

## **Commission on Disabilities - Meeting Minutes**

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

**Sept 11, 2023, 6:00 – 7:30 pm**

**Present:** Tricia Palluzzi, Annie Harper, Sally Esposito, Billy Huang, Ben Bond, Linda McDonough

**Absent:** Carmen Correa-Rios, Grisel Aguilar, Sandra Roberts

**Staff:** Gretchen Knauff

**Guests:** Misty Maza, David Agosta, Lena Esposito

### **I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Chair B. Huang at 6:23 PM.

### **II. Approval of July minutes.**

The Commission Members approved the minutes from the July 10, 2023, and August 14, 2023, meetings.

### **III. Commissioner Highlight - Linda McDonough**

L. McDonough told her story of how she became a special education teacher. She explained that she started that work to help her own child. She discussed the tension between the official rules and the needs of some of the children. She told a story about an administrator who misunderstood the actions of a child with selective mutism, as she had failed to take the time to understand what was really going on. Her goal for the Commission is to see a system that ensures that schools are complaint with the special education laws. She would also like the Registrar of Voters to meet with G. Knauff and review the polling sites; G. Knauff explained that this did happen 2 years ago, but it is an ongoing issue. The Commission then discussed the need to continue advocating for polling sites to be accessible. L. Esposito described an experience where she found her polling site had closed early and learned that they decided to close it early because there were too few people using it. S. Esposito suggested contacting the Board of Alders as they have an interest in enabling everyone to vote. B. Huang suggested creating a fact sheet/infographic. L. McDonough will do a FOI request to the Registrars regarding polling place disability-related assessments (D. Agosta completed the FOIA request while in the meeting).

### **IV. Old Business**

#### **A. Updates/Discussion**

- 1. Elevator Ordinance** – G Knauff provided an update, the ordinance language is finalized, the next step will be a public hearing which will likely be on October 3, 2023, at 6:00 PM at the Legislative Affairs Committee of the Board of Alders. It is important that the Commission shows up and would be extremely powerful if someone who has been directly affected could be there. S. Roberts may be willing to do this. Written testimony would also be good. Other attendees could include the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. D. Agosta suggested talking to someone at McQueeney towers, a public housing building on Orange

St. as elevators have been breaking down; he will try to contact someone. City owned properties are exempt from fines but are required to move people to another location while elevators are being repaired.

- 2. Effective Communication** - G. Knauff has been contacting different CT municipalities, has found that they do hire interpreters on staff. Spoke with someone at New England ADA Center who put her in touch with person Mayors Commission on Disability in the City of Chicago. Chicago has four interpreters as city staff. Gretchen will meet with the Mayor again on Friday. The Commission should be sure to issue a press release if they hire an interpreter on staff.
- 3. Legislative Forum** - B. Huang quickly addressed the Legislative Forum and how it might be formatted. He suggested bringing in Molly Cole to provide legislative training that would combine information about certain legislation from 2023 and how advocate for legislation and with legislators. Could also invite legislators with interest in disability issues.
- 4. Notification for Individuals with Autism** - T. Palluzzi - relevant person from New Haven Police Department requested the information about a contact in North Haven Police who worked on the Walk with Derek project. Tricia explained how the system will work.
- 5. Peabody Museum Accessibility** - S. Esposito discussed her concerns about slopes and location of curb cuts, and related signage. There are also issues with parking for the Museum.
- 6. Meeting time** – The Commission voted to change the October meeting date to October 16, 2023, at 6:00 PM. due to the Indigenous People’s Day holiday.

## **V. Public comment**

D. Agosta raises three issues that are on the Parks commission agenda and suggested that someone from the Disability Commission attends the next meeting there.

1. Access to summit of East Rock Park.
2. Use of loose paving blocks in public parks.
3. Tree stump removal policy currently prioritizes based on whether a person can water a new tree, rather than ADA requirements.

Mr. Agosta raised other issues including sidewalks around schools. D. Agosta has filed a complaint with Dept of Public Works. He is concerned about disparate impact to public schools alleging that the City of New Haven only repairs sidewalks around schools in primarily white neighborhoods. He stated that all Elm City elderly and disabled communities have sidewalks in surrounding areas that are not ADA compliant leaving these communities ghettoized. D. Agosta also raised concerns about the Safe Streets process; S. Esposito was involved as a Fair Haven resident but stepped back because she was not convinced that they were taking accessibility issues seriously (they were more concerned about bike lanes). Felt let down by the process. T. Palluzzi felt similarly, it was all about bike riding so people who had to drive felt unwelcome. D. Agosta notes that in Safe Streets report bikes are mentioned 563 times, wheelchairs only 3 times. He mentions that he has applied to be on the Disability Commission.

## **VI. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58pm.