection and Advocacy and Michelle Duprey stated that she will be attending a celebration they are hosting.

Oct 31, 2007 is the end date for applications for the Accessible America Award. Michelle Duprey explained the award and the application process that she has been working on.

Michelle Duprey stated that she has also been attending to Zoning Accommodation Requests the past month.

Old Business

Transportation Committee:

Accessible Cabs

David Hicks began the report with an inquiry as to whether Michelle Duprey would agree that having accessible cab service in New Haven would be a positive note to be able to include in the Accessible America Award. Michelle Duprey stated 70 percent of the population would not be able to afford cab fares. Heiwa Salovitz mentioned that in California they have vouchers for people with disabilities using cabs, because of the expense, as a consideration. There was additional discussion regarding this. David Hicks reported that he had contacted Mike Piscitelli, from Traffic and Parking, by email, and that Mr. Piscitelli had a positive response to accessible cabs in New Haven. Follow up from Mr. Piscitelli is expected as he proposed mentioning the issue at a Department of Transportation meeting. Michelle Duprey talked about some of the possible federal tax credits that are available as well as some potential grant opportunities.

My Ride

Stan Kontogiannis talked about the meeting with representatives from "My Ride" at the Miller Library in Hamden. He distributed the summary of points that Commission members raised at the meeting and described the meeting with Brandon Foster, Manager, and Alan Nadus. Stan Kontogiannis said he has called Brandon Foster to get written follow up to the meeting. Michelle Duprey made some suggestions about the survey that will be developed in the near future.

Housing Committee:

HANH Accessibility Requirements

Linda Reeder said that she was able to touch base with the City Building Department about HUD's requiring a lower percentage of accessible units than state law requires for new project development by the Housing Authority of New Haven (HANH). Linda reported that Andy Rizzo, Director, said that the department has been reviewing plans and they are enforcing the State Building code.

Section 8

Michelle Duprey asked if any of the Commissioners had read the recent article in the New Haven Advocate which highlighted the plight of the Gaither family who lacks accessible housing and receives Section 8 from HANH. None of the Commissioners had read the article, so she briefly explained the article, and her written comments in the article.

New Business

A proposed schedule of 2008 meetings of the Commissioner was distributed to the group. After review of those proposed dates, David Hicks moved to accept the schedule, as proposed, which was seconded by Heiwa Salovitz. It was unanimously passed.

A Trees of Hope information packet was sent to the Commissioners via the Department. David Hicks reviewed the information for the group. The fund raiser benefits the Ronald McDonald House in New Haven. Robin Tousey-Ayers reviewed what the Commission had done in previous years. There was discussion about fundraising in general, initiated by Stan Kontogiannis. Stan suggested that in the future the Commission consider fundraising for other organizations instead of favoring one. There was general agreement. Linda Reeder brought up her concerns regarding unequal contribution by Commissioners on the project in past years. Robin Tousey-Ayers talked about the event itself and some of the items for sale and general discussion about the project. Stan Kontogiannis moved that (pending Robin's success in obtaining a wreath and decorations) the Commission participate in the Trees of Hope event and each Commissioner commit to obtaining one gift certificate. The motion was seconded and Commissioners unanimously agreed that they will participate this year in the Trees of Hope. Robin Tousey-Ayers will contact Hooker School to see if they are interested in decorating the wreath this year, and will approach A.C. Moore's for a donation of an artificial wreath. There was additional discussion about the organizational aspects of the project.

Announcements

Robin Tousey-Ayers announced that she is on a Regional Committee for the state's Birth to Three program and is pursuing whether there are other parents who are willing to come forward on the issue of student aide layoff.

Stan Kontogiannis made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Heiwa Salovitz and was so moved. The meeting adjourned.