

FAIRHAVEN COMMISSION ON DISABILITY

Meeting Minutes March 10, 2022

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Meeting held at Fairhaven Town Hall, 40 Center Street, Fairhaven

Contact: cod@fairhaven-ma.gov

2022 MAY 16 A 9:10

Present: Marcus D. Ferro (Chairperson), Glenn Gabbard (Treasurer), Pamela Whynot (Vice Chairperson), Janice Alves, Jenna Benoit, Pamela Ferro, Sarah Buck, Eleanor Chew, Wendy
Absent: Sue Makepeace, Brian Rego, Diane Rocha, Donna Lavalley
Guests and other attendees: Fairhaven Cable Access

I. OPEN MEETING

Chairperson Marcus Ferro called the meeting to order @ 6:35 pm.

II. ROUTINE MATTERS

Roll call, 7 members were present, which represented a quorum.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes from the Commission on Disability (CoD) meeting on January 5, 2022 were sent to all CoD members by email the week of March 1, 2022. Janice Alves moved that the minutes from the CoD meeting on January 5, 2022 are approved; Pamela Whynot seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. COMMISSION BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Marcus Ferro mentioned that the C.O.D. board is almost full and additional community members have expressed interest in joining. Marcus indicated he will reach out to board members who have not been active for several meetings to see if they still wish to remain on the commission. If they would like to step down, this may open up spots for additional members to join.

V. SECRETARY ROLE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF MARIA RUEDLINGER WALKER

Marcus Ferro recognized Maria Ruedlinger Walker for her tireless service to the Commission on Disability and her service as secretary. Since Maria has moved on from her secretary post, the C.O.D. is in need of a new secretary. Pamela Whynot volunteered to record minutes for this meeting and suggested we bring up the need for secretary again at next meeting. The meeting proceeded with the understanding that a secretary will be needed in the future.

VI. APPOINTMENTS: NEED FOR RESPITE SERVICES

Janet Elliott spoke about the need for adult respite care services in the town of Fairhaven. Janet is the caretaker for her two brothers and spoke about the importance of them and others being able to stay in town when respite care is needed but there are currently no respite care providers in Fairhaven. Those interested in becoming a respite care provider can reach out to Family Service Association in Fall River, MA. Marcus Ferro suggested that the need for respite care be advertised on the upcoming C.O.D. Facebook page. Pamela Ferro suggested writing a letter to the Neighborhood News to seek more respite care providers. Marcus Ferro indicated that he would scan materials provided by Janet and send them to COD members to help get the word out about the need for adult respite providers. Motion made by Pamela Ferro to draft a letter to the Neighborhood News on behalf of the C.O.D. regarding the need for respite care. Janice Alves seconded. Passed unanimously.

VII. C.O.D. FACEBOOK PAGE

Sarah Buck raised a question regarding Facebook page. Pamela Whynot indicated she had contacted Wendy Graves and the contact provided regarding Facebook page but had not heard back yet. Marcus Ferro indicated that the C.O.D. should have one and that he would be following up with the town to get this started.

VIII. TOWN HALL ACCESSIBILITY

Pamela Whynot and Sarah Buck met prior to meeting and suggested that we move forward with town accessibility matters with the incoming Town Administrator. Wendy Graves agreed that it makes sense to revisit this topic with the new TA and also indicated that the town is getting a new phone system, which may impact the accessibility options. Marcus Ferro indicated he would connect with new TA once that person was in place and coordinate. Sarah Buck brought forth other important issues and asked questions regarding Historic Commission in relation to their involvement with town accessibility. Glenn Gabbard followed up to concur that starting with new TA is a good idea but also encouraged C.O.D. to use the previous efforts and information gathered by previous members rather than completely starting from scratch, including looking at what other towns are doing.

Pamela Whynot will reach out to Maria Ruedlinger Walker for information on what was done in the past on this issue. Glenn Gabbard reminded the C.O.D. that accessibility issues will remain important across many town offices and buildings. Wendy Graves raised this issue that some employees of the town are unable to access the downstairs part of town hall. The tax collector's office, town clerk, and downstairs offices are all priority. Janice Alves also raised the issue of the current difficulty accessing the Town Hall in a wheelchair from the back of the building. Pamela Whynot made a motion to send a letter to new TA asking to have a meeting to discuss town accessibility issues. Seconded by Sarah Buck. Passed unanimously.

IX. PUBLIC SAFETY

Marcus Ferro met with Lt. Kobza regarding ways to help make town safer for individuals with disabilities, including the following topics (1) 911 forms from the state – Lt. Kobza wanted to upload these to Town Website so that individuals could make responders aware of certain conditions or behaviors they may have (2) Known to Wander form – Lt. Kobza working with IT Dept. to make it available/usable for many different disabilities (3) Notes that can be added to Fairhaven PD database that can assist officers to respond appropriately (4) Inventory of seatbelt sleeves that identify someone has having autism – Lt. Kobza will follow up on the quantity of these so C.O.D. can disseminate information about these. Marcus will update C.O.D.

X. TOWN BEACH ACCESSIBILITY

Marcus Ferro spoke with Vinny Furtado (Superintendent) and Becky Vento (Office Manager) with the Department of Public Works (DPW) regarding beach mats. Highway Department has measured out the space and DPW has found an appropriate mat to order. They also found a mat for accessible parking spot. Seems that this should be available for this summer. Janice Alves expressed that usually people with disabilities have to find a lifeguard to use the beach. In addition, Janice indicated that tires are too small on sand/water wheelchairs, and then do not allow for independence once you are in the water. Janice suggested a platform or ramp and also a beach wheelchair that has big sand dune tires so an individual can use the beach independently. Marcus indicated he would speak with D.P.W. about these suggestions. Janice also indicated that there are no attendants to assist individuals once they've been dropped off in the parking lot. C.O.D. president will look into this as well.

XI. PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE & ADOPT-A-STOP

Marcus Ferro suggested that C.O.D. find local businesses to partner with who would be willing to plow. Pamela Whynot indicated that sub-committee determined it would be best to narrow the focus of which stops should be cleared first. In addition, sub-committee discussed getting businesses to donate their services in exchange for C.O.D. advertising that those businesses are the sponsors. Janice Alves suggested that we raise money and awareness to pay for the snow removal by holding an event where town officials travel in town on a wheelchair. Marcus Ferro recommended the event be video-taped to raise awareness. Janice Alves suggested that people could donate a certain dollar amount to sponsor those participating. Costs, potential sponsors will be determined. Donna Lavalley (not present) had made a suggestion for C.O.D. to do a "Challenge Day" for education, resources, and to raise money for C.O.D. programs, such as Adopt-A-Stop.

Marcus Ferro also raised the issue of certain crosswalks being dangerous. DPW received a grant to ameliorate some of these issues and make them accessible, including properly signage. These stops that will be revamped include South Street, four spots on Alden Road, three places on Main Street, and one on Sconticut Neck Road. Janice Alves shared that there is no curb cutout where the crosswalk is between Main and Wilding. The understanding is this will be addressed this spring. Pamela Ferro agreed that getting community businesses involved with advertising would have longevity. Sarah Buck indicated that Fairhaven Fire Department is also doing an Adopt-A-Hydrant program where volunteers remove snow near hydrants and inquired if we could connect the two programs. Marcus Ferro agreed that we should contact Fairhaven Fire Department to ask about it. Elanor Chew suggested C.O.D. send a letter to the property owners to remind them of the bylaws that require them to clear the bus stop. Janice Alves shared that often the plows come by to clear roads and block the curb cut outs from being accessible.

XII. SPECIAL EDUCATION

Jenna Benoit put together a list of resources for families who have children who need special education services and made it available via email to the C.O.D. Glen Gabbard (not present at this point in the meeting) also contributed. Jenna Benoit indicated she would update the list with any new resources sent by C.O.D. members. Jenna Benoit found trainings that would be free and available for families to learn about their rights through Community Autism Resources. Pamela Ferro suggested we also include services for individuals age 22 and older (once public k-12 education is over), including Ghotchel Access Program and transition services. Jenna Benoit indicated she would help with post-22 services.

XIII. TREASURER'S REPORT

Glen Gabbard had to leave meeting early. No treasurer's report provided. Marcus Ferro reminded C.O.D. that we need to make a decision about how to use our current funds.

XIV. HANDICAP PARKING SIGNS

This will be removed on future agendas.

XV. MEMBERSHIP

Marcus Ferro will reach out to non-active members to see if they wish to remain on the C.O.D. to allow space for others who are interested.

XVI. NEW BUSINESS

No new business on Massachusetts Office on Disability (M.O.D.)

Sarah Buck suggested we reach out to Postmaster/mistress to ask if they could move the mailbox closer so individuals who cannot get out of their car can still insert mail into mailbox. Sarah Buck also suggested an idea for postal workers to check in on individuals if their mail piles up. Sarah Buck indicated that disabled individuals can contact Eversource to let them know if you have medically necessary equipment that needs priority in case of a power outage. Sarah Buck also recognized Maria Rudelinger Walker for her service and suggested a plaque in her honor and thanked new member, Eleanor Chew.

Janice Alves indicated that individuals with disabilities in community have reported some incidents of abuse and scare tactics being used within their public or private disabled housing complex. Marcus Ferro suggested contacting DPPC, who have spoken to C.O.D. previously and agreed that getting information out to people on what their rights are.

Eleanor Chew suggested C.O.D. have a booth at homecoming as a way to communicate resources with residents. Eleanor Chew also suggested we come up with C.O.D. mission statement and post it to the page. Marcus Ferro indicated he would send out mission statement for review by the C.O.D.

XVII. NEXT MEETING

Marcus Ferro proposed May 12, 2022 at 6:30pm or June 9, 2022 for next meeting. Janice Alves motioned for May meeting. Sarah Buck seconded. Passes unanimously.

XVIII. MEETING CLOSING

Motion to adjourn made by Marcus Ferro. Seconded by Pamela Ferro. Unanimously passed. Meeting closed at 8:25pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pamela Whynot, Vice-Chair and acting Secretary