

Boston Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Minutes for Wednesday, June 23, 2010

Present: Eileen Brewster John Kelly (assisted by Kevin Spies), Suzanne Leveille, and Janice Ward. Jay Walsh represented the City. Arnold Berry, Carl Richardson, and Heather Watkins were absent. The meeting started at 5:10 PM.

John apologized for the lack of minutes from the June meeting, which resulted from computer and technological problems. Carl will listen to the tape and write up the minutes. John summarized the May meeting, in which City representatives from Public Facilities proposed using a route from Court Street at the top of Washington Street (opposite the old Statehouse), across the Plaza to the side of City Hall and then loop around to the accessible ramp at the front of the building. (This route was marked #2 on the map prepared by John). Structural concerns and special events planning prevented use of the two proposed routes from Cambridge Street. The chosen route also presents engineering problems, in that there is only 3 inches or less of depth available for the new surface. This led the officials to propose use of pavers. The city does not want to use asphalt because of aesthetic reasons and the material's softness -- vehicles traverse the Plaza frequently. Members present (Eileen Brewster, John Kelly, Suzanne Leveille and Carl Richardson) joined the officials outside for a site inspection, and supported the path of the route. City officials will go back to begin engineering the path, while discussions on materials, width of path, and color will continue.

Bob Giers from Public Works informed the commission that the city had generated a plan for the resolution of access problems on Huntington Avenue between Massachusetts Avenue and the Museum of Fine Arts. Beginning July, 2010, and continuing through 2013, the city will install a concrete path of travel through the brick sidewalk as it did on the stretch between Mass Ave. and Gainsborough street.

Bob Giers also informed the commission that the city was going to allow the usage of brick in front of the Eustis Street Firehouse in Roxbury. Members did not object because, as John laid out in an e-mail, the area is in an historic district, is adjacent to a brick sidewalk, is a short stretch, and the historic preservation group about to occupy the old building requested it.

Announcements: John received a copy of the first variance application from the City of Boston, regarding steep cross slope issues on Massachusetts Avenue in the South End during the road's reconstruction. He opposed the variance because of dangers to wheelchair users (cross slopes range as high as 15% close to the curb), and because the city could raise the curbs higher than 6 inches -- the city doesn't want to because of concern for car doors, but it has raised curbs up to 8 inches elsewhere. Because of this opposition, and the opposition of Dennis Heaphy, a wheelchair user who lives on Massachusetts Avenue, the Architectural Access Board scheduled a hearing for September 13.

Handicap Parking Fine: the current fine for parking in any HP spot is \$120. the group discussed raising it so that the commission could receive part of the funds, in line with the state law which organized the commission. Eileen raised the problem of people parking in HP spots in Boston Housing Authority property, and that tickets don't get written. Jay Walsh said that only BHA police would be able to write those tickets, that others cannot. He said that any increase in the fine would require City Council approval. The Council will be resistant to any hike, especially as high as \$300. John said that \$240, which he had

listed in an earlier agenda, would be a good goal, and that Waltham had doubled its fine recently. Jay said the fine was increased from \$75-\$120 in 2002, and that led to a 17% reduction in tickets written. He thought that this reduction has continued, and agreed to provide a full spreadsheet set of data. These tickets constitute less than 2% of all tickets written -- 1300 were written last year. He said that it would be very important for the commission to generate a plan of how they would spend these revenues. He suggested speaking with officials from the revenue department longer than transportation for this aspect. He also said that transportation is interested in talking to the commission about dealing with the abuse of HP placards.

Members suggested some uses such as design of a website, training for young people, education, and a film series. Jay did not think that using the money for sidewalk or curb cut work would make sense, as those are capital expenses funded by bonds. This discussion will continue.

Site Reviews of Proposed Access Route: site reviews were held on May 28 and June 22. John sent out a report to the commission after the May 28 review. June 22 was devoted primarily to the difficulties blind people would have negotiating a route across an open space. Meg Robertson, orientation specialist from the Mass Commission for the Blind, said that she would instruct a cane user to walk along the steps of the Ames hotel outdoor dining area, and then along the building to the left. We discussed some possible ramp ideas either up the stairs on the side of City Hall or down the stairs from the Government Center MBTA station, but Chuck Worcester, the city official who joined us at both dates, reported back that none of them would be feasible. We will continue to work with Meg Robertson as design progresses.

Letter to City regarding ADA Coordinator. Members discussed the draft of letter to Mayor Menino that Carl adapted from John's first draft. At the May 28 site review, John spoke with Larry Mayes, in whose department the ADA coordinator works. He said that something was coming soon and that discussions were happening. So Carl addressed the new draft to Mayor Menino. Suzanne Leveille edited the letter for clarity and strength, and the resolution passed unanimously to send the letter. It was agreed that John would be the only one to sign the letter, doing so on behalf of the commission.

Consultant to Begin Self-Evaluation: although Jay Walsh had left by this point in the meeting, members briefly discussed initiating a self-evaluation process, tapping monies that Jay Walsh had reported earlier to be available for a consultant. Members agreed that the commission should have a role in the selection of a consultant, perhaps recommending one for the city to hire.

Commission Stationery: Suzanne brought in a few versions of possible stationery for the commission, adapting the initial proposal from Jay Walsh. Members discussed placement of the various names and addresses, and Suzanne agreed to send out some versions after more edits. Members agreed to ask Jay Walsh for his title, as it is his office listed on the stationery as the contact in City Hall.

Ad Hoc Committee on Membership: None of the members present were interested in joining this committee, which now comprises Carl, Arnold, and Heather. Members agreed with the suggestion that Carl announce the membership openings at the ADA celebration on July 26, and that he should speak briefly about the commission and its role. The announcement of openings will be put up on the city website, and there was a suggestion that the commission reach out to cable TV with the information.

Finally, it was suggested that the Multicultural Independent Living Center also be sent variance requests for the City of Boston. Members agreed.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Notes taken by Kevin Spies and written up by John Kelly